

The Genesis of Arda

by Donald O'Brien

A. Introduction.

Intent on doing research on *The Silmarillion*, I have found it necessary to understand how Tolkien's earliest writings culminated in *The Silmarillion* and how they stand in relation to it, how to place *The Silmarillion* within the evolutionary context of *The Hobbit* and of *The Lord of the Rings* which it preceded and followed both in composition and revision as well as in publication, and how Tolkien's evolving perception of mythopoeisis and subcreation impinged upon *The Silmarillion*. Hence I embarked on this study solely, at the outset, for private purposes, to understand the chronological evolution of Arda from its first beginnings on the Western Front in 1916 to Tolkien's death in 1973. I here present a portion of this study, a reconstructed chronology of when Tolkien wrote or revised works pertaining to Arda in the hope that this chronological framework may be of some use to others seeking to understand how Tolkien's diverse works might stand in relation to one another.

Two chronologies are presented in this paper. The first chronological chart reconstructs the complex evolution of *The Lost Tales*, and the second chart, Tolkien's writings from 1910 to 1973. *The Lost Tales* have been granted their own chronology because of the complex manner in which they were composed. The second chronology is intended to provide a synoptic view of the sequence of composition of Tolkien's works, including works of art, pertinent to Arda.

B. The Lost Tales.

In the first chronological chart the horizontal axis defines the temporal framework from 1916 to 1920 during which *The Lost Tales* were written. The vertical axis orders the tales themselves from top to bottom according to their narrative sequence in *The Silmarillion*. The box codes used in the table to represent the state of composition of the different works are as follows:

Single outline: pencil text

Double outline: ink text

Triple outline: ink text over a wholly erased pencil text

The slant of the boxes is meant to suggest composition over time. Straight directed lines linking boxes indicate the transfer or rewriting of material from one tale to another.

For the purpose of convenience the tales can be broadly considered to fall into four main groups:

1) A group comprising early writings when Tolkien first began to compose *The Lost Tales* during the period 1916-1917. During this time *The Lost Tales* were not written in the order in which they would ultimately appear in *The Silmarillion*. In fact the tales written at this time fall predominantly toward the end of *The Silmarillion*. Tolkien was doubtless still developing and discovering the story

of Arda. The three other groups of tales would fall earlier in the narrative sequence or would be developments of tales already written during the early phase with the purpose of being integrated into one long narrative about the Noldoli and their relationships with Melko and the Valar. These three groups consist of the following.

2) The tales from *The Music of the Ainur* to *The Flight of the Noldoli* were probably written one following the other according to the narrative sequence of the story, at least in their final stage of composition, apparently without any major interruption.

3) Some tales which now follow *The Flight of the Noldoli* in the published *Silmarillion* involving an interlocutor named Ailios in the links joining the tales.

4) Some tales that follow *The Flight of the Noldoli* in the published *Silmarillion* with Gilfanon replacing Ailios as tale-teller. The early writings fall within the period of Tolkien's army service and the three later groups were composed during Tolkien's work on *The New English Dictionary* at Oxford from November 1918 to the spring of 1920.¹

As regards the earliest group, *The Fall of Gondolin* and *The Tale of Tinúviel* were composed, according to Christopher Tolkien in 1916-1917². According to Humphrey Carpenter the earliest tale, *The Fall of Gondolin*, was composed sometime during January-February 1917, during Tolkien's convalescence at Great Haywood, and *The Tale of Tinúviel* at Brooklands Officers' Hospital in Hull sometime during April-November 1917.³ The earliest version of *The Tale of Tinúviel* is not extant, but the original version of *The Fall of Gondolin*, called *Tuor A* by Christopher Tolkien, is an extant pencil manuscript that was subsequently heavily emended. *The Cottage of Lost Play*, whose date of composition "could have been, but probably was not, earlier than the winter of 1916-17"⁴, exists in both a pencil manuscript and a fair ink copy in a notebook displaying the date "Feb. 12th, 1917". This tale provided the context for the alleged transmission of *The Lost Tales* to our modern times through an intermediary Eriol/Alfwine presented in the "links" that join *The Lost Tales* together into a coherent narrative.

The Lost Tales from *The Music of the Ainur* to *The Flight of the Noldoli* were possibly first written during the time when Tolkien worked on *The New English Dictionary*, and were probably written in the order in which they appear in *The Book of Lost Tales*⁵ without major gaps in time, although given Tolkien's method of composition he could possibly have moved back and forth among these tales, rewriting existing tales wholly or in part as the story progressed from *The Music of the Ainur* to *The Flight of the Noldoli*. The first tale of this group, *The Music of the Ainur*, was written after a gap of at least one and a half years following the composition of *The Cottage of Lost Play* (i.e., the gap extended from 12 February 1917 to at least November 1918, a gap which

Christopher Tolkien describes as "some two years or more"⁶). The tales are extant in various manuscript states, ranging from pencil to ink and to ink over wholly or partly erased pencil versions as indicated in the accompanying first chart⁷. It would appear that Tolkien systematically planned to revise and rewrite the pencil manuscripts into ink texts, but did not complete the task, for approximately the last forty per cent of this group of tales, apart from a rider "written carefully and legibly in ink on separate sheets at how great an interval of time I (= Christopher Tolkien) cannot say"⁸ to replace a rejected portion of the pencil text of *The Flight of the Noldoli*, are extant as pencil manuscripts.

The relationship of the remaining groups of *Lost Tales*, which are referred to in the first chart as the 'Ailios phase' and the 'Gilfanon phase', with the other *Lost Tales* within the framework of the order of composition is somewhat difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty. Christopher Tolkien has described the relationship between the various tales at this juncture as follows: "The development of *The Lost Tales* is here in fact extremely complex."⁹ The extant version of *The Tale of Tinúviel* is preceded by an introductory link which was subsequently rewritten as the introduction to *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon*. This link naturally refers back to the subject matter of *The Flight of the Noldoli* and, as Christopher Tolkien has suggested, his father probably intended at one time to place *The Tale of Tinúviel* after *The Flight of the Noldoli*, thus choosing at least at one stage of the composition of *The Book of Lost Tales* not to place them in narrative sequence.¹⁰ Christopher Tolkien has also written after *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon*:

"There is nothing in the manuscripts to suggest that the tales that follow *The Music of the Ainur* to the point we have now reached were not written consecutively and continuously from *The Music*, while my father was still at Oxford."¹¹

and:

"That the rewriting of *Tinúviel* was one of the latest elements in the composition of *The Lost Tales* seems clear from the fact that it is followed by the first form of the 'Gilfanon interlude', written at the same time: for Gilfanon replaced 'Ailios', and Ailios, not Gilfanon, is the guest in the house in the earlier versions of *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon* and *The Hiding of Valinor*, and is the teller of *The Tale of the Nauglafring*."¹²

The first statement by Christopher Tolkien had initially led me to believe that *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon* was written immediately after *The Flight of the Noldoli*. This conclusion made it difficult for me to fit *The Tale of Tinúviel* into the temporal framework of these tales: how could this tale be one of the last written if *The Hiding of Valinor* was apparently written continuously on the completion of *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon*? The dilemma can be resolved if it is assumed that *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon* was not written "consecutively and continuously" immediately following *The Flight of the Noldoli*, but rather that the writing of the latter tale was followed immediately by a link introducing *The Tale of Tinúviel*, the rewriting of *The Tale of Tinúviel*, and by an interlude intended to introduce *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon*. The page numbers of the notebook containing

The Tale of Tinúviel are reported to follow the pagination in the notebook containing *The Flight of the Noldoli*¹³ Tolkien must then have decided to reorder *The Lost Tales*. He revised and recopied a part of the link introducing *The Tale of Tinúviel*, and then recopied the 'Gilfanon interlude' that originally concluded *The Tale of Tinúviel* with considerable revision, and then appended these two links together in tandem to the end of *The Flight of the Noldoli*. He then possibly proceeded to rewrite *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon*, after the hiatus devoted to *The Tale of Tinúviel*, appending it in narrative sequence to *The Flight of the Noldoli*.

As Christopher Tolkien states in the second quotation above, Gilfanon replaced Ailios as tale-teller. Ailios and Gilfanon respectively characterise earlier and later phases of the composition of the *Lost Tales* that follow *The Flight of the Noldoli* in narrative sequence, as indicated in the accompanying first chart. Gilfanon appears not only in the revised interlude subscribed to *The Flight of the Noldoli*, removed from *The Tale of Tinúviel*, but also in the link introducing the latest version of *The Hiding of Valinor* and in *Gilfanon's Tale and the Travail of the Noldoli*. *The Hiding of Valinor* was probably written in its last version shortly after the last version of *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon*, and *Gilfanon's Tale* probably shortly after *The Hiding of Valinor*; the pagination of *Gilfanon's Tale* follows consecutively the last manuscript of *The Hiding of Valinor*.¹⁴ Tolkien ceased work on *The Lost Tales* while working on *Gilfanon's Tale*¹⁵, and this phase in the evolution of the material of *The Silmarillion* came to an end at this point. *The Tale of Tinúviel* in its last rewriting was probably the fourth to last tale among *The Lost Tales* Tolkien worked on.

To define a temporal boundary between the earlier Ailios and later Gilfanon phases of the tales is impossible. We can be sure only that Gilfanon replaced Ailios as tale-teller and that links containing Gilfanon are later than the same links containing Ailios. It has been impossible to place the manuscripts of *The Fall of Gondolin* with accuracy into the accompanying first chart. As regards the Ailios-Gilfanon phases, the *Tuor A* version was first written in 1916-1917, and, according to Christopher Tolkien, the emendation of *Tuor A* and the writing of *Tuor B* belong to the Oxford period (November 1918-Spring 1920)¹⁶, and in fact "it is virtually certain that a good deal of the revision of *Tuor B* was made before my father read it to the Essay Club of Exeter College in the spring of 1920."¹⁷ I have arbitrarily assigned the revision of *Tuor A* and the first or B extending into the Gilfanon phase.

I suspect, although the evidence is wanting, that the emergence of Gilfanon was a late development, associated with the last rewriting of *The Tale of Tinúviel*, and that if the composition of the tales in their last forms from *The Music of the Ainur* to *The Flight of the Noldoli*, and then *The Tale of Tinúviel*, *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon*, *The Hiding of Valinor* and *Gilfanon's Tale and the Travail of the Noldoli* was more or less continuous, then the replacement of Ailios by Gilfanon may have been a late development associated with the last rewriting of *The Tale of Tinúviel*, and that manuscripts containing Ailios as interlocutor precede the

last rewriting of *The Music of the Ainur*. The accompanying first chart has been drawn based on this assumption.

It is an interesting fact that Tolkien's vision of the order of the tales evolved as he worked on them. As mentioned above, not long before he abandoned the tales he had at one time planned to insert *The Tale of Tinúviel* between *The Flight of the Noldoli* and *The Tale of the Sun and the Moon*. Moreover the link introducing *The Fall of Gondolin* found at the end of *The Tale of Turambar* and containing Ailios as an interlocutor was not altered in order that Gilfanon replace Ailios. During the Ailios phase Tolkien had also intended at one time to place *The Tale of Turambar* after *The Hiding of Valinor*.¹⁸ This somewhat puzzling disregard for the narrative sequence of *The Lost Tales* was probably due to the fact that the stories were not 'invented' or written according to their narrative sequence as published in *The Silmarillion*; in fact, the Earendil tale was the first story to evolve even though it would never be fully written during the period 1916-1920 as a Lost Tale and should naturally have fallen last in the narrative sequence.¹⁹ It appears that Tolkien was working toward a narrative sequence in the Gilfanon phase amid the complex detailed evolution of the contents themselves of the tales, but halted at Gilfanon's tale, before *The Lost Tales* were brought to completion.

I have assumed that the Turambar manuscript postdates *The Hiding of Valinor* because the link at the end of the latter tale was inserted at the beginning of the former. The temporal relationship of other tales in the Ailios phase is difficult to disentangle. I have arbitrarily placed the tale of Tuor later than *The Tale of Turambar*, and *The Tale of the Nauglafring* later than *Tuor A*, although there is no evidence to substantiate these assumptions.

Doubtless this reconstruction of the order of composition of *The Lost Tales* has been somewhat simplistic because I have not had direct access to the original manuscripts. Certainly the evidence that Christopher Tolkien has excellently presented in *The Book of Lost Tales I* and II, and in the three subsequent volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* has demonstrated how difficult and complex a task it has been at times for Christopher Tolkien to disentangle his father's manuscripts.

C. A Literary Chronology of J.R.R. Tolkien

The second chart, as specified above, presents a chronology of Tolkien's work from 1910 to 1973. The focus in this chart is on those works directly related to Arda and Middle-earth. The chart also includes those works revealing Tolkien's concept of sub-creation and mythopoeisis, such as *On Fairy-Stories* and *Smith of Wootton Major*, and important academic works, such as *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, both because of their relevance to Middle-earth and because they also provide a temporal context of the significant academic work that Tolkien was engaged in during his years at Oxford University. The chart proceeds vertically

downward from 1910 to 1973. Each work is enclosed within a box. The location of the upper edge of each box is intended more-or-less to represent the time at which Tolkien commenced the work relative to the upper edges/starting dates of the other boxes/works. I have attempted, but without any degree of consistency, to have the lower temporal edge of each box represent roughly the time when Tolkien ceased work on that particular box/work. An upper/lower edge of a box which is not closed indicates that the commencement/termination date of composition of that work is unknown. Dashed directed lines lead from a box/work to its later revision, drawn either continuously to the revision, or, when the revision is separated from the earlier version by a large time span, referring to the revision by the date of the revision. The publication dates of works are inserted at the right hand side of the chart.

Notes

1. Carpenter, Humphrey *J.R.R. Tolkien: a biography* Allen and Unwin, 1977, pp.100-102.
2. *The Book of Lost Tales I* p.10, II pp.3, 146-147.
3. Carpenter, *op.cit.* pp.97-99,265; *The Book of Lost Tales II* p.45.
4. *The Book of Lost Tales I* p.13.
5. *Ibid.* p.203.
6. *Ibid.* p.45.
7. *Ibid.* pp.45,52,64,94,130n.8,140,162,163.
8. *Ibid.* p.163.
9. *Ibid.* p.202.
10. *Ibid.* p.203.
11. *Ibid.* p.203.
12. *Ibid.* p.204.
13. *Ibid.* p.203.
14. *Ibid.* p.231.
15. *Ibid.* p.231.
16. *The Book of Lost Tales II* pp.146-147.
17. *Ibid.* p.147.
18. *The Book of Lost Tales I* pp.229-230.
19. *The Book of Lost Tales II* p.252.



Chart I: The Evolution of the 'Lost Tales'

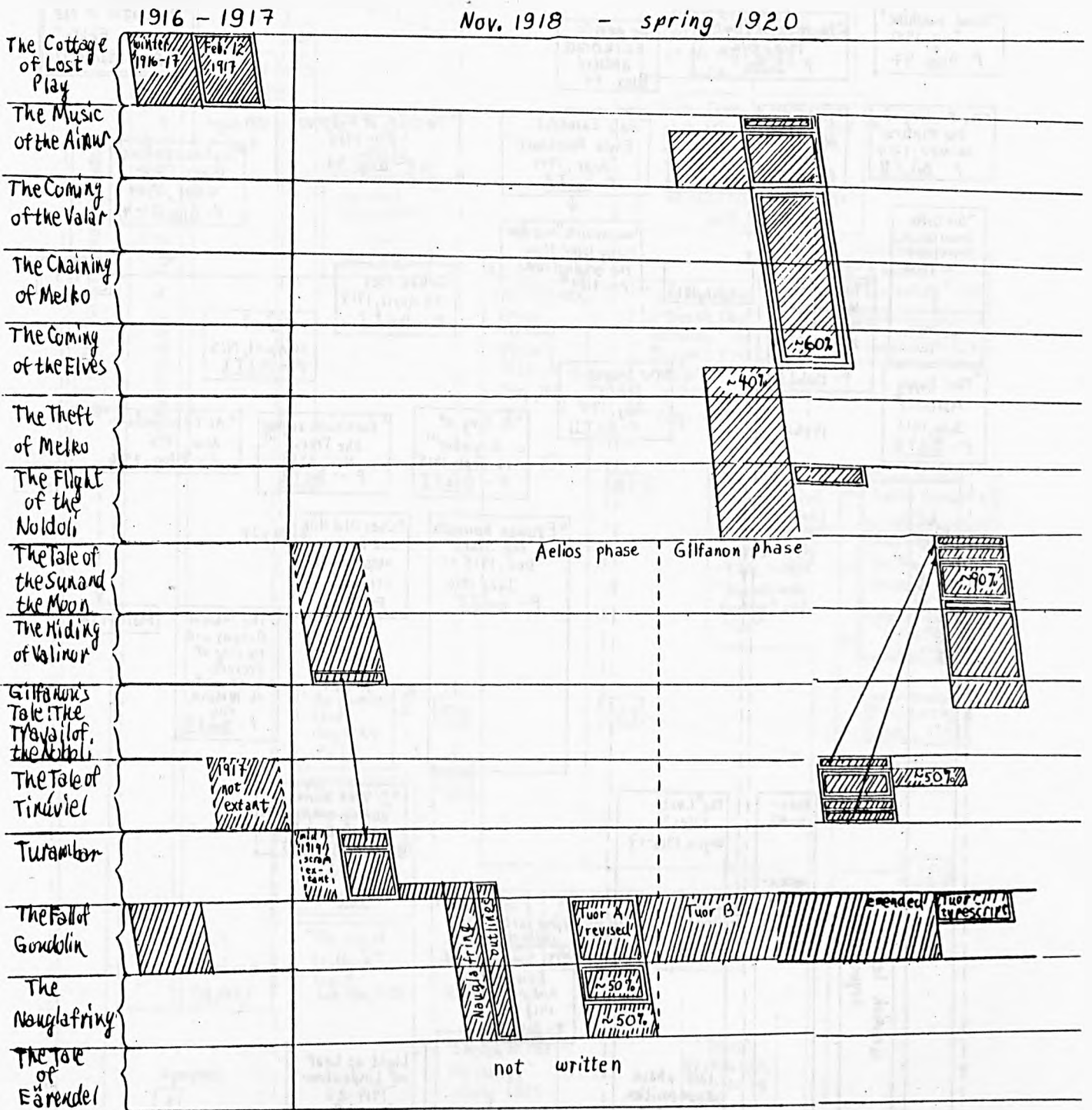
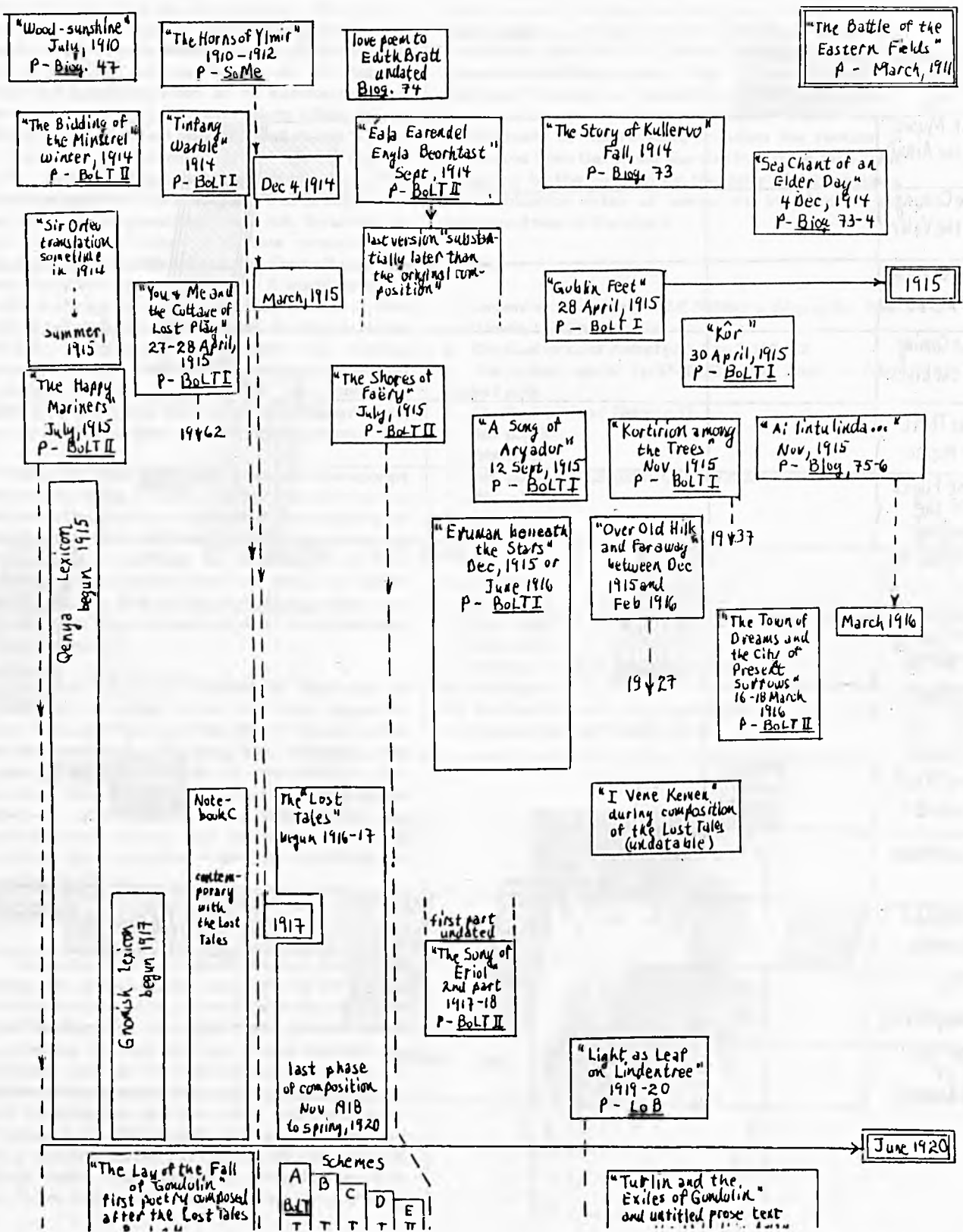
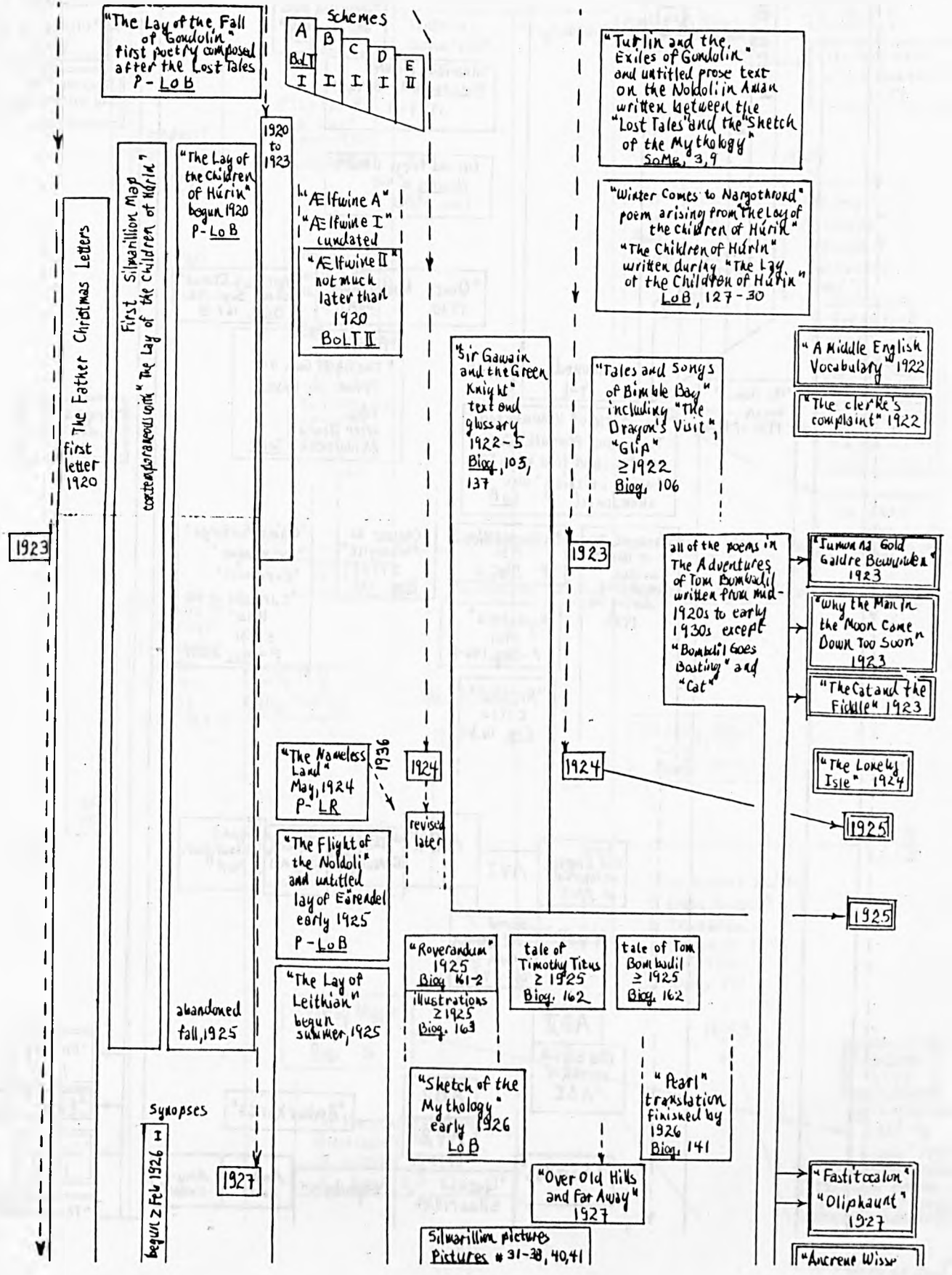


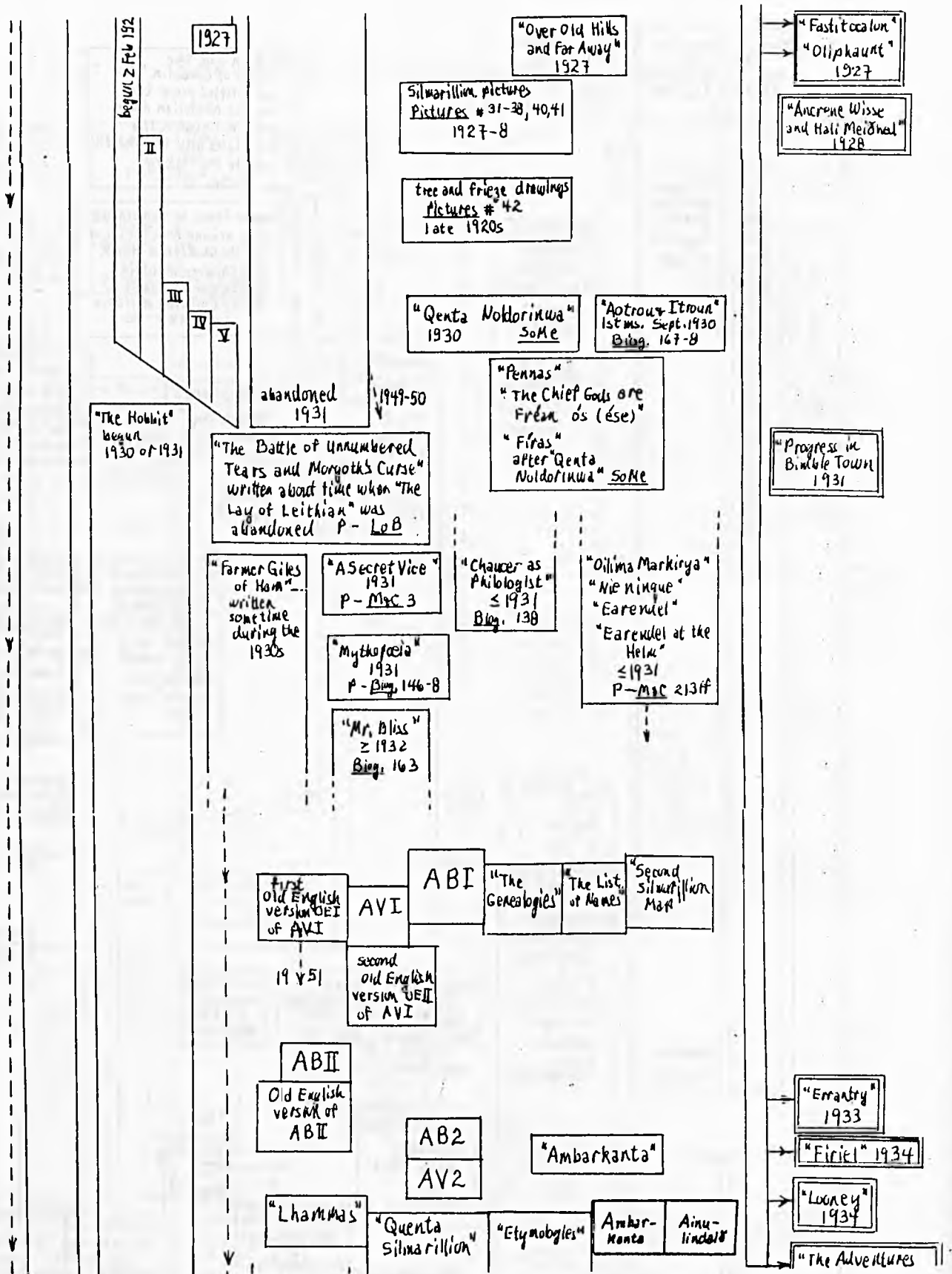
Chart II: The Evolution of the Mythopoeisis of Arda



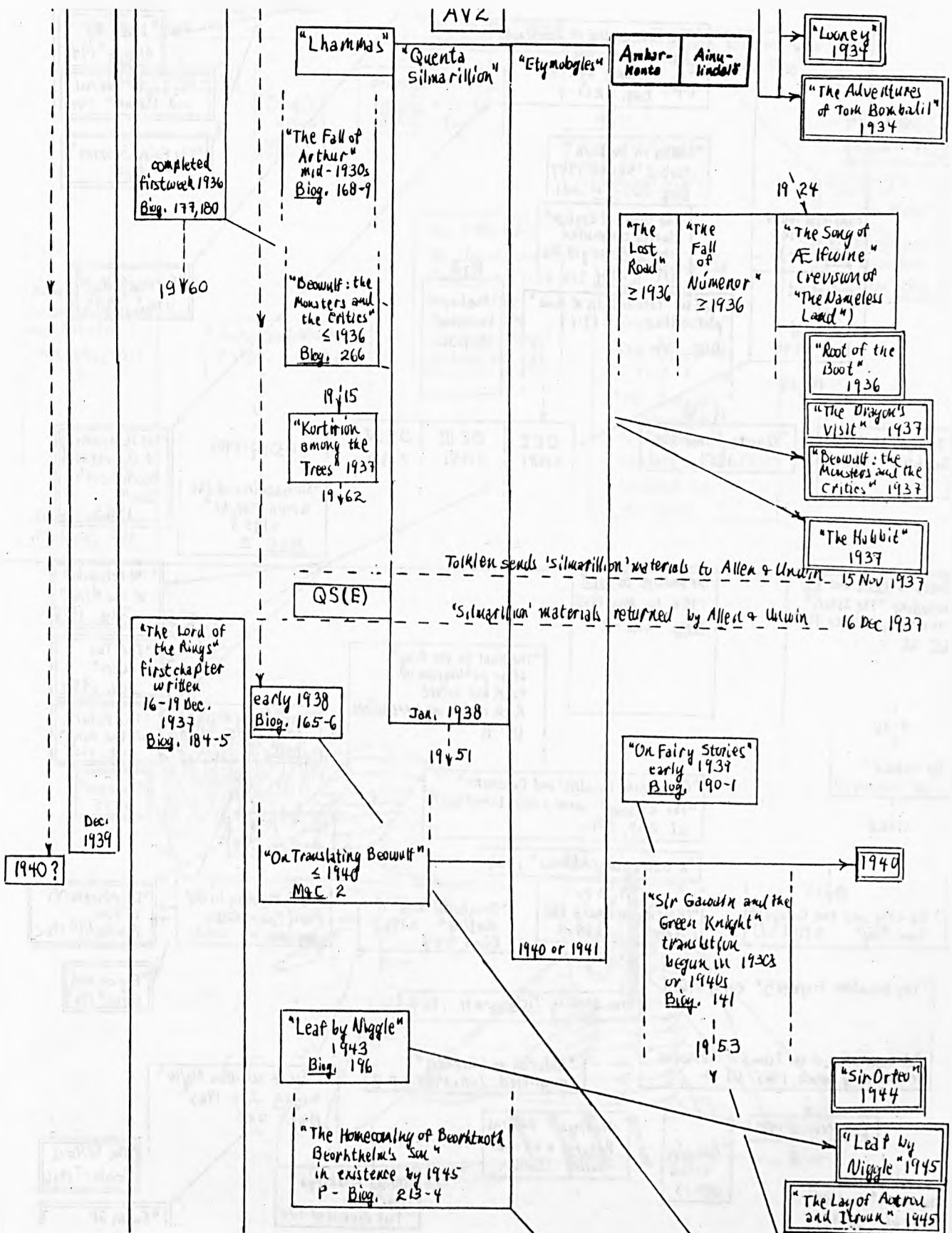
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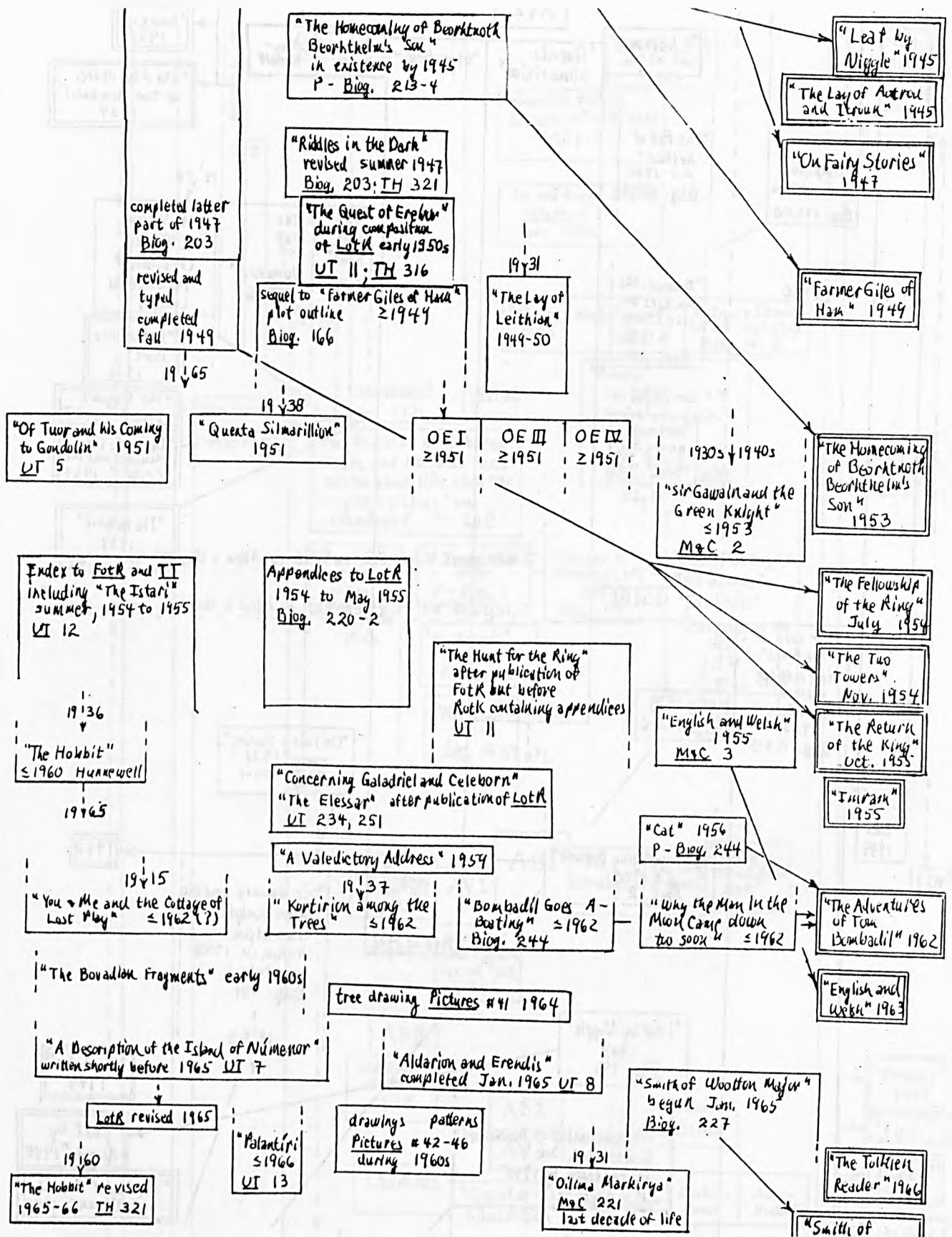
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"A Description of the Island of Númenor"
written shortly before 1965 VI 7

LoTB revised 1965

"Palantíri"
5 1966
VI 13

drawings patterns
Pictures # 42-46
during 1960s

"Aldarion and Erendis"
completed Jan. 1965 VI 8

"Smith of Wootton Major"
began Jan. 1965
Bioy. 227

1973
"Olimo Markirya"
MnC 221
last decade of life

"The Tolkien
Reader" 1966

"Smith of
Wootton Major"
1967

"The Road Goes
Ever On" 1967

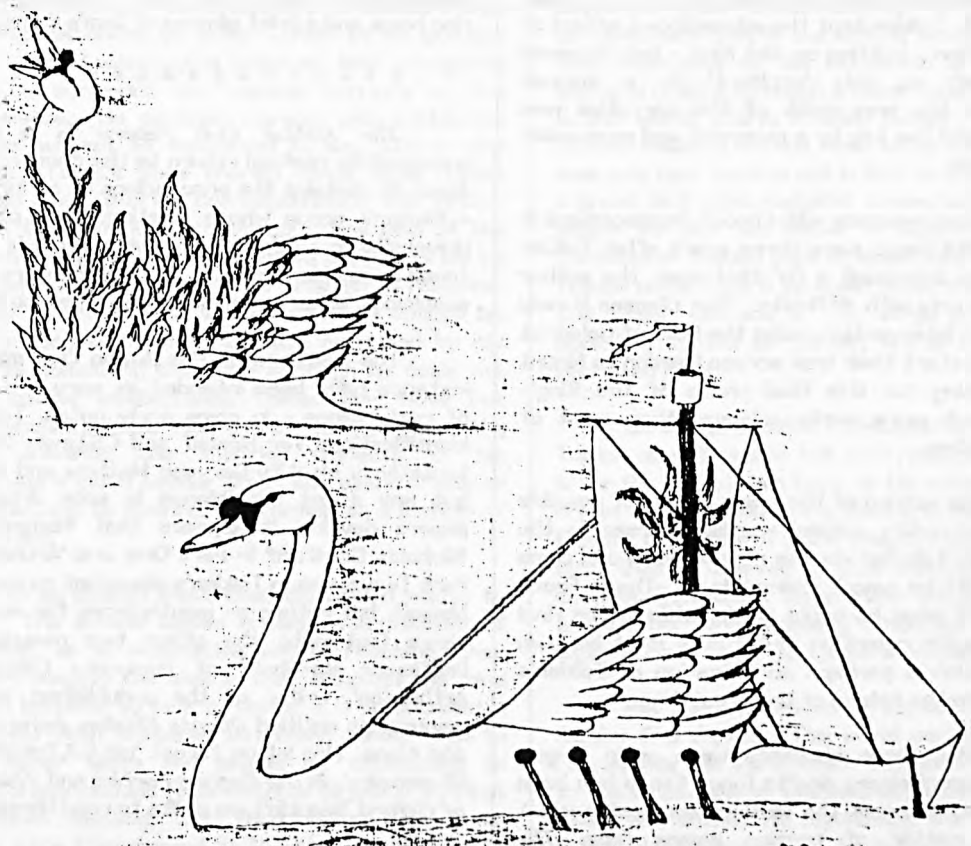
"Narn i Hîn Húrin"
"The Line of Elrus"
Pictures # 47-48
"Guide to the
Names in The
Lord of the Rings"
undated, post LoTB

"The Disaster of the
Golden Fields"
"Cirion and Eorl"
"The Battles of the
Fords of Isen"
"The Druedain"
philological essays
in "The History of
Celebrim and Galadriel"
undated 'late'
narratives

material in "The
History of Celebrim
and Galadriel"
from before 1969
to

"Amroth and Nimrodel"
≥ 1969 VI 240

the last month
of Tolkien's life



Losgar