1976

Footnotes from "The Christian Character of Tolkien's Invented World"

Willis D. Glover

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore

Part of the Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol3/iss3/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.
Footnotes from "The Christian Character of Tolkien's Invented World"
cavalry of Rohan, no longer held in check by Saruman, and aided by the Wild Men of the woods, arrives unexpectedly out of the forest and Sauron's army is flanked and its commander killed (III, p.117). Quickly following upon this action, the army is again flanked from the south by Aragorn, who has deceived the southern alliance; the northmen are caught between the flankers and are cut to pieces, unable to leave the fields of battle in order to aid their king. This battle is lost and all of Sauron's forces are defeated (BK 5, Ch.6). The arrival of the Riders and Aragorn illustrates another vital principle of strategy: the essential nature of the timing of an attack. Sauron's attack was expected, and the commanders of the enemies were ready for it; so there was no surprise involved. The attack of the Rohirrim and then of Aragorn, however, is a complete surprise and helps to distinguish this battle from others. Sauron and the Riders arrived later, after the fall of Minas Tirith, they could have done little against the victorious army of Sauron, but would probably have been annihilated.

Sauron's being caught off balance is a result of another of his failures as a strategist: his lack of any alternative moves to be made in case one of his plans is disrupted. To quote once more from Liddell Hart: "The absence of an alternative is contrary to the very nature of war. It sins against the light which should shine upon all the secret plans of Sauron, the most careful of statesmen. It is his most pronunciating dictum that 'every plan of campaign ought to have several branches and to have been so well thought out that one or the other of the said branches cannot fail of success.' ...A plan, like a tree, must have branches--if it is to bear fruit. A tree without leaves is improbable. (Strategy, pp.345-44.) Sauron, however, had staked everything on the fall of Minas Tirith, and when this proves impossible, he is left again where he started. Also, after this battle the opposing military forces are more equally balanced than before the battle. Sauron himself is no longer the most powerful force in the land, and so he cannot decide that he will not notice the true threat to his power offered by Frodo and Sam. As he says, "We must push Sauron to his last throw. We must call out his hidden strength, so that he shall empty his land. We must march out to meet him at once. We must make ourselves the bait, for he will not lose so much as a hair, if he can help it." (III, p.154). Now the decision rests with Gondor and its allies. Shall they remain on the defensive and wait for another attack, or take the offensive against Mordor? Once again Gandalf shows his ability as a master strategist. Like Napoleon, he realizes that "defensive war does not exclude attacking, just as offensive war does not exclude defending..." (Phillips, p.437). The move which he proposes reveals that he has never found a moment's rest, and it was nothing less than an attack. He had no plan to launch another attack and he has many troops that have not been used (III, p.154). Now the decision rests with Gondor and its allies. Shall they remain on the defensive and wait for another attack, or take the offensive against Mordor? Once again Gandalf shows his ability as a master strategist. Like Napoleon, he realizes that "defensive war does not exclude attacking, just as offensive war does not exclude defending..." (Phillips, p.437). The move which he proposes reveals that he has never found a moment's rest, and it was nothing less than an attack. He had no plan to launch another attack and he has many troops that have not been used (III, p.154). Now the decision rests with Gondor and its allies. Shall they remain on the defensive and wait for another attack, or take the offensive against Mordor?

Aragorn, however, is a complete surprise and helps to disorganize the forces of Sauron. He arrives after the fall of Minas Tirith, and has done little against the victorious army of Sauron, but would probably have been annihilated.

So Sauron's failure to question Pippin through the palantir must be classified as stupidity by anyone's definition. I agree with Auden: "One of Tolkien's most impressive achievements is that he succeeds in making the reader see the mistakes which Sauron makes to his own undoing are the kinds of mistake which Evil, however powerful, cannot help making, just because it is evil." (p.7.)

---

Footnotes


---

Footnotes from The The Role of Warfare and Strategy in The Lord of the Rings

The Role of Warfare and Strategy in The Lord of the Rings: The Role of Warfare and Strategy in The Lord of the Rings

[We apologize for having left these footnotes out of Mythlore 10, where the body of the article appeared on pages 3-8. —GG]


4 The possibilities of parable are always present in a fairy story because of the nature of the Christian doctrine of creation and its relationship to both science and philosophy is Langdon Gilkey, Maker of Heaven and Earth (New York, 1959).


6 Edmund Fuller, "The Lord of the Hobbits," Tolkien and the Critics, p.35.

---

Footnotes from The The Role of Warfare and Strategy in The Lord of the Rings

The Role of Warfare and Strategy in The Lord of the Rings

[Several of the members of the audience thought I had exaggerated in remarking on Sauron's "stupidity" and that actually it had been largely brought about by Frodo's trickery. After thinking over it, I am convinced that although Sauron is intelligent, his intelligence is severely limited by his inability to imagine what others might be like. His "bad luck" is mostly of his own making. Gandalf says of him, "Wise fool. For if he had used all his power and given all his guile to the hunting of the Ring, then indeed hope would have faded: neither Ring nor bearer could long have eluded him" (p.100). Perhaps a definition of "stupidity" given by a former teacher of mine fits Sauron best: "Stupidity is aggressive ignorance." I am certain that Sauron's failure to question Pippin through the palantir must be classified as stupidity by anyone's definition. I agree with Auden: "One of Tolkien's most impressive achievements is that he succeeds in making the reader see the mistakes which Sauron makes to his own undoing are the kinds of mistake which Evil, however powerful, cannot help making, just because it is evil." (p.7.)]