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## Linguistic Foolery

### Elven Holidays and Festivals: What do we have to work with in the First Age?

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Holidays and festivals are a popular occurrence in fanfiction, offering a good excuse for drunken mirth or to assemble large groups of characters who might not otherwise have much contact. But what choices does an author have in terms of celebrations throughout the year? Very little of what's listed in the calendar information of *Appendix D* of *Lord of the Rings* is applicable in a *Silmarillion* setting. Luckily, other sources contain more appropriate alternatives.

#### Named Holidays

There are two explicitly named Elvish holidays that, without a question, are celebrated in the First Age. Both of them are holidays of Gondolin, but may have been observed elsewhere.

*Nost-na-Lothion* is a spring festival described on pages 171 and 172 of the *Book of Lost Tales 2*:

Yet in its time a spring of wondrous glory melted the skirts of those white mantles and the valley drank the waters and burst into flowers. So came and passed with revelry of children the festival of *Nost-na-Lothion* or the Birth of Flowers.

No exact time of year is given for *Nost-na-Lothion*, but the Quenya names of the months might give some clue. May is called *Lótessë* in Quenya and *Lunde Lótëa* or *Lotession* in the Quenya Lexicon: all of these names are related to the words for 'flower' and 'blossom', making May the month of flowers. It would therefore make sense for *Nost-na-Lothion* to occur at the beginning of May.

Immediately following on *BoLT* page 172 is a mention of *Tarnin Austa*:

And now at great length is that great fest of *Tarnin Austa* or the Gates of Summer near at hand. For know that on that night it was their custom to begin a solemn ceremony at midnight, continuing it even until the dawn of *Tarnin Austa* broke, and no voice was uttered in the city from midnight until the break of day, but the dawn they hailed with ancient songs.

*Tarnin Austa* can be literally translated as 'passage into summer', and thus probably occurs on the summer solstice (as with *Nost-na-Lothion*, no timeframe is given). The term *Austalendë*, meaning 'Midsummer's Day', appears in the Quenya Lexicon and could very well be another name for the same holiday.

A third named holiday appears in the *Book of Lost Tales*, this time in volume one. However, given that it takes place during the time of Eriol's visit to Tol Eressëa, its general relevance to

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the First Age is questionable. However, it is worth mentioning simply because its name appears in both Qenya and Gnomish: Q *Turuhalmë* ('log drawing') and G *Durufui* ('log night'). From BoLT2 page 260:

that was the day of Turuhalmë or the Logdrawing. "Twill be a fitting day,' saith Lindo, 'for the sports of the morning in the snow and the gathering of the logs from the woods and the songs and drinking of Turuhalmë will leave us of right mood to listen to old tales beside this fire.' ... and the company from Mar Vanwa Tyaliéva went into the snowy woods to bring back firewood on sleighs. Never was the Tale-fire allowed to go out or to die into grey ash, but on the eve of Turuhalmë it sank always to a smaller blaze until Turuhalmë itself, when great logs were brought into the Room of the Tale-fire and being blessed by Lindo with ancient magic roared and flared anew upon the hearth.

In the Gnomish Lexicon entry for *Durufui*, both it and 'the feast of *Turuhalmë*' are loosely translated as 'Yule'. Under the related entry for *halm*, a further explanation is given that "*halm* [drawing] is properly the morning followed in the evening by that festival called *Durufui*, or *Tonfui* [fire night] (Parma Eldalamberon 11, p 47)." No timeframe is given for *Turuhalmë* here or in the Lost Tales, other than that it takes place in winter. But if one wants to take a guess, the winter solstice would make for a nice placement not only as a complement to *Tarnin Austa*, but also because Peoples of Middle-earth mentions the solstice as a notable time for the Elves.

PoME pages 126-127 show an earlier (and more complex and complete) version of the Eldarin calendar that appears in LotR *Appendix D*. Both are calendars of Imladris as observed by Sam Gamgee, but the obsolete PoME version could be used as an alternate by authors looking for something different for use in the First Age (or among any Elven kindreds outside of Imladris). Here, instead of the beginning of spring, the centuries (and thus the years) "are arranged ... to begin as nearly as possible with the first sunset after the Winter Solstice" (PoME 127). Two special days are named in this calendar: Quantarië, the Day of Completion (final day of the century or *quantië*) and *Vinyarië*, Newyear's Day (first day of the century).

One more possible day of note is listed in the Qenya Lexicon: *i Sovallë*, 'the purification'. Nothing at all is explained about what 'the purification' is, but its capitalisation indicates that it's not simply an everyday noun. This one is left entirely up to the imagination. All we know is that related words from the same root (SOVO/SOWO) have to do with washing, bathing, and cleansing. Additionally, the month name *Sovalwaris* appears, meaning 'February'. *i Sovallë* would logically then take place in February.

## Unnamed Holidays

Two very important festival times appear in The Silmarillion, and neither is given a name. The first famously occurs during the darkening of Valinor and is described as a harvest festival:

Therefore Yavanna set times for the flowering and the ripening of all things that grew in Valinor; and at each first gathering of fruits Manwe made a high feast for the praising of Eru, when all the peoples of Valinor poured forth their music and joy upon Taniquetil. (Silmarillion, pp 74-75)

As usual, no time is given for this outside of the mention of the 'first gathering of fruits' that indicates summer.

Then, when Eärendil comes to Tirion, he arrives during a festival:

So now Earendil had come at a time of festival, and wellnigh all the Elvenfolk were gone to Valimar, or were gathered in the halls of Manwe upon Taniquetil (Silmarillion, p 248)

The purpose of this festival is not given, but the similarities in the descriptions of the deserted stairs and empty streets of Tirion (as well as the gathering of the Eldar upon Taniquetil) during the earlier feast indicate that Eärendil could very well have shown up at the same time of year.

### **Inventing Holidays**

If you feel like inventing a holiday or festival for your story that has some canonical basis, here's an easy way to do it: several of the months are associated with the names of Valar. A festival in honour of the Vala of the month would make sense.

January, according to the Qenya Lexicon, is called not only *Lundë Niqilissëa* (snowy month), but also *Lirillion* for its first half (month of Lirillo, Vala of song) and *Erintion* for its second half (month of Erinti, Valië of love, music and beauty). While neither Lirillo nor Erinti survives past the era of the Qenya Lexicon, January festivals of music and love could still be created as a nod back to these early ideas. February is similarly called *Amillion* after the obsolete Vala Amillo (Hilary).

March is *Lundë Susúlima* (month of wind) in Qenya and *Súlimë* in Quenya. A possible connexion can be made with Manwë Súlimo for a March festival. Next, April shares one of its Qenya names with Vána: the word *Tuiléris* can be applied to both Vána and April, her month. Then, one of the Qenya names for May, *Lotession*, could be related to the Valië Lotessë (another name for Erinti, above).

Finally, with a month-name that exists in mature Quenya, September is called *Yavannië*. Harvest festivals in Yavanna's honour would be appropriate for September.