As we draw near mountains: nature and beauty in the hearts of dwarves

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Abstract
When discussing the concept of nature, there is a tendency among scholars, critics, and even Tolkien himself to privilege the Elvish and Hobbitish love of growing things. This essay argues that the Dwarvish connection to mining and stone represents a celebration of the natural world, and an alternative ideal of beauty which privileges practicality along with aesthetics. This examination will be driven by a textual analysis of the Dwarves' relationship with geology in The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings, and The Silmarillion. While Tolkien paints a mostly positive picture of Dwarves throughout his works, there remains a thematic connection between the Dwarvish love of gold, jewels and stone, and the negative traits of materialism and greed; but there is a multi-dimensionality to the natural world and the beauty to be found within it. Like their creator Aulë, the Dwarves see the potential of their natural environment, and interact with it in a uniquely utilitarian but nonetheless beautiful manner.