

GENDER IN “A STONE WOMAN”:  
HOW A.S. BYATT USES SYMBOLISM TO EXPLORE WOMEN’S INNATE  
CONNECTION TO NATURE

by

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## ABSTRACT

This project examines A.S. Byatt's short story, "A Stone Woman," as she portrays the main character's innate connection to nature through a journey from humanity to a life of stone. This intrinsic connection is shown through symbolism and implies that women have a deeper understanding of how nature interacts with itself and its separate parts. The Icelandic folklore referenced in "A Stone Woman" centers around trolls: creatures of stone that embody volcanic and mountainous landscapes. The use of this folklore strategically shows how women, in essence, *are* nature, and therefore facilitates Ines's transition into a more natural state. Her transition of moving to a natural landscape provides a form of elemental homecoming for her. Through this homecoming, women, especially in times of extreme stress and immeasurable loss, can escape trauma by discovering their primal form to find true acceptance and freedom.

This project will examine several themes of "A Stone Woman" to reveal how this narrative addresses the inherent connection between women and nature which facilitates an elemental homecoming. The first of these themes is the physical component of Ines's transformation. Ines undergoes a strenuous physical change as every aspect of her body is affected by her change of state. Each of the changes that she experiences provides her

with a tool to help her discover her new self and her new life. The next theme is the psychological component of Ines's transformation. She experiences many varied emotions throughout her transformation as she begins with a sense of panic and reluctance as she enters this new stage of her life and eventually finds freedom and acceptance at the end of her transformation. The last theme covers the new perspective that Ines acquires throughout her transformation. Ines acquires a new perspective on herself, the creatures she encounters, and the weather's effect on her environment. This is due to the Icelandic background of her guide, Thorsteinn, the transformation altering her current senses, and her newfound acceptance of her sense of self and her body. "A Stone Woman" employs these themes to show how women are innately connected to nature through their understanding of the natural world and their primal origin.

## INTRODUCTION

“A Stone Woman” was written by A.S. Byatt and was first published in *The New Yorker* in 2003 before being published in the *Little Black Book of Stories* in 2005. She produces a new kind of narrative portraying the connection of women to geological forms. In her narrative, she illustrates women’s understanding and connection to nature in terms of a deep geological interwovenness with the physical. Byatt’s short story follows a woman, Ines, as she undergoes a transformation from flesh into stone following the loss of her mother. Because of the extreme loss that Ines experiences, she is met with the shocking and intricate transformation back into her natural state of stone. Throughout this transformation, she develops a better understanding of herself and how she is one with nature as she begins embracing her escape to nature by experiencing genuine freedom and acceptance for her truest self. Byatt explores women’s connection to nature by transforming a woman back into the nature that she emerged from.

Byatt showcases this transformation by describing the the physical aspect of her transformation, which describes the changes to the body as it loses its human connection in exchange for minerals, and the intricate geological aspects of Ines’s transformation illustrating the challenges and discoveries that she finds throughout this journey. Byatt also describes the psychological aspect of Ines’s transformation through her extreme agony and contentment as she struggles with the her loss and her sudden new life. Lastly, Byatt outlines the perspective-changing aspect of Ines’s transformation as she begins to see the world through a new set of eyes, literally and figuratively, and begins appreciating the parts of the world that she had never noticed before. The physical, psychological, and perspective-changing aspects of Ines’s transformation are interconnected and provide her



with the tools needed for thriving in the new life waiting for her at the end of her transformation.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **THE PHYSICAL**

As Ines struggles in making sense of her mother's passing and the loss of her navel, she begins her transformation from flesh to stone. Her transformation serves as a symbol of the cycle from the earth and, eventually, back into the earth. Ines's connection with her natural state starts with her literal transformation into rock and encompasses all aspects of her physical change.

Her physical change into stone is sudden, unexpected, and confusing through each of her revelations. Ines first realizes that her skin is crystallizing during her postoperative bath when "the pumice clinked against her flesh" and later when she is changing her bandages and sees "what seemed like glinting red dust, or ground glass, in the folds of her dressing gown and her discarded underwear" where "she saw . . . a raised shape, like a starfish, like the whirling arms of a nebula" (Byatt). This experience is jarring for Ines as she realizes she is losing her connection to the current civilization she lives in because she can no longer exist and operate normally around people without them noticing that she is different or encountering many obstacles. She also recognizes that her own skin rejects her current life in favor of a new life that is more in tune with nature.

Her skin further displays this rejection of civilized life with the choice of stone on each part of Ines's body. Each rock in Ines's transformation has a specific purpose for her individual growth. The first notable mention of a named stone occurs when Ines

witnesses the transformation of her collarbones into opals in the mirror: “She observed its beginnings in the mirror one morning, while brushing her hair: a necklace of bailed swellings above her collarbones, which broke slowly through the skin like eyes from closed lids, and become opal—fire opal, black opal, geyserite, and hydrophane, full of watery light” (Byatt). People widely use Opal for luck and, as such, is notable for being the first named stone appearing on Ines’s body because of the luck that she will be receiving from it. The next stone that Ines encounters is “jagged flakes of silica and nodes of basalt” (Byatt) under her breasts. The silica that Ines experiences provides purification of her mind, body, and spirit while also clearing her thoughts for an undisturbed understanding of her new life. The basalt that Ines grows provides her with the courage to make progress and strength entering a new life phase. Since these stones are growing under her breasts, they settle near her heart, providing strength and clarity at her core. Each of the stones on Ines’s body further push her into her new life of stone. Not only are the stones physically changing Ines into stone, but also providing her with the mental fortitude and preparation needed for going forward in her transformation.

The preparation that Ines has helps her during a few notable occasions. At one point, she notices that her armpit hair was turning into “greenish-white crystals” that “were attached deep within; she felt their stony roots stirring under the skin surface, pulling at her muscles” (Byatt). This deep connection that the stone forms with her body solidifies the permanence of her transformation that she will soon undergo and “is an imprint of the semiotic and natural energy” (Bear). Especially with the development of her wound, “pushed out ruddy veins into the tired white flesh, threading sponge with crystal . . . . puckered weals where flesh met what appeared to be stone. What *was* stone”

(Byatt), did Ines's body show that this transformation would affect every part of her body's functioning. Ines injuring herself further shows this effect. The cut on her hand became a "black scar, fringed with a rime of new crystals" (Byatt) as her body's new defense mechanism petrifies her wounds. Her dramatic transition to rock in her wound shows how the body focuses its healing efforts on the parts of Ines's body that experience the most trauma through this new crystallizing method that emphasizes the natural rather than the modern ways of medicine which Ines is familiar with. Because her body has this healing drive by the methods it adopts from nature, her body shows Ines that she already has a deep connection to nature regardless of how little that connection was cultivated throughout her lifetime. Simply by being a woman, she fosters this relationship with the natural and utilizes nature's gifts to better herself.

Ines deepens her connection to the gifts of the stones when she encounters labradorite growing "beneath her buttocks" while examining herself in the cheval glass in her mother's bedroom (Byatt). The labradorite provides Ines with enhanced emotional protection during her journey and aids her with a clear direction going forward. Discovering this stone through her mother's possessions in her mother's room is significant because of the loss of her maternal connection. Because Ines's mother is dead, Ines loses her confidant as she goes through this extensive and emotional journey. Discovering this powerful protection stone through the aid of her mother's belongings is very meaningful as it emphasizes the protection that Ines's mother gave her when she was still alive. The meaning that the labradorite has for Ines deepens the connection that she has with the stones on her body. Ines also grows five impactful stones: dolerite, which enhances spirituality; barite, which improves one's ability to take action; fluorspar,

which provides protection and stability in a connection to one's spirit; desert rose, which awakens the subconscious and changes one's feelings; and blue john, which aids in spiritual journeys and enhances a connection to the natural world in her inner arms. These stones provide Ines with the tools that she needs as she enters this transformation, especially since she begins accepting and appreciating herself.

One of the last meaningful stone-identifying moments for Ines is in a park during a rainstorm when the intense need to be outside in the elements overcomes her. She stands in the rain and it washes away her past traumatic experiences and cleanses her before entering the new chapter of her life. She then notices that her cheeks were growing silica and dendrite, which provides her with mindful purification and inner-stability. Her hair was growing alabaster and peridot, which both aid in the healing and neutralization of negative emotions and emotional pain. The combination of the rain and the stones cleanse Ines of the mechanical man-made world before she enters the world of the natural. Each stone that Ines gains throughout this part of her transformation provides her with a deeper connection, a better understanding, and mental aid which she brings with her as she continues experiencing her physical change.

In addition to Ines's body, her senses change with her transition into stone: "She noticed that her sense of smell had grown sharper. She could smell the rain in the thick cloud blanket. She could smell the sulfur dioxide in the car exhausts and the rainbow-colored minerals in puddles of petrol" (Byatt). Much like many animals, she can now better assess and understand her surroundings through her sense of smell: a helpful quality as she enters this new stage of her life. Ines is transforming her human senses to "include the mineralogical one" (Ivanchikova). Although she gains helpful qualities, she

also gains new reading difficulties because “her new eyes could not bring the dancing black letters to have any more meaning than the spiders and ants that scurried around her feet or mounted her stolid ankles” (Byatt). Ines’s newfound difficulty shows how her senses are switching from that of human to that of stone. Her brain can no longer decode the man-made language that she has known her whole life. Furthermore, her general eyesight is also becoming limited. She notices that Thorsteinn, her guide, looks “blurred and out of focus” and that his “very solid body looked as though it were simply a form of water vapor” (Byatt). As Ines’s senses shift to stone, deciphering the soft shapes of much of the tangible world in contradiction to stone’s solidity is more difficult for her. Her new stony senses provide her with new senses for experiencing the world that she could not have as a being of flesh.

Thorsteinn guides Ines to Iceland where she better understands herself and the reason for her transformation—becoming a part of nature. Although she does not know at the time, her body has been telling her that Iceland is her final destination. Near the beginning of her transformation, Ines notices that her body was forming “ultramafic black rocks and ghostly Iceland spar . . . in succession” (Byatt) as well as her blood becoming molten lava. The parallel of the volcanic stone and the Icelandic clear calcite with Iceland’s actual land illustrates how Ines’s body points her in the desired direction. Additionally, the calcite growing on Ines is *from* Iceland. Once she arrives in Iceland, she first sees “the jagged peaks and easter fjords” (Byatt) before encountering the volcano of Katla and, lastly, the forest of Thórsörk. These geographic landscapes are fascinating to Ines as she has never before encountered a landscape like Iceland during her time in the city. The most striking to her, though, is how “geologically young” (Byatt) the landscape

is. She learns that the coast is ever-changing due to “volcanic eruptions that pour red-hot magma from mountain ridges, or spout up, boiling from under the thick-ribbed ice” (Byatt). The changing landscape of Iceland is much like the changing geography of Ines’s own skin, as it underwent so many metamorphoses since her surgery that she changed more times than she could know. Witnessing the simultaneously ancient and new land of Iceland and knowing that this will soon be her new home is healing for Ines because she is finally finding a place that truly understands her and provides her with an accepting environment where she can thrive and enjoy her newfound freedom. Without undergoing the physical aspect of her transformation, Ines never would have gained the psychological and perspective changes surrounding herself and her environment. Physically changing forms provides Ines with the base to begin shifting her emotions and her world view to align with stone.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL**

During Ines’s transformation, she experiences many different emotions over her physical transformation and psychological journey. Ines’s psychological journey begins with her mother’s death. Her death causes a sudden loss of her connection to the one person who deeply understood her. Ines explains how she found her mother dead with a book in her hand in the morning and describes how her mother’s “eyes had faded from cornflower to forget-me-not,” and her “mother’s hair had shone silver and ivory” and, once dead, “quickly lost this lifelikeness” (Byatt). Seeing her once strong mother in such a compromising and frail state causes undue stress on Ines until she acquires a twisted gut

and rushes to the hospital. Ines's loses her navel when repairing her twisted gut which severs her maternal connection. This physical loss sends Ines spiraling into a period of aimlessness. When Ines loses her maternal connection, seemingly her only powerful connection, her body begins returning to nature and the elements. This defense mechanism that the body triggers is the last effort protecting Ines and giving Ines a better life. The reversion to a more natural state that Ines experiences when she loses the last meaningful part of her life provides her with a new meaning for her life. Her love for her mother becomes evident in the difference between how she well cared for herself when her mother was alive in comparison to how poorly she cares for herself now. This disregard for her well-being illustrates precisely how lost and "grief-stricken" (Abell) Ines has become before her transformation and "petrification" (Abell). Her behavior explains how drastic her situation becomes before her body takes extreme measures and how profound Ines's depression and "loneliness" (Abell) becomes before her form of nature takes root and emerges through her physical change.

When she first began changing, she was very anxious about everything that was happening to her. The thought that this stony transformation will kill her concerns her. She worries that her "plump fresh heart" will stop pumping "blue blood along the veins of her shifting shape," that the "gray and clammy matter of her brain" will become "limestone or graphite," and that her brain stem will become "a column of rutilated quartz" (Byatt). She has not displaced her anxiety because this process is very new to her, and she does not know that this transformation will not kill her but rather help her. This assumption that her transformation will kill her comes "from the perspective of symbolic language and society, which can interpret her movement back to the semiotic and the

natural world only as death” (Bear 75) without consideration of the good that could come from it. The anxiety that Ines experiences shifts as she interacts with the world around her.

Ines displaces her nervousness onto the stone figures around her. When she finds herself in a graveyard, the disfigured stone people “made Ines feel queasy, for they were inert and weighed down; they were pulled toward the earth and what was under it” (Byatt). She sees herself in these figures and is terrified that she might meet the same fate. After she leaves the scene of the disfigured stone people of the graveyard, she has another moment of panic over her transformation when she cuts her hand and reveals that her blood is now molten lava. Ines now has this concern over her death because she, “a furnace,” “may erupt” (Byatt) after she passes and may be uncontrollable. This fear leads her back to the graveyard, where she meets Thorsteinn and shows him “her grotesque transformation” (Byatt). She cries “pearly drops on her ruddy hematite cheeks” (Byatt) as she shows herself to him. Thorsteinn challenges her view of herself as a “monster” and instead says that she is “beautiful” and remarks that she is “grown. Not crafted” (Byatt). This shift in thought over herself begins her journey to accept herself and what she will become. The nervousness that she feels shows her thoughts as they relate to her upbringing and the social expectations that she has as a human; her acceptance shows her shift into a more natural way of living where she can become one with the elements.

Throughout this narrative, there are many references to women and their strength, which further shifts her thoughts. Ines has a firsthand experience of a woman’s life since she has been living the experience her whole life. She witnesses the strength of her mother as she raised her and witnesses her own strength as she continues living after her



mother's passing. She also experiences her own body's strength and perseverance as it fights for her after Ines's surgery through the transformation to stone. She first notices many women in the graveyard in the form of stone "lady angels" (Byatt). These angels portray the strength that women possess. The other figures in the graveyard are disfigured and dilapidated while the angels are still intact and protective. These angels are also foreshadowing the stone women and living stones that she experiences when she goes to Iceland which are also incredibly powerful. When she meets Thorsteinn in this graveyard, she looks to him for guidance: "You said that the stones in your country were alive. I thought you might understand what has happened to me. I do not need a monument. I have grown into one." (Byatt). Ines realizes how her body is powerful like the angels and realizes that she is not a "monster" and is instead a "monument" (Byatt). This exchange sparks the beginning of her geographic journey to the natural land of Iceland as well as her personal journey as she begins to better understand and accept the transformation that she is undergoing.

Ines, realizing that her body is transforming beneficially to help her, begins accepting these new changes, and becomes more fascinated with how her body is adapting to her new life. On one of these occasions, when "one of the blue veins on her inner thigh erupted into a line of rubious spinels," Ines did not immediately form a negative association with her transformation and instead "thought of jewels before she thought of pustules" (Byatt). Her change of mindset shows how her mind has switched from horror to curiosity as she begins accepting her transformation and appreciates the intricacies of her reversal back into nature: "No, what was happening was, it appeared, a unique transformation" (Byatt). Her newfound appreciation for her stony appearance she

describes as “beautiful” (Byatt) is further felt by Ines as she begins preferring her stony aspects more than her human aspects in some places. When her joints change from bone to stone, she can feel “delicious smoothness” from the “polished stone” that replaces her ball and socket joints of her pelvis, hips, knees, elbows, and shoulders (Byatt). She was not aware of how her bones had deteriorated over time from use and could only now, with the change into stone, realize how much she had accommodated and restricted herself with her original body. Through this realization, Ines better understands how her body is better as stone. She achieves the most freedom possible with her body in its stone state and achieves the deepest connection to nature possible through this transformation. Ines realizes that the most healing would occur for her if she accepts her changes as they come.

Ines acceptance starts when she realizes that the world of minerals provides “reciprocities, both physical and figurative” (Byatt) and realizes that her original thoughts of her transformation as “profoundly unnatural” and “a move from a world of warm change and decay to a world of cold permanence”(Byatt) are not true. She begins finding parts of her body appealing, such as “the parts of her body that were now volcanic glasses, not bony chalk: chabazite, from the Greek for hailstone; obsidian, which, like analcime and garney, has the perfect icositetrahedron shape” (Byatt) and her mind starts creating connections between the living world and the world of stone through the “radical decolonization” of “linguistic colonization” through the removal “of the sticky sheathing of organic metaphors that have invaded the geologic” (Ivanchikova). She realizes that she would be “returning to it [the earth] in a form quite different from her mother’s fiery ash”

(Byatt) and realizes that she is content with these differences. Ines's acceptance is opposite to her original nervousness since she begins appreciating herself and her change.

One of the most telling experiences for Ines is when she cuts her hand on a knife while cutting a loaf of bread. When she cuts herself, her blood comes out as a "thick liquid" which "[ran] down the back of her hand, onto the bread, onto the table." Ines realizes that "her veins were full of molten lava" (Byatt). Her blood burns through her apartment after cutting her finger which shows a rejection of civilization. Her blood burns through that which is man-made as a way of returning to nature without the constraints that have been put in place for her.. Her blood is escaping the man-made world as a metaphor for Ines's need to escape the same. The civilization that she currently lives in is suffocating and does not uncover her true self and finds the freedom and acceptance that she desperately needs and deserves. When Ines witnesses this injury turn into lava, she is overcome with panic and anxiety, but later she releases the mental block that she has formed and finds a way to ease her anxiety and seek acceptance for her new self. Her shift in thought is apparent as she continues through her transformation, especially during her travels.

When Ines is on the boat to Iceland, "she opened her tent of garments to the driving wind and wet" (Byatt) so that she can fully experience the elements around her through "mineral liberation" (Ivanchikova). Once in Thórsmörk, Ines plants "small gardens in the crevices of her body, trailing grasses, liverworts" and allows creatures to run over her such as "a stone-colored butterfly, indistinguishable from her speckled breast, foraging ants, a millipede" as well as "fine red worms . . . which burrowed unhindered" (Byatt) and even walks through nature to find more creatures and offer them

refuge on her body. This new addition to her body of these animals shows how accepting Ines is of her new self and how she now sees the beauty in her body just as Thorsteinn has always seen. While with Thorsteinn in Iceland, she expresses to him how, although she has accepted herself, she is worried that the figures that she saw dancing, that she knew that she would be meeting soon, would not accept her as one of them. Later, though, during a heavy storm, she can fully see the dancers and knows that it is now time for her to join the others in the mountains:

The woman in his stone garden took a breath—he saw her quiver—and essayed a few awkward dance steps, a sweep of an arm, of both arms. He heard her laughter in the wind. She jiggled a little, as though gathering momentum, and then began a dancing run into the blizzard. He heard a stone voice, shouting and singing, “*Trunt, trunt, og tröllin í fjöllum.*”

(Byatt)

By joining the others in the mountains, Ines can finally find her true freedom and acceptance among her own people and become one with nature as she, herself, has fully integrated with her natural roots.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PERSPECTIVE

As Ines experiences her transformation, she begins to see the world differently as her perspective skews into a more primal and naturalized one. Ines even sees the “midday sky” as “thick and gray as *granite*” (Byatt: emphasis mine). Due to her transformation, she applies her view of rock from herself into the world. The application of her idea of

granite into the sky demonstrates how her mind shifts from identification of colors into a comparison to rock. She shows that she no longer fully identifies with the human label as she wants to run towards the chaotic nature rather than hide from it: “The odd flash of lightning made human stomachs queasy, Ines was overcome with a need to be out in the weather” (Byatt).

Further, not only does Ines want to be out in the weather, she *needs* to be in it. Although Ines recognizes that she is becoming a part of nature and an average person’s expectations no longer apply to her, she still operates in a way that the average person considers normal to not attract attention. Ines “puts on wide trousers and a tunic, and over them a shapeless hooded raincoat” as well as puts “her knobby feet into fur boots, and her clay-pale hands, with their veins of azurmalachite, into sheepskin mittens, and set off down the stairs into the street” (Byatt). She shows how she is still subjected to and acts in a way that does not counter the status quo. These actions are a direct contradiction to what Ines’s body tries accomplishing. Her body craves the elements and tries to become one with nature. While Ines experiences this need for the natural elements, she finds herself in a graveyard where she further stone-ifies the world around her. In the gravestones, she sees a “flat stony city” made up of “house after house under humped ripples of earth, marked by flat stones, standing stones, canted stones, fallen stones, soot-stained, dropping-stained, scum-stained, crumbled, carved, repeating, repeating” (Byatt). Ines does not notice the grass growing around the gravestones or the animals in the trees; she purely focuses on the objects in her perception that are the most relatable to herself: stones. This graveyard is very important in Ines’s transformation as she meets the one

person who can and wants to guide her and help her see how beautiful and unique she is: Thorsteinn Hallmundursson.

Thorsteinn Hallmundursson is the first person that genuinely sees and admires Ines for her transformation. Thorsteinn provides Ines with a completely opposite outlook on her new appearance due to his Icelandic background. He sees her transformation as beautiful and even refers to it as a “metamorphosis.” He applies this same thought process to much of the nature that surrounds him: In the city, he tells Ines that he does not like to clean away the moss covering the tombstones because of the beauty that he sees in the moss. He goes so far as to tell Ines that “he would show her mosses and lichens she could never have dreamed of” when he brings her to Iceland (Byatt). Hearing a perspective of nature and herself that is so different from the perspective that she currently has helps Ines to better understand herself and what her body is enduring by facilitating her physical change.

Thorsteinn is from Iceland and, therefore, provides Ines with a much different perspective than that which she has developed from her years living in the city. Thorsteinn helps Ines by personifying nature as she starts becoming one with nature. He helps her to better understand the world and the way that everything is interconnected. Thorsteinn notes that “we live like lichens clinging to standing stones and rolling stones and heaving stones and rattling stones and flying stones” (Byatt). This statement references the stone women and his amazement that he has the opportunity to actually meet one in person. Since Thorsteinn grew up with the stories of the stone women in Iceland, he can better understand how remarkable Ines’s transformation is and how interconnected life is to nature. Especially the connection that she, as a woman, has to

nature as she becomes part of the folklore. She spends more time with Thorsteinn, and they “constructed a friendship” where she shares her body with him for him to study and begins appreciating the inner-workings of her body, even going so far as to label labradorite and fantomkvarts as “the two [stones] she loved most” on her body (Byatt). Ines even allows Thorsteinn to chip and polish her body in order to “bring out the lights and the angles” which leads her to “trust him completely” (Byatt). The relationship that the two of them foster illustrates the change that Ines goes through, starting as someone who was hiding away in her apartment, afraid to show her face, and changing into someone who seeks out a companion who appreciates who she is and helps her to appreciate herself.

While Thorsteinn guides Ines to Iceland, she notices the sky in a new and different way. She notices that the sky over the Pacific Ocean constantly changes in colors, “opal and gunmetal, grass green and crimson, mussel blue and velvet black,” throughout the night as the sky is “scattered with wild starshine” (Byatt). This focus on nature and recognition of the world’s ever-changing nature around her provides her with a change as she moves from the city to Thórsörk, Iceland. When she reaches Thorsteinn’s home in Thórsörk, she notices the “grassy space in front of the house” and the sheer amount of stones in the yard, including “boulders and a half-formed stone circle” (Byatt). Ines notices that Thorsteinn had been carving all of these stones to create figures of stone women adorned with jewels and pins. Seeing these carvings gives Ines insight into why he is fascinated with her and provides background into his life and an understanding of her transformation.

As a result of her new perspectives, Ines has a crucial revelation during her stay in Iceland. This revelation occurs when Ines truly starts internalizing the profound changes to her senses because of the rock replacing her body. Her eyes begin completely meshing with the life of a stone woman: “And at the same time she was seeing, or almost seeing, things that seemed to crowd and gesture just beyond the range of her vision” (Byatt). This is the switch that her brain and body go through as they become one with the stone woman identity; she begins seeing through the stone woman dimension. This switch is illustrated by the differences in her observations on the boat versus when she is in Iceland. On the boat to Iceland, “she had seen momentary sea creatures” such as dolphins, whales, and fulmars (Byatt), which shows her past grasp on her humanity. However, Ines begins sensing that which humans cannot: “Now she sensed earth bubbles and earth monsters shrugging themselves into shape in the air and in the falling fosses. Fleet herds of light-footed creatures flowed around the house with the wind” (Byatt). This shift from human to nonhuman senses tells Ines that her final shift to fully stone is imminent.

These senses couple with Ines’s lack of hearing as she must “cup her basalt palm around her ear in order to hear his [Thorsteinn’s] great voice, which sounded to her like the whispering of grasshoppers” (Byatt). She is slowly losing her human senses for the replacement of the senses of stone women. She now fully personifies stones since she is becoming one, specifically that the “stones she stared at, as Thorsteinn worked, began to dimple and shift, like disguised moorbirds, speckled and splotched, on nests of disguised eggs, speckled and splotched, in a wilderness of stones, speckled and splotched” (Byatt). Ines’s new senses emphasize her innate connection to nature because she can now



understand the deeper complexities surrounding the natural world. One of these natural complexities is time; Ines begins to experience her “biological time” (Byatt, et al) differently than she used to. She now sees “lichens . . . grow at visible speeds and form rings and coils, with triangular heads like adders” (Byatt), in real-time when she would have never noticed any growth from before due to “the slow pace of biological time” (Byatt, et al). Time is very different as “the vastness of geological time as opposed to human time” (Rayo) provides Ines with an outlook that helps her better understand the world around her. This new sense of time is so foreign to Ines that she can only truly “comprehend it as a metaphor” (Gould) because this time shift “impacts on people at the level of experience” (Irvine). The new senses Ines gains reveal how simple her natural perception of the world was before experiencing her new way of life. Since her journey into the life of stone, she has encountered many experiences and gained many new qualities that allow her to flourish and free herself from the constraints of who she was before.

During her journey to Iceland, she refers to Lot’s wife from the Bible who turned into a pillar of salt when looking back in yearning at her past life that she was leaving behind. Ines refuses to become a pillar stating that “She was no pillar. She was heaving and restless like the sea,” (Byatt) showing just how strong her resolve is to find her true freedom and self-acceptance in this new life of hers among the mountains in Iceland among nature, where she is supposed to be. Ines is exposed to more folklore of strong women in Iceland when she learns of Katla, who is the troll-woman of the volcano of the same name. This troll-woman, Katla, has a kettle of gold and tricks all who come to find it with false visions of the slaughtering of their livestock and their homesteads burning

(Byatt). Katla wields power that she has as a woman as well as being the embodiment of the volcano. This power Katla possesses gives Ines an insight into her own power as a woman. Ines can understand nature on an unprecedented level due to the folkloric lineage that she has to these powerful women. Once Ines makes her way to Thórsmörk, she also notices “dancers” (Byatt) spread all over the mountains. She notices that these dancers are not only living among the land but are interacting with the mountain range, which is also alive:

Clearest of all—almost visible—were the huge dancers, forms that humped themselves out of earth and boulders, stamped and hurtled, beckoned with strong arms and snapping fingers. After long looking, she seemed also to see that these things were walking and running, like parasites on the back of some moving beast so huge that the mountain range was only a wrinkle in its vasty hide, as it stirred in its slumber or shook itself slightly as it woke. (Byatt)

Although she does not know it yet, these are the stone women that she will join later in her journey. Since her vision is now moving away from that of human and moving toward that of stone, she now sees the beings resembling her living among the mountain range in Iceland. Noticing and studying the dancers throughout Iceland, Ines learns that she will experience a sense of belonging and acceptance from this new community in Iceland in a way that she never had living in the city. After this experience and spending much time in Iceland living among nature, she realizes that *she* is a stone woman who should live among the mountain ranges. This is the final stage of her transformation “which culminates in the fusion of her stony body with mountains

shrouded in legend” (Rallo). She tells Thorsteinn, “I think now that Iceland is where I should go, to find somewhere to . . . stand, or stay.” (Byatt). This statement to Thorsteinn illustrates the inner-acceptance and inner-peace that Ines finally finds in her new life and understands that this is her true home.

## CONCLUSION

Ines’s journey through this transformation provides insight into the innate connection that women have to nature. Ines’s connection to nature is realized through her outer and inner transformation into stone which allows her to accept her physical change and begin to appreciate herself. Her self-acceptance and appreciation is coupled with her newfound perspective on the world around her. Ines is aided by powerful images of women, Thorsteinn’s culture and perspective, and her discovery of Iceland, where her true home is. Ines’s physical, psychological, and perspective transformations are inter-related to her dynamic change to experience a sense of acceptance and freedom in Iceland as she leaves to join the other stone women of the mountain ranges.

Byatt wrote a narrative that challenges the ideas surrounding women’s role in society. This different perspective allows for a discussion to be had about women’s nature and the power that they possess. “A Stone Woman” is a short story that encourages a conversation to be had over the role of society, culture, and oneself in the path to self-discovery.

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