The Early Noldorin past tense

Roman Rausch

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Introduction

After the composition of the *Gnomish Lexicon* and the *Qenya Lexicon* the next major stage of Tolkien's linguistic creation was the writing of the *Early Qenya Grammar* (EQG) and the *Early Noldorin Grammar* (ENG) some time around 1923 while he was at Leeds. The ENG is also accompanied by two compilations of vocabulary, the *Noldorin Word-lists* (NW) and the *Noldorin Dictionary* (ND).
There are several verb paradigms given in association with the grammar, and apart from that both NW and ND list about 20 verbs, each with their respective past tenses.

The aim of this article is thus to classify the Noldorin past tense patterns of that time. It will be seen that the conceptions in NW and ND are not quite the same and therefore the two will be treated separately before a final comparison with the verb paradigms will be given. Citations are given by the page numbers of PE13 in brackets, unless noted otherwise.

Preliminary remarks

In Qenya of the EQG the past tense is obtained by the suffixes **-ye, -ie, -ne**. The commonest is **-ie** and is *normally accompanied by stem strengthening consisting out of* (EQG:56):

1. *a-infixion*

2. *n-infixion*

3. *vowel lengthening*

The situation is not very much different in Noldorin. The strong past tense is obtained by nasal infixion and i-mutation throughout the word apparently caused by the suffix **-ye**. So **mad-** > **maint** (< ***mantye**) 'ate' where Qenya has ***mantye** > **mansie** (EQG:57). Note that some forms hint at a past tense suffix **-ya** rather than **-ye**, e.g. 3rd masc. **medenniog** < ***mat-ant-yā-k-**, fem. **[med]ennias** < ***mat-ant-ya-s-** (163), but this weak past tense formation is already analogical.

For a discussion of Noldorin vowel mutation at that time see [6].

All verbs can be grouped into 'basic verbs' which contain no derivative suffixes (called *strong -(i) verbs* by Tolkien (165)) and 'derived verbs' which are formed with **-a, -ta, -nta, -ya, -tya** (EQG:56) in Qenya. In Noldorin these suffixes usually appear as **-a, -d, -ia**.

Tolkien lists the verbs either by their roots, the infinitives, or by the 3rd singular impersonal form. The infinitive is usually formed with the suffix **-i** attached to consonantal stems and **-d** (< ***-t**) to vocalic stems (and therefore mostly to derived verbs). In the former case i-mutation is caused. But ***-t** is sometimes also appended to consonantal roots where it causes further changes, as **alaith** 'inf. shielding, warding off, protect(ion)' < ***alakt-**, stem ***alag-** or **gonoth** 'inf. to count' < ***go-nod-t**, stem **gonod**. Finally, derived verbs ending in **-ata** > **-ad** usually lengthen the last vowel in the infinitive: ***-āta** > **-od**, so **tangod** 'to fix, fixing', stem ***tangad-**.

The 3rd sg. impersonal form is usually endless, but the same basic verbs that form the infinitive with ***-t** obtain the 3rd sg. by i-mutation (in Welsh the 3rd sg. present is also either the bare stem or the i-mutated bare stem). So **elaig** *'shields, wards off' and **genyd, goenyd** *'counts'. The reason for that might be that the derivational suffix **-ya** only occurs in the present. Compare Tolkien's description of -(**n**)**ta** as being *mere present-formative* in Qenya – it means that this suffix appears in the present (**kapta** 'leap') and the future (**kaptuva**), but is omitted in the past (**kampie**). In this light the present forms **elaig** < **alak-ya**, masc. **elegiog** < ***alak-ya-k-**, fem. **elegiais** < ***alak-ya-is-** become clear. On the other hand ***nuv-** 'sinking, going down, to sink, set' forms the 3rd sg. impersonal **ný** or **ní** by i-mutation, but otherwise behaves like a basic verb, so masc. **nuveg** rather than ***nyviog**. Hence I have treated this last pattern as a basic verb. Perhaps i-mutation becomes a morphological device by analogy.

To keep the etymologies clear, verbs will be cited by their roots (reconstructed if necessary).

1 Noldorin Word-lists

(1.1) basic verbs – strong A: nasal infixion / i-mutation

The strong past tense of basic verbs is formed by a combination of nasal infixion and i-mutation. The plural is formed by the suffix **-i** with medial change **-mp-, -nt-, -nc-** > **-mm-, -nn-, -ng-**. The forms **crimp** and later (2.1) **pint** are actually glossed 'Old Noldorin' (therefore medial **-nth-** in pl. **pinthi**; late Noldorin would be ***pinni**), in other cases the weak past tense (1.2) is just mentioned as 'more recent'. So it appears that this pattern (1.1) becomes archaic in the course of time, displaced by an analogical formation.

- ONo. **crimp**, pl. **crimmi** < **crib-** 'to bend' (141)

- **dainc** 'slew' < (**n**)**dag-** 'to slay' (141)

- **genynt, goenynt**, pl. **genynni** < **go-nod** 'to count' (145) [present tense by i-mutation **genyd, goenyd** *'counts']

- **hync**, pl. **hyngi** < **hug-** 'futuere' (147)

- **lhint**, pl. **lhinni** < **lhid-** 'float, sail' (148)

- **lhimp** < **lhif** 'drinks' (148) [Note that this is actually analogical, the historical form is not ***slif-** or ***plif-** (which would produce ***lhif-**), but actually **sl̩q-, sl̩p-** and falls under (1.2).]

- **sainc**, pl. **sengi** < **sag-** 'to fight' (153) [present tense by i-mutation: **saig** *'fights']

(1.2) basic verbs with syllabic consonants – strong B: a-infixion

Several examples indicate that the past tense of verbs with a syllabic consonant was originally obtained by lengthening. In Noldorin this results in an apparent a-infixion. So **hist** 'spits' < **hṣt** and **lhif** < **sḷq, sḷp** are due to the resolution of syllabic **ṣ** > **is** and **ḷ** > **il** [6]. The past tense of **lhif** is **heilf** (later **hailf**) from **sl:q-** [Tolkien's spelling] > ***salf-**, subsequent i-mutation and the common change **s-** > **h-** initially. It seems that long syllabic **s:** becomes **as**, hence ***hs:t-** > ***hast-** and finally **haist**.

- **haist** < **hist** 'spits' (*hst-*) (147)

- **heilf, hailf** < **lhif** 'drinks' (*slq-, slp-*) (148)

- **gaist** < **gist** 'knows' (*ʒist-*) (144)

It appears that in later Noldorin a-infixion is recognized as a new pattern, so that a new analogical present is formed by **hilf**, which now goes with the past tense **hailf**. It regularizes the disagreement of the initial consonants (**h-** and **lh-**). Also, the verb **gist** 'knows' must be derived from **ʒist-** (146), there is no syllabic consonant here. The past tense **gaist** is then either formed by analogy to the verbs like **hist**; or maybe a-infixion is quite regular in such a case because n-infixion would probably have no effect upon the from (***ʒinst-** > **ʒist-**).

(1.3) basic verbs – analogous weak: *-aint*, pl. *-enni*

The weak past tense of basic verbs is formed with the suffix **-aint**, pl. **-enni** (with i-mutation) for any root vowel. It seems that this suffix was later generally introduced for both basic and derived verbs. Later Noldorin sources indicate that it is an analogical formation from strong past tenses of verbs ending in **-d** (< ***-t**), like **maint** and **tengaint** (PE17:44).

- **cribaint** < **crib-** 'to bend' (141)

- **goenoedaint, genedaint** pl. **gonedenni** < **go-nod** 'to count' (145)

- **gwestaint** < **gwaist** 'is aware, recognizes' (perhaps with dissimilation **ai** > **e** from expected ***gwaistaint** < ***waʒist-ant-ye-**) (146)

- **histaint** < **hist** 'spits' (*hst-*) (147)

- **lhifaint** < **lhif** 'drinks' (148) [see (1.1)]

- **nyvaint** < ***nuv-** 'sinking, going down, to sink, set' (151) [present tense by i-mutation: **ný**, older **ní** *'sinks, sets down']

- **segaint**, pl. **segenni** < **sag-** 'to fight' (153)

(2.1) derived verbs – strong: nasal infixion / i-mutation

As already mentioned the derivational suffix **-ta** is often present-formative in Qenya and is omitted in the past tense (**kapta – kampie**). However, in causative or transitive formations the past suffixes **-ne, -ine** are used (**lapta** *'wrap' (cf. **lapa-** 'wrap, swathe, wind' (QL:51)) – **laptane**). Another pattern is nasal infixion of the derivative ending (**lokta – lokante**) (EQG:58).
It appears that the present-formative suffix in Noldorin is rather **-ya** than **-ta**, cf. **rotya-** > **rhoid** in ND. Otherwise we find nasal infixion of the last consonant after the fashion of **lokta – lokante** and usual addition of ***-ye** causing i-mutation.

- **cyrenaint** (**curanant-*), intr. **agyraint** < ***curant-**, inf. **curenni** 'to curdle' (**curan-t(a)-*), 3 sg. masc. **curanneg** (141)

- **mebaint** (*mapant-*) < **maitha-** (*mapta-*) 'to ravish' (149)

- **meriaint** < **meriad** 'to dwell, live, stay' (**mbaryata-*) (150)

- ONo. **pint**, pl. **pinthi** < **peda** 'to say' (152)

- **tengaint** < ***tangad-** 'to fix' (**tankata-*), *inf. **tangod** 'to fix, fixing' (153)

Note that **curenni** is probably formed with causative -(**n**)**ta**. This suffix loses its final **-a** in Noldorin practically yielding a consonantal stem (cf. **tangod, meriad**), so the infinitive is formed with **-i**. The intransitive past tense **agyraint** appears to be formed by i-affection only, without the extension ***curant-** > ***curana-n-t**. The augment seems to be quite unique – it otherwise only appears in **agor**, which is transitive, however.

The verb **peda** seems to be derived with **-a**, as also seen in the 3rd masc. pres. **pedog** < ***kwetā-k-**. Since there is no consonant in the derivational ending for n-infixion, n-infixion appears to act upon the root consonant, as in the case of basic verbs.

(2.2) derived verbs – weak: *-(a)in(t)*, pl. *-(e)n(n)i*

In Qenya this past tense is obtained by **-ne**, but Noldorin employs the suffix -(**a**)**int**, -(**a**)**in** (< ***-(a)ntye**, *-(**a**)**nye**), pl. -(**e**)**nni**, -(**e**)**ni** (< ***-a)nti-**, *-(**a**)**ni-**) instead; which is, as already mentioned, most probably an analogical derivation from regular strong past tenses like **maint** and **tengaint** (PE17:44). I-mutation is again carried out throughout the word.

- **pedaint**, pl. **pedenni** < **peda** 'to say' (152)

- **pisaint** < ***pisa-** (*kwissa-*) 'to whisper', **pis** 'whispers', masc. **pisog** (152)

- **rheidiain**(**t**), pl. **rheidien**(**n**)**i** < **rhoid** 'to let go' (*rotya-*), 3rd sg. **rhoidia, rhoe(i)dia, rheidia** (152)

(2.3) derived verbs with *-tha* > *-aist*

There is only one example:

- **crimmaist** < **crimtha** 'to bend (tr.)'

This is a compound of **crimp** *'bent' and **tha-** 'to make cause to be'. The past tense is obtained by simply putting **tha** into the past tense **aist**, see (3).

(3) irregular

The verb **tha-** 'to make cause to be' is somewhat irregular, the basic form is from **s'ta-**, the past tense stem is **asti-** with a prefixed root vowel. This yields **aist** without further suffixes for the 3rd impers., and 3rd masc. **astig**.

Another irregular example is **gwaist** 'is aware, recognises' (*wa-ʒist*, 146), past tense **guist**. The present form is apparently derived from **ʒist** 'knows' with the prefix **gwa-** 'together, co(n)-' (< ***wa-**), but the past tense seems to incorporate the unstressed form **go-** (< ***wo-**) of this prefix with subsequent **oi** > **ui**.

2 Noldorin Dictionary

There is a main difference in the past tense formation introduced in the ND: There are now two past tenses, the *imperfect* and the *aorist*. Although Tolkien later calls a timeless or habitual verb form 'aorist', it is traditionally a term referring to a simple action in the past, without any other aspectual restrictions. It it is therefore close to the perfect tense, although the perfect tense properly conveys the idea that an action has already occurred at the time of speaking, or the state resulting from the action. So English 'was doing', 'did' and 'has done' would roughly correspond to the imperfect, aorist and perfect, respectively.
Note that there is no perfect tense in any Early Noldorin verb paradigm. In Welsh, there is an imperfect tense and a past tense; the past tense is either perfect or aorist in sense, but mostly the latter (J. Morris-Jones, An Elementary Welsh Grammar §267,270). One observes that Early Noldorin is strongly based on Welsh in phonology [6] and it seems that Tolkien had a very similar verbal system in mind. Of course, Ancient Greek is also well-known for having a past, perfect and aorist.

The fact that the Noldorin aorist is indeed a past tense can be for example seen from the translation of aorist **maint** 'ate'; compare past imperfect **madath** 'was eating'. Even more so, all the usual past tense patterns of NW are now glossed 'aorist'. So Q. **alatya** *'shield, ward off, protect' (158) forms the aorist **altíne** – this is a pattern in good agreement with the EQG pattern **tulya** 'send, bring' > pa.t. **tulĭne** or **tantya** 'set bouncing' > **tansĭne**, rarely **-īne**; but there is no distinguishing of the imperfect and aorist in the EQG.

2.1   The aorist

(1.1) basic verbs – strong: nasal infixion / i-mutation

- **edainc** < **adag** *'builds, erects' (158)

- **hync** < **hug-** 'coire (trans.), futuere' (163)

- ONo. **maint** 'ate' < **mad** 'eats' (163)

- **pint**, later **peint** < **ped-** 'to say' (164)

- †**dadní** (*dad-nubh-ye*) < **dadnú** *'sinks, goes downhill/downstairs' (*dad-nubh-*) (164)

The variants **pint** and **peint** show different results of i-mutation: In the former case we see a raising ***pentye** > ***pint**(**i**), in the latter an infixion ***pentye** > ***peint**(**i**).
Note that †**dadní** is formed by i-mutation only, probably because of the early loss of the spirant **v** after **u** – this way the verb ends in a vowel and nasal infixion cannot be applied.

(1.2) basic verbs – analogous weak A: *-(i)n(t), -(i)nn, pl. -(i)n(n)ir*

This weak past tense suffix is probably just the same suffix ***-ntye** as for derived verbs, but it is attached to the stem via the connecting vowel **-i-**. The plural is now formed with **-ir** rather than **-i** in NW, but is attested only for **alaith**.

- **elchin**(**t**), pl. **elchin**(**n**)**ir** [old] < ***al**(**a**)**ch-** 'shielding, warding off, protect(ion)', inf. **alaith** < ***alak-t-** (158) [present tense by i-mutation: **elaig**, masc. **eleigiog**, fem. **eleigiais**]

- **emrynn, emrynt** (< *amrontye*) < **amró** *'rises up' (159)

- **pedint** < **ped-** 'to say' (164)

(1.2) basic verbs – analogous weak B: *-aint, pl. -ennir*

- **elchaint**, pl. [**elch**]**ennir** < ***al**(**a**)**ch-** 'shielding, warding off, protect(ion)', inf. **alaith** < ***alak-t-** (158) [present tense by i-mutation: **elaig**, masc. **eleigiog**, fem. **eleigiais**]

- **geraint** < 3rd sg. or inf. **gair** 'there is room (for)' (*gar-*) (161)

- **genedaint** < **go-nod-** *'to count' (162)

- **medaint,** masc. **medenniog**, fem. [**med**]**ennias**, pl. [**med**]**ennir** < **mad** 'eats' (163)

- **dadnyvaint** < **dadnú** *'sinks, goes downhill/downstairs' (*dad-nubh-*) (164)

- **pedaint** < **ped-** 'to say' (164)

Note that in **dadnú** the spirant **v** (**bh**) is lost after **u** in final position.

(1.3) basic verbs with syllabic consonants – strong: a-infixion

- **haich** < **hich** 'vomits' (*pṣk-*) (163)

- **haist** < **hist** 'spits' (*sṣt-* or *pṣt-*) (163)

Initial **p-** becomes **h-** in Early Noldorin and syllabic **-ṣ-** is resolved in **-is-**. In the past tense we are probably again dealing with long syllabic ***ṣ:** > **as**. Also note **sk** > **ch**.

(2.1) derived verbs – strong: nasal infixion / i-mutation

- **enneirn** (< ***antharn-yē**) < **athra-** 'to face, look in a certain direction, oppose', ONo. **anthra-** (160)

- **glebaint** (pa.t.) < ***glabad-**, inf. **glabod** 'babbling &c.' (162)

- **goelwaint, gelwaint** < **golwad-** 'stink, to stink' (< *golwat(a)-*), pl. **goelwedir** (162)

- **mebaint** < **maitha-** 'to ravish' (163)

- **rhynt** < **rhaid** 'rush, hurtle', ONo. **rhoid** (*rotya-*) (165)

Note that after **r** we are rather dealing with a nasal suffix (> **rn**) than infix. The verb **anthra-** can be very well seen falling into the same pattern as **maitha** < **mapta** or Q. **lokta** – for the nasal fortification it is extended, so ***antra-** > ***antar-** > pa.t. ***antarnye** > **enneirn**. Compare **mapta** > ***mapat-** > pa.t. ***mapantye** > **mebaint** and Q. **lokta** > **lokante**.

Some more explanation is needed in the case of **rhynt** < **rhaid**. The verb base is **rotya-** and there is no change of the root vowel except for an epenthesis **o** > **oi**, perhaps because a- and i-mutation of the **o** balance each other out. So if the first i-mutation raises **rotyā** > ***ru(i)tya**, the vowel **u** is again lowered by subsequent a-mutation > **rhoid**. Finally, ONo. **oi** is regularly changed to **ai**. This explanation is not compelling, however, it may be that the variants **rotya-** > ***rh(o)eid-**, ***rhuid** just have not been realized (the former has been realized in the 3rd masc. form **rhe(i)diog** beside **rhoidiog**).
In any case there is no a-mutation in the past tense: ***rontye-** > ***runtye-** > **rhynt**.

(2.2) derived verbs – weak: *-(a)int*

- **rhestaint** < **rhosta, amrosta** *'to rise up' (159)

- **ethraint** (aor.) < **athra-** 'to face, look in a certain direction, oppose', ONo. **anthra-** (160)

- **crennaint, agraint** (pa.t.) < **crenni** (< **kran-t(a)-*) 'to finish, complete, accomplish' (161)

- **maithaint** < **maitha-** 'to ravish' (163)

- **rhodaint** < **rhaid** 'rush, hurtle', ONo. **rhoid** (*rotya-*) (165)

Note that the past tense suffix substitutes the whole derivational ending **-ya** in **rot-ya-** > ***rot-antye** > **rhodaint**. This is not the case in NW, where the corresponding form is **rheidiain**(**t**) < ***rotya-ntye**.

(3) irregular

- **agor**, pl. **agori, egerni** < **cara** 'to make, do, perform, act (trans. and absolute)' (161)

This past tense seems to be formed by vowel lengthening and augment ***akār-** > **agor**, but a nasal can be seen in pl. ***akarni** > **egerni**. Although this pattern is usual in later Sindarin, **agor** is exceptional in Early Noldorin.

2.2   The imperfect

The imperfect tense formation actually displays a very simple pattern – it is obtained by the suffix **-ath** for all verb classes alike. The suffix may cause a-mutation of the preceding vowel.

-(a)th, pl. -(e)thir, -aith

- **amro(a)th**, pl. **amroethir, -rethir** < **amró** *'rises up' (159)

- **madath** 'was eating' < **mad** 'eats' (163)

- **dadnovath, -nuvath**, pl. **dadnyvaith, -nevaith, dadnévethir, -nyvethir** < **dadnú** *'sinks, goes downhill/downstairs' (**dad-nubh-*) (164)

- **maithaf** (dissimilated ***maithath**) < **maitha-** 'to ravish' (163)

3 Comparison with verb paradigms

NW and ND are accompanied by a grammar entitled **Lam na·NGoluith** and several paradigms of verb declensions which may be compared with what has been discussed so far:

paradigm	3rd sg.past of **glathra-** 'to polish'	3rd sg. past of **mad-** 'to eat', **dag-** 'to slay'
rejected (126-127)	**glathraith << glathrath**	**maint**
retained (129-130)	**glathraith**	**maint, dainc**

We see here the suffix **-ath** for derived verbs and nasal infixion for basic verbs – a distinction never met in the wordlists. Furthermore the retained sketch has columns which are probably representing the aorist. It is apparently formed by prefixes, **glathra** *'polishes' > **aglathra, dengin** *'I slay' > **gindengin, manthin** *'I eat' > **(gi)mennin**. Such a pattern never appears in the wordlists either.

Furthermore there is a very detailed paradigm (131-132) with a complete declension of 5 different verbs:

	3rd sg. of **tangad-** 'to make firm'	3rd sg. of **lub-** 'wash'	3rd sg. of **mad-** 'to eat'	3rd sg. of **adag-** 'build'	3rd sg. of **gurdh-** 'die'
past (imperfect)	**tangàdath**	**lhovath*, lhuath**	**madath**	**adagath**	**gwardhaf**
aorist	**tengaint**	**lhîf*, lhîw*, lhuaint**	**maint**	**edainc, edegaint**	**gwridh**

This paradigm is in accordance with ND, where **madath, maint, edainc** also appear (**tengaint** appears in NW).

Note that the gloss **lub-** seems to reflect a primitive form, becoming ***lhuv-** in Noldorin. Hence the possibilities ***lhuvath > lhovath** with a-mutation (asterisked by Tolkien) or ***lhuvath > lhuath** with loss of **v** after **u** (cf. **dadnú, ný** above). The aorist forms ***lhîf, *lhîw** are also asterisked by Tolkien – they seem to be formed by i-mutation only (cf. **dadnú** > aor. **†dadní** above) and final **-v** is not lost because the preceding vowel is not **u** anymore. Instead, it becomes devoiced **-f** or the approximant **-w** (the latter might also be a vowel [u]).

The past form **gwardhaf** is once again dissimilated ***gwardhath** (cf. **maithaf**). Aorist **gwridh** seems strange at the first glance but may be explained by the fact that the primitive form has a syllabic **ṛ**: **ngwṛþ-** or **guṛþú** > Goldogrin **gurthu** 'death' (PE11:43). Hence perhaps ***(n)gwṛđ-ye > gwridh** (with a labialized **g**); and there is no room for n-infixion.

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