

Poetic Scroll Texts and Sources

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I. Introduction – What Do We Mean, Poetic Scroll Texts?

For the purposes of this class, a Poetic Scroll Text is a text whose inspiration and style are based on any form of poetry or literature rather than being based on a legal document. This is a very broad category, and so there are no hard and fast rules – rather there are general tips and best practices that can be used to give a scroll text that literary flair. No disrespect is meant to writs here – they're great, and BOD knows I write a lot of them – but there is a world outside of them.

II. What Works for Sources

A non-exclusive list of works that I have used for creating poetic scroll texts:

- Shakespeare and other English Plays and Poetry
- The Bible
- Norse Sagas
- Beowulf
- Korean Poetry
- Chinese Poetry
- Japanese Poetry
- Persian Poetry (sensing a theme?)
- Greek and Roman Epics and Poems
- Mongol Epics

There is nothing in the world that cannot be mined, adapted, or stolen (see below) to make a moving scroll text. If it is from period and it has evocative language, you can find a way to make it in to a text.

III. General Principles for Adaptation

a. Good Art Borrows...

But Great Art steals outright. If you find particularly good language that just works, use it. You are not under any obligation to have everything in your text be your original language. Borrowing from other texts is period, just generally don't borrow from other SCA people's work; go back to the source, and steal from Period. Or Shakespeare. Or the Bible.

One of the best lines I've ever included in a scroll text ("*For he is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars*") is outright lifted from the Song of Solomon. It makes it feel more period, and pretty much everyone does it (*To all by whom these present Letters come isn't exactly original*).

b. Repetition, Repetition, Repetition, and Expansion.

While this is often seen more in writs, it also holds true for certain kinds of poetry: People in period loved using three words for the same thing instead of one.

...corn, wines, meat, fish, clothes and all things necessary for their living and for their rank...

...services, duties, and demands...

All of those pretty much mean the same thing, but they really liked listing them out in Period. In writs it is because of a legal principle called *noscitur a sociis*, which means we can judge a word by the company it keeps – and providing more examples provides more words to compare it to.

But in a poetic scroll text it is often a feature of the poetic form – such as the use of alliteration in Norse Sagas. But you also see repetition in more than just synonyms, but in lists of titles or long lists of great deeds. In the *Þórsdrápa*, Thor is referred to as ‘Slayer of giants, basher of trolls’; in the first branch of the Epic of King Geser there is no simple ‘in the beginning’. Instead it reads:

“In the earliest of early times,
In the most ancient of periods,
In the first of first times,
In the time of the beginning;”

This repetition or multiple referencing sounds poetic to the modern ear, for certain kinds of poetry. We’re used to hearing heroes referenced by multiple titles, or hearing the Bible speak of ‘Blessed are you, oh LORD our God, King of the Universe’ (Baruch atah adonai eloheinu, melekh ha’olam).

IV. The Goal is Evocative Language – But Remember the Requirements

In order to be a legal scroll, the following elements are required:

- The name of the recipient
- The name of the Award Givers (Sovereign and/or Consort, Baron and/or Baroness most often)
- The name of the award
- The date

Beyond that, everything else is fungible. Be bold, be evocative. In Calontir our fighting (Armored, steel, equestrian, and archery) awards are Fyrd and Huscarl, which are themselves fairly evocative. But they’ve been called Spear Kin, Axe bearers, sword bearing guards, the *Jaish al-Zahf* (horse guard). Generally you will want to refer to them by their ‘legal’ name once so that everyone knows for sure what you’re talking about (including the person who tracks precedence for your Kingdom), but outside of that it’s all up in the air.

V. Specific Sources

a. Rumi

Be Lost in the Call

Lord, said David, since you do not need us,
why did you create these two worlds?

Reality replied: O prisoner of time,
I was a secret treasure of kindness and generosity,
and I wished this treasure to be known,

so I created a mirror: its shining face, the heart;
its darkened back, the world;
The back would please you if you've never seen the face.

Has anyone ever produced a mirror out of mud and straw?
Yet clean away the mud and straw,
and a mirror might be revealed.

Until the juice ferments a while in the cask,
it isn't wine. If you wish your heart to be bright,
you must do a little work.

My King addressed the soul of my flesh:
You return just as you left.
Where are the traces of my gifts?

We know that alchemy transforms copper into gold.
This Sun doesn't want a crown or robe from God's grace.
He is a hat to a hundred bald men,
a covering for ten who were naked.

Jesus sat humbly on the back of an ass, my child!
How could a zephyr ride an ass?
Spirit, find your way, in seeking lowness like a stream.
Reason, tread the path of selflessness into eternity.

Remember God so much that you are forgotten.
Let the caller and the called disappear;
be lost in the Call.

We are as the flute, and the music in us is from thee;
we are as the mountain and the echo in us is from thee.

We are as pieces of chess engaged in victory and defeat:
our victory and defeat is from thee, O thou whose qualities are comely!

Who are we, O Thou soul of our souls,
that we should remain in being beside thee?

We and our existences are really non-existence;
thou art the absolute Being which manifests the perishable.

We all are lions, but lions on a banner:
because of the wind they are rushing onward from moment to moment.

Their onward rush is visible, and the wind is unseen:
may that which is unseen not fail from us!

Our wind whereby we are moved and our being are of thy gift;
our whole existence is from thy bringing into being.

b. Sijo (Korean)

Oh that I might capture the essence of this deep midwinter night
And fold it softly into the waft of a spring-moon quilt,
Then fondly uncoil it the night my beloved returns.

- Hwang Jin-I, 1522-1565

c. Christine de Pizan

When you are come, joy is so all complete,
The heart leaps in my breast, beholding you,
O flower of beauty, O rose fresh and new,
Whose slave I am, whose servitude is sweet.

Lady of gracious ways, whom all men greet
Most beautiful of women and most true,
When you are come, joy is so all complete.

For you the happy festival shall meet
In glee ; with none else have I need to do
For my delight ; from you alone I drew
The life and joy that make my heart to beat,
When you are come, joy is so all complete.

d. The Song of Solomon

⁸ I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.

⁹ What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?

¹⁰ My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.

¹¹ His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven.

¹² His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set.

¹³ His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh.

¹⁴ His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.

¹⁵ His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.

VI. Adaptations

a. Korean Sijo:

