
Linguistic Foolery

Twenty-Two Words You Never Thought Tolkien Would Provide

By Darth Fingon

Fair warning: some of the listings herein are of a biological or personal nature and may cause offence to those with delicate sensibilities. If you don't want to read about Elvish wee-wees and hoo-hoos, stop reading now and scroll on by.

You read it correctly. I have assembled here twenty-two words you never thought you'd see on any Elvish wordlist, ranging from silly to vulgar. All of these are found in Tolkien's earliest material: the Qenya and Gnomish Lexicons. Because of this, the words listed here are **not necessarily compatible** with later Quenya and Sindarin. So you won't want to be using any of these in your fanfiction; they could very well be either wrong or inappropriate in your context. The words are listed for purposes of reference and hilarity only.

One brief digression before we get onto the good stuff. In last month's column about food, I missed two items: tea and sugar. So you can now sleep soundly at night knowing that Elves can drink sweetened tea.

Now, all of the words listed below are from three different publications: Parma Eldalamberon 11 (the Gnomish Lexicon), Parma Eldalamberon 12 (the Qenya Lexicon), and Parma Eldalamberon 13 (Gnomish Lexicon Slips and Early Noldorin Fragments). For citation purposes, they are listed as 11, 12, and 13. A citation of 11-45 means PE11 page 45, in case you want to look it up and make sure I'm not fibbing. A G before the word indicates that it is Gnomish (which later became Sindarin); a Q indicates that the word is Qenya.

22) Drunken (*G balfaug* 13-138)

Loosely translated, this means 'thirsty in an evil way'. Clearly, somebody has gone overboard and consumed too much wine.

21) Vomit: to vomit (*G hich-* 13-163, *Q qama-* 12-76)

This may very well be what happens as a result of the previous word. 'Nausea' is also listed.

20) Feces (*Q muk* 12-63, *G gorn* 11-41)

We all knew they did it. We just thought Tolkien was too polite to make up a word for it. Apparently not.

19) Urine (*Q mis* 12-62, *G piglin* 11-64)

And, of course, it would be silly to have a word for poop but not for pee.

18) Louse (G *gwef* 11-45)

Do Elves get lice? I don't see why not. They have a word for 'louse' right here. One more thing to make the Siege of Angband more uncomfortable.

17) Shave: to shave (G *thas-* 11-72)

You may well ask why Elves needed a word for 'shave'. How's that for a plotbunny?

16) Temple (G *alchar* 13-109, Q *alkar* 12-30, Q *korda* 12-48)

There are actually quite a few religious ideas showing up in the early wordlists, including 'temple', 'shrine', 'sacred fire', 'idol', 'blessed', 'worshipful', and more. These date back to a time when the word Vala was translated as 'god', indicating that, at one time, Tolkien did envision the Elves as having a pagan-style religion.

15) Government (G *gomaithri* 11-41)

I was hoping to come across a word for 'politician' or 'bureaucrat', but alas I had no luck. This was the best I could find.

14) Lawyer (G *fedhirweg* 11-34)

This almost made up for the lack of 'politician'. The Qenya Lexicon also has *kos(t-)*: 'legal action' (12-48).

13) Ignorant: to be ignorant (G *gwista-* 11-46)

Not all Elves are impressive and wise, and they have a specific verb to illustrate this fact.

12) Poverty (Q *oise* or *oiste* 12-71)

Nor is Aman a perfect paradise where everyone lives in carefree happiness. Related words from the same root include 'poor' and 'lack'.

11) Bitch (G *huil* 11-49, Q *sunī* 12-82)

Yes, it's literally a female dog, but in the event that anyone needs a canonical insult, here's proof that the word exists in both major languages.

10) Slave (G *guinir* 11-43, G *drog* Q *norka* 11-31 & 13-142, Q *vartyo* 12-102)

There are a few different words for 'slave', and they have slightly different meanings. *Drog* means 'thrall' or 'someone taken into bondage'. *Guinir*, on the other hand, is related to the words for 'property' and 'chattel' and doesn't have the explicit relationship to having been taken into slavery and forced to do base work that *drog* does. The Qenya word *norka* is equivalent to *drog*, while *vartyo* means both 'slave' and 'servant'.

(My personal interpretation of this is that one would use *drog* or *norka* in reference to Elves captured by Morgoth and forced into slavery, while *guinir* and *vartyo* are reserved for socially acceptable household slaves and servants.)

9) Ravish (G *maitha*- 13-149, Q *amapta*- 12-34)

The fact that there is a specific word for this in both languages, rather than simply a descriptive phrase, suggests that it happens more often than just the one known example of Morgoth and Arien.

8) Buttocks (G *hacha* Q *hakka* 11-47)

This is also glossed as 'the hams', which is somewhat more amusing. It appears to be related to the verb 'to sit down'.

7) Breast / Teat (G *tith* Q *titte* 13-154, Q *tyetse* 12-50)

Tith and *titte* are not expanded, but *tyetse* comes from the same root as the verb 'to give suck' and the word for 'tiny baby'.

6) Cunnus (G *huch* 13-147 & 163)

This appears as part of the expansion of *hoith* (see #3 below) and then again on its own. The second listing has the word *pukku* written beside it, which, though unexplained, looks like the Qenya equivalent.

5) Penis (G *gwî*, *gwib* 13-162, Q *puntl* 12-75)

Both *gwî* and *gwib* are translated as the Old English *teors*. *Gwî* is also listed as *membrum virile*, and *puntl* is listed as *vir*. All of those are just fancy ways of saying penis without actually using the word penis. The difference between *gwî* and *gwib* is that *gwî* is the archaic or poetic word, while *gwib* is presumably what one would use in everyday life.

That's right. They have a poetic word for it. Interpret that as you will.

Fun side note: the name *Mandos* is translated in the Gnomish Lexicon as *Bandoth Gwî*. The *Gwî* there means something entirely different (it's the Gnomish equivalent to Qenya *Vé*), but still. What an unfortunate homonym.

4) Semen (G *gwaith* 11-44, Q *milt* 12-61)

I guess if you have words for 'penis' and 'impregnate' (G *gwectha*-), you kind of need this one, too. The Qenya word is related to 'seed', while the Gnomish word is listed among words for 'male', 'manhood', 'masculinity', etc..

3) Coitus (G *hoith* 13-147 & 163, Q *pukta* 12-75, 13-147)

Yes. This word exists.

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For some reason, all of the 'personal' words can be found in PE13. *Hoith* is listed outright, while *pukta* in PE12 is listed as 'a gloss that can no longer be read'. However, it appears under the root *PU(HU)* (generate), which also provides *putse* (baby) and *puntl* (see #5 above). An expanded description of the word *hoith* in PE13 confirms *pukta* as the Kenya equivalent.

The verbs are G *hoitha-* and Q *pukta-*, with an additional verb being G *hug-*. While *hoitha-* is translated as 'to have intercourse with; to marry', *hug-* means 'to copulate'.

The second listing of *hoith* in PE13 gives the meaning as 'coitus (one act)' and provides an alternate Kenya spelling of *puhta* (which is more in line with later Quenya spelling conventions). Beneath this is *huis: coire (trans.), futuere*, and the Q form *pukse*. So that gives us a third Gnomish verb: *huis-*.

2) Consort (G *hauthwaid* 11-48)

You can translate this as 'bed buddy': literally, it's composed of the elements *hauth* 'to lay' and *gwaid* 'companion'. Its second meaning is 'wife or husband', probably indicating that the person one lies with ought to be one's spouse.

And that brings us to the number one word you never thought Tolkien would provide. What do you think you would be least likely to see on an Elvish wordlist? How about this:

1) Hermaphrodite (G *gwegwin* 11-44)

Composed of the elements *gweg* plus *gwin*, this is directly translated as 'man-woman'. I wonder if he ever planned on using this word in a specific tale, or just created it for fun. Too bad we'll never know.