

**SHE**  
**WHO**  
**LIES**  
**ABOVE**

**BEATRIZ HAUSNER**

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**Book\*hug Press**

For my father, Joseph Hausner, in memoriam.

*And the too much of my speaking:  
heaped up round the little  
crystal dressed in the style of your silence.*  
—Paul Celan

# PREFACE

**H**ERE IS HYPATIA'S heart. I found it in the long refectory building on Rue des Ursulines at Trois-Rivières. A city not unlike Alexandria, on the shores of flowing waters the colour of sand and summer. Hypatia, she of Synesius, student, lover, and master of the voice of the one who lasts. Hypatia, trained to persist unflinchingly on top, hovering while observing and also underneath, often suppliant while partaking thoughts, receiving pleasure, enduring pain, becoming transformed in the manner of the daughters of Isis and gathering the parts of the world destroyed by those who came before her, only to be broken again by those who will come after. Hypatia exists outside of time's delight and time's suffering, the two knotting themselves in her sex ascending to her womb to be gestated according to schedules made, unmade, and made again by the hands of The Invisible One, who ordered that she be found at this New Alexandria of the mind.

These fragments I present here with and in my own words, in order that their mystery be examined by women and men finally become classifiers, making functional their taxonomies in ways that please and disgust, at once and constantly: The Work is made and unmade and made again by the hands of The Terrible-Worker-Within, who ordered that Hypatia be found by me, and I be found by Hypatia.

Bettina Ungaro

## AUGUST MISTRESS

**Synesius:**

*August mistress, Hypatia, called also She-Who-Lies-Above, divine creature, and whatsoever else is honoured in thought or word or deed.*

**Hypatia:**

*I welcome your words. So much is contained in these disordered fragments, dear friend, even if they seem obscured at first. I am your devotee, much missed friend, slave to myself in your utterances as the sheets of light flood the room and replicate your luminosity: You lord over me. Come and visit. I have determined to count the days without you, while I wait. May it be that you arrive full-bodied, your extremities and the other parts that constitute your person, in full attendance.*

*Synesius belongs to Hypatia. Hypatia belongs to Synesius. Their roles curve, reverse, then straighten. Student is teacher, teacher is friend, and friend is lover. Synesius, master of the voice of the one who lasts.* This thought came to me while walking along the verdant paths of the Centre Hospitalier Sainte-Anne in Paris several years ago. I went there, guided by a friend who insisted I visit the institution's art gallery.

What struck me, quite apart from the extraordinary art held within the old curved walls of the small exhibition place, was the fact that the streets of that large complex were mostly named after writers, artists, and musicians that I am fond of: Paul Verlaine is the main avenue; the psychiatric emergency ward sits between Charles Baudelaire Park and André Breton Square; there are Robert Schumann, Camille Claudel, and Henri Michaux streets, and more. I explored the complex as thoroughly as I could, walked up and down the geographic markers of that contained city, where my hero Antonin Artaud was first interned.

While having coffee at the cafeteria with residents and staff, a thought occurred to me: *Could the contained neighbourhoods that defined Hypatia's Alexandria resemble the little city inhabited by those whose minds I so admired, and where I found myself at that precise moment?* Being inside those spaces so charged with disturbance and depth shook me, serving as the release I needed to begin collating my translations of Hypatia's texts to Synesius's letters to her.

## BEGINS THE CORRESPONDENCE

**Synesius:**

*This letter I dictate for you from the bed of my illness: teacher, mother, sister, daughter, and, before all else, benefactress, the bestower of blessings all.*

**Hypatia:**

*You are kind to be writing me in the circumstance. I venture to say that the fevers are your deceit. Mine too. I recall our embrace long ago when last you were in Alexandria. You would speak about your pursuit of the placement of the stars in the dark night, by way of attesting to your method and the manner of your careful measuring of your affection. What I have experienced since is and has been a strange distention of time.*



Hypatia makes herself. She is her own creation, irreversibly moulding her person into the object we project onto our own constructions, much like images projected on a screen, that shift, dislodge, then disappear from our collective consciousness.

This all began in Virginia Tentindo's studio in Paris's Montmartre neighbourhood, where I had gone at her invitation. I didn't know at first that her marvellous workspace was the Bateau-Lavoir, so coined by Max Jacob, who often went there to visit his artist friends, including Pablo Picasso. It was inside that space, surrounded by Virginia's astonishing sculptures, that Hypatia appeared to me fully formed and true. Clay, bronze, and gold defined her body and her spirit, and gave me her voice:

### **Everyday Goddesses**

I appear. My forms begin to take shape in  
your hands, Virginia, as you give form to

the cat goddess who sits in wait of the rituals  
inside my sex. Bastet lives within me, with

and without her antecedents, her hair not golden  
but mottled in ways different from this daughter

of Re, Sun-god fierce, who frightens the non-  
adherents. I say, approach the woman beneath

these polished surfaces, beauty in clay  
skins of polished bronze, gold, even.

Carving deep at first, Virginia labours until  
the screams of my muds fill the air.

“Go on cleaving my forms,” I say. “In  
your hands I come alive with my nostalgias.”

\* \* \*

Bastet I become, yes, Bastet and her rabbit,  
begetter of the woman in the cat’s paw. *Natura*

*non facit saltus*, softly. Someone is pleasuring  
the opening of my sex. It gives onto a temple

where the goddess lives and is delicate.  
In your hands, Virginia, I am born of earth

and of fire. After the mold is cast and before  
the metal hardens, the molten black substance

turns red to white. Only then will the secrets  
of the Rue de Ravignan be revealed:

With you, through your hands, Virginia,  
we are shaped into goddesses of transfiguration.

\* \* \*

I ask: Who is Wenet? Once the swallower of myriads,  
she persists, ingesting herself furled inside a circle

turning solid the substances that were once unfixed.  
Virginia conjures the creature of clay made of

wet mud in the watery abyss of Nun at the primordial  
mound where the gods are newly born. I go on

renewing myself as The Goddess Wenet leads  
journeys to the Otherworld. She cannot perish.

\* \* \*

Becoming one with my articulations split at waist  
by a hinge, my legs turn me backwards-walking

while I am forward-sitting, the better  
to become goddess of transmutation.