

“Fast Speaking Woman” is indebted to Maria Sabina, the Mazatec Indian shamaness in Mexico, guiding persons in magic mushroom ceremony & is a reworking & coincidence of the same for all wandering spirits. Reading aloud as intended I can be more playful improvising new words & sound thus expanding the territory I’m in. The piece began as a travel meditation during a trip to South America, continued back in NYC, then later in India. It kept growing. Sabina died in the mid-1980s.

*Fast Speaking Woman*

## FAST SPEAKING WOMAN

“I is another”

—Rimbaud

because I don’t have spit  
because I don’t have rubbish  
because I don’t have dust  
because I don’t have that which is in air  
because I am air  
let me try you with my magic power:

- I’m a shouting woman
- I’m a speech woman
- I’m an atmosphere woman
- I’m an airtight woman
- I’m a flesh woman
- I’m a flexible woman
- I’m a high-heeled woman
- I’m a high-style woman
- I’m an automobile woman
- I’m a mobile woman
- I’m an elastic woman
- I’m a necklace woman
- I’m a silk-scarf woman
- I’m a know-nothing woman
- I’m a know-it-all woman
- I’m a day woman
- I’m a doll woman

I'm a sun woman  
I'm a late-afternoon woman  
I'm a clock woman  
I'm a wind woman  
I'm a white woman  
I'M A SILVER-LIGHT WOMAN  
I'M AN AMBER-LIGHT WOMAN  
I'M AN EMERALD-LIGHT WOMAN  
I'm an abalone woman  
I'm the abandoned woman  
I'm the woman abashed, the gibberish woman  
the aborigine woman, the woman absconding  
the Nubian Woman  
the antediluvian woman  
the absent woman  
the transparent woman  
the absinth woman  
the woman absorbed, the woman under tyranny  
the contemporary woman, the mocking woman  
the artist dreaming inside her house  
I'm the gadget woman  
I'm the druid woman  
I'm the Ibo woman  
I'm the Yoruba woman  
I'm the vibrato woman  
I'm the rippling woman  
I'm the gutted woman  
I'm the woman with wounds

I'm the woman with shins  
I'm the bruised woman  
I'm the eroding woman  
I'm the suspended woman  
I'm the woman alluring  
I'm the architect woman  
I'm the trout woman  
I'm the tungsten woman  
I'm the woman with the keys  
I'm the woman with the glue  
I'm a fast speaking woman

water that cleans  
flowers that clean  
water that cleans as I go

I'm a twilight woman  
I'm a trumpet woman  
I'm the raffia woman  
I'm a volatile woman  
I'm the prodding woman  
I'm the vagabond woman  
I'm the defiant woman  
I'm the demented woman  
I'm the demimonde woman  
I'm the woman deracinated, the woman destroyed  
the detonating woman, the demon woman  
I'm the lady of the acacias  
I'm the lady with the rugs

I'm the accomplished woman  
I'm the woman who drives  
I'm the alabaster woman  
I'm the egregious woman  
I'm the embryo woman

I'm the girl under an old-fashioned duress

I'm a thought woman  
I'm a creator woman  
I'm a waiting woman  
I'm a ready woman  
I'm an atmosphere woman  
I'm the morning-star woman  
I'm the heaven woman

that's how it looks when you go to heaven  
they say it's like softness there  
they say it's like day  
they say it's like dew

I'm a lush woman  
I'm a solo woman  
I'm a sapphire woman  
I'm a stay at home woman  
I'm a butterfly woman  
I'm a traveling woman  
I'm a hitchhike woman  
I'm a hitching-post woman

6

I'm a sun woman  
I'm the coyote woman  
I won't be home  
I'll be back

I'm a justice woman  
it's not sadness  
no, it's not a lie

I'm the Southern Cross woman  
I'm a moon woman  
I'm a day woman  
I'm a doll woman  
I'm a dew woman  
I'm a lone-star woman  
I'm a loose-ends woman  
I'm a pale-coast woman  
I'm a mainstay woman

I'm a rock woman  
I'm a horse woman  
I'm a monkey woman  
I'm a chipmunk woman  
I'm a mountain woman  
I'm a blue mountain woman  
I'm a marsh woman  
I'm a jungle woman  
I'm a tundra woman  
I'm the lady in the lake  
I'm the lady in the sand

7

water that cleans  
flowers that clean  
water that cleans as I go

I'm a bird woman  
I'm a book woman  
I'm a devilish clown woman  
I'm a holy-clown woman  
I'm a whirling-dervish woman  
I'm a whirling-foam woman  
I'm a playful-light woman  
I'm a tidal-pool woman  
I'm a fast speaking woman

I'm a witch woman  
I'm a beggar woman  
I'm a shade woman  
I'm a shadow woman  
I'm a leaf woman  
I'm a leaping woman  
I'M A GREEN-PLANT WOMAN  
I'M A GREEN-ROCK WOMAN  
I'm a rest-stop woman  
I'm a city woman  
I long for the country  
I get on the airplanes and fly away  
I know how to work the machines!

I'm a sighing woman  
I'm a singing woman  
I'm a sleeping woman  
I'm a muscle woman  
I'm a music woman  
I'm a mystic woman  
I'm a cactus woman  
it's not strange  
no, it's not a lie

I'm the diaphanous woman  
I'm the diamond-light woman  
I'm the adamant woman  
I'm the headstrong woman  
I'm the tunnel woman  
I'm the terrible woman  
I'm the tree woman  
I'm the trembling woman  
I'm the treacherous woman  
I'm the touchy woman

flowers that clean  
water that cleans  
flowers that clean as I go

I'm an impatient woman  
I've got the right of way  
I'm the baby woman, I'll cry  
I'm the wireless woman  
I'm the nervous woman

I'm the wired woman  
I'm the imperious woman  
I'm the purple sky woman

I'M THE PURPLE-LIGHT WOMAN  
I'M THE SPECKLED-LIGHT WOMAN  
I'M THE SUGAR-LIGHT WOMAN  
I'm the breathless woman  
I'm the hurried woman  
I'm the girl with the unquenchable thirst

flowers that clean as I go  
water that cleans  
flowers that clean as I go

hey you there  
hey you there, boss  
I'm talking

I'm a jive-ass woman  
I'm the callous woman  
I'm the callow woman  
I'm the clustered woman  
I'm the dulcimer woman  
I'm the dainty woman  
I'm the murderous woman  
I'm the discerning woman  
I'm the dissonant woman  
I'm the anarchist woman  
I'm the Bantu woman

10

I'm the Buddha woman  
I'm the baritone woman  
I'm the bedouin woman

I'm the woman with taste  
I'm the woman with coral

I'm the mushroom woman  
I'm the phantom woman  
I'm the moaning woman  
I'm the river woman  
I'm the singing river woman  
I'm the clear-water woman  
I'm the cleansing woman  
I'm the clay woman  
I'm the glazed woman  
I'm the glass-eyed woman

I'm the stone woman  
I'm the stone-tooth woman  
I'm the woman with bones  
I'm the fossil woman  
I'm the soft flesh woman  
I'm the doe-eyed woman

that's how it looks when you go to heaven  
they say it's like softness there  
they say it's like land  
they say it's like day  
they say it's like dew

11

I'm the lonesome woman  
the woman without a home  
I'm the lithesome woman  
the limber woman, the woman forbidden  
the woman divided, the woman entangled  
the woman caught between two continents  
the woman dancing inside her house

I'm the contented woman  
I'm the unrelenting woman  
the unresolved woman  
the woman with the treble  
the soprano woman  
the woman who roves  
the woman riding in clover  
the woman deliberating  
the foraging woman  
the phenomena woman  
the woman who studies  
the woman who names  
the woman who writes  
I'm the cataloguing woman

water that cleans  
waters that run  
flowers that clean as I go

I'm the vendetta woman  
I'm the inventive woman  
I'm the invective woman

12

I'm the reflective woman  
I'm the grave miscreant  
I'm the molten matter  
I'm the substratum  
I'm the tumbleweed woman  
I'm the half-breed  
I'm the banyan tree woman  
I'm the static woman  
I'm the woman in classic pose

I'm the silk woman  
I'm the cloth woman

I'M THE SILVER-CLOTH WOMAN  
I'M THE GOLD-CLOTH WOMAN  
I'M THE EMERALD-CLOTH WOMAN

I'm the weaving woman  
I'm the woman with colorful thread  
I'm the fiber woman  
I'm the fleeing woman  
the woman forgotten  
the woman derailed  
the tempestuous woman

I'm the woman who dreams  
I'm the woman who exhales

I'm the night woman  
I'm the black-night woman  
I'm the night without a moon

13

I'm the angel woman  
I'm the white-devil woman  
I'm the green-skin woman  
I'm the green-goddess woman  
I'm the woman with arms  
I'm the woman with wings  
I'm the woman with sprouts  
I'm the woman with leaves  
I'm the branch woman  
I'm the masked woman  
I'm the deep-trance woman

I'm the meat woman  
I'm the red-meat woman  
I'm the fish woman  
I'm the blue-fish woman  
I'm the woman with scales  
I'm the woman with fins  
I'm the crawling woman  
I'm the swimming woman  
I'm the sun-fish woman  
I'm the silver-fish woman

water that cleans  
flowers that clean as I go

I'm the moss woman  
I'm the velvet-moss woman  
I'm the woman with vines  
I'm the woman with thorns

I'm the needle woman  
I'm the pine-needle woman  
I'm the science woman  
I'm the mistaken woman  
I'm the inexorable woman  
I'm the explorer woman

that's how it looks when you go to heaven  
they say it's like softness there  
they say it's like land  
they say it's like day  
they say it's like dew

I'm the impoverished woman  
I'm the heavy-belly woman  
I'm the woman with hair  
I'm the woman with child  
I'm the heathen woman  
I'm the hermaphrodite woman  
I'm the iridescent woman  
I'm the hazardous woman  
I'm the precipice woman  
I'm the insouciant woman  
I'm the jasmine woman  
I'm the jaguar woman  
I'm the Inca woman  
I'm the woman with the facade  
I'm the woman with the sparks

I'm the taxi woman  
I'm the tactile woman  
I'm the ductile woman  
I'm the taciturn woman  
I'm the fierce woman  
I'm the Jupiter woman  
I'm the tiger woman  
I'm the woman with claws  
I'm the woman with fangs  
I'm the closed-circuit woman  
I'm the muddy-bank woman  
I'm the big-footed woman  
I'm the big-hearted woman  
I'm the water-pool woman  
I'm the shimmering woman  
I'm flowers radiating light  
I'm the heavy-paint woman  
I'm the patina woman  
I'm the matinee woman  
I'm the Neanderthal woman  
I'm the automaton woman  
I'm the decadent woman  
I'm the opulent woman

water that cleans  
flowers that clean  
water that cleans as I go

16

I'm the beads woman  
I'm the stone-beads woman  
I'm the money-belt woman  
I'm the woman with the passport  
I'm the immigrant woman  
I'm the woman with the weight on her shoulders  
I'm the woman with the weight on her back  
I'm the old woman  
I'm the stooped-over woman  
I'm the barefoot woman  
I'm the dark-eyed woman  
I'm the raven-dark woman  
I'm the jet-black woman  
I'm the slippery-eel woman  
I'm the facile woman  
I'm the princess woman  
I'm the serpent woman  
I'm the ecliptic woman  
I'm the sine-wave woman  
I'm the sliding woman  
waters that clean  
flower that cleans  
waters that clean as I go

I'm the sensible woman  
I'm the senseless woman  
I'm the pink-dawn woman

17



I'm the mist-dawn woman  
I'm the mysterious woman  
the woman demystified  
the woman divulged  
the apocalypse woman  
I'm the plexiglass woman  
I'm the rash woman  
I'm the hushed woman  
I'm the caustic woman  
I'm the resonating woman  
I'm the altercating woman  
the ambidextrous woman  
the ambiguous woman  
I'm the effusive woman  
I'm the ancipital woman  
I'm the woman in the mirror  
I'm the woman in the museum  
I'm a fast speaking woman  
  
I'm the ameliorating woman  
I'm the Marabout woman  
I'm the indolent slyph  
I'm the frugal handmaiden  
I'm the harridan  
I'm the trickster  
I'm the minx  
I'm the shy courtesan  
I'm the frau  
I'm the woman with the wares  
I'm the woman with the whims

18

I'm the woman with the hems  
I'm the woman with the volts  
I'M THE POET DREAMING INSIDE HER HOUSE  
  
I'm the tautological woman  
I'm the technological woman  
I'm the tally sheet woman  
I'm the dallying woman  
  
water that cleans  
flowers that clean  
waters that clean as I go  
  
I'm the hieratic woman  
I'm the hermetic woman  
I'm the harvesting woman  
I'm the cloistered woman  
I'm the prismatic woman  
I'm the manic woman  
I'm the magic woman  
  
I'm the fleeting woman  
I'm the floating woman  
I'm the flotsam woman  
I'm the gypsy woman  
I'm the rain woman  
I'm the rainy-season woman  
I'm the lady from Twenty-nine Palms  
  
I'm the inestimable woman I'll convert yr piastres to gold

19

I'm the Infanta, I'll get my way

I'm the disdainful woman

I'm the declaiming woman

I'm the thwarted woman

I'm the turgid woman

I'm the Tuscarora woman

I'm the farsighted woman

I'm the wry woman

I'm the circular woman the woman

who returns

water that flows

flowers that clean

water that flows as I go

I'm the Parnassian woman

I'm the Parsee woman

I'm the monophobic woman

I'm the perfunctory woman

I'm the percussive woman

I'm the domestic woman

I'm the vigilante woman

I'm the chastising woman

I'm the Shakti

I'm the errant woman

I'm the variegated woman

I'm the woman with the clout

20

I'm the woman with the refrain

flowers that clean as I go

water that cleans

flowers that clean as I go

I'm the raised-on-jazz woman

I'm the syncopated woman

I'm the woman at the keyboard

I'm the woman-turns-her-neck-around

I'm the clapping woman

I'm the strapping woman

I'm the back seat woman

I'm the crusader woman with teapot, bedroll, yellow

plastic water bottle & green turban shouting

*Insh'allah* on route to El Ayon—reclaim my

Sahara *Insh'allah!*

I'm the old old Polish woman raking & gathering

leaves mid-October just outside Chicago

I'm the woman scribbling on paper bag sitting by

Hudson, hat slouched over squint in autumn sun

I'm the pinched-face lady in Montreal serving you

up a tasty meal

I'm the woman standing in the shadow

the Navaho in velvet

21

I'm the visceral woman  
I'm the Valkyrie  
I'm the vermilion woman  
the pivoting woman  
the Yesuvian woman  
I'm the vexed woman  
I'm the woman put a hex on you  
I'm the concealing woman  
I'm the babbling woman  
I'm the bakshesh bakshesh bakshesh woman  
I'm the bankrupt woman  
I'm the bargaining woman  
I'm the barracuda woman  
I'm the bellicose woman  
I'm the benevolent woman  
I'm the petulant woman  
I'm the aimless woman  
I'm the average woman  
I'm the woman adoring  
the woman adulterated  
I'm the acetate woman  
The acetylene woman

water that cleans  
flowers that clean  
water that cleans as I run

I'm the lone assassin I'll sit in my cell  
I'm the inflamed woman ready to burn  
I'm the notorious infidel

22

I'm the agent provocateur  
I'm the infectious woman whose energy catches on  
I'm the huckster woman just down the street  
I'm the woman with the rings  
I'm the woman with histrionics  
I'm the vixen  
the woman in the hovel  
the woman on the dole

I'm the regenerative woman  
I'm the woman strapped to the machine  
I'm the reptile woman I'll grow back my limbs  
I'm the reproachful woman I'll never forget  
I'm the plutonium woman make you glow for a  
quarter of a million years!

I'm the Hottentot woman  
I'm the hot-rod woman  
I'm the hostile woman  
I'm the equinox woman

that's how it looks when you go to heaven  
they say it's like softness there  
they say it's balanced there  
they say it's like land like day like dew

I'm the monophonic woman  
I'm the setaceous woman  
I'm the moonlit woman in silence under trees  
I'm the touchstone woman

23

I'm the woman with the vitamins  
I'm the woman with the keys  
I'm the woman with the delays  
I'm the woman with the maize  
I'm the woman who breathes in  
I'm the woman who sails

I'm the redundant woman  
I'm the incumbent woman  
the woman askew, the woman amok  
the amorous woman  
the malachite woman  
the hidden cave woman

THE WOMAN INSPIRED INSIDE HER HOUSE!

I'm the volcano woman  
I'm the pressured woman  
I'm the bituminous woman  
I'm the slimy-fuel woman  
I'm the bright-fire woman  
I'm the fire-eater woman  
I'm the spaced-out woman  
I'm the hemmed-in woman  
I'm the woman with the walking shoes  
I'm the woman with the straw hat

I'm a fast speaking woman  
I'm a fast-rolling woman

I'm a rolling-speech woman  
I'm a rolling-water woman  
I KNOW HOW TO SHOUT  
I KNOW HOW TO SING  
I KNOW HOW TO LIE DOWN

## II

woman never under your thumb, says  
skull that was a head, says  
bloodshot eyes, says

I'm the Kali woman the killer woman  
women with salt on her tongue  
fire that cleans  
fire that catches  
fire burns hotter as I go  
woman traded in her secrets never, says  
woman reversed the poles, says  
woman never left America to know this  
but she did, says, she did leave  
woman combs snakes out of her hair  
woman combs demons out of her hair

woman lies down with the cobra  
then meditates under cobra canopy

woman had a bone in her throat, says  
was it yours? says

she admits she has a taste for you, says  
*she's cannibal woman, Kali woman*

woman's tongue once split in ten directions

one: I'm a savage woman

two: I'm the rutting woman

three: I'm the fire dancer with coal-black feet

four: I'm the old-time thinker

five: poseur woman

six: I'm the redacteur

seven: auteur

eight: I haunt you with my songs

nine: I was the nun

now I am bound by desire again

ten: I'm the *cittipatti* woman

the dancing-skull woman

mouth is moving, says

skull-mouth moving, says

says these things

says terrible things as I go

mouth is gaping

tongue is bleeding

everywhere suffering, as I go

I'm the celebrity woman

I'm the luminary woman

I'm the standout woman

I'm the braggart woman

I'm the shrew at the window woman

I'm the stigma woman

the beaten woman

the disgraced woman

hag woman

where will I go?

who will have me?

water clean me

water clean me, as I go

I'm the camouflaged woman

I'm the assuaged woman

I'm the ravenous woman

I'm the Kali Yuga woman

high-pitched woman

not a trifling woman

hissing woman

I'm the woman with the fangs

I'm the woman with the guns

I'm the woman with tomes

I'm the book woman

I'm the stolen book woman

fire that burns as I go

woman was in the world was walking  
woman was singing sounding the day away  
sounds like a cranky old machine, someone said  
(that someone was a mean man, mean child-man)  
but she just ignored the cranky old machine part  
& went on her way

woman took her haughty self out of the sky  
she had a nose that tall  
how tall?  
that!  
& stuck up it was  
mincy mincy mincy mincy she cried  
mincy mincy mincy  
she was burning all right  
her house (the one she carried on her head) was afire

I'm the woman never made a fool of  
woman who hides her heart  
woman hidden in long sleeves  
sleeves of green & gold  
I'm the woman shelved one night  
while he beds down with the deer  
I'm the woman wandering the forest  
tilt moon  
full moon lights up a honey eye  
half moon he returns  
I'm the woman waiting

28

the woman counting moments  
a moment never existed & he walks in  
I'm the woman who scribes this text  
long after the animals lie down  
chopping wood outside the retreat hut  
stoking the fire with my little stick  
a candle lit to light a teacher's face  
I learn by books  
I learn by singing  
I recite the chant of one hundred syllables  
I write down my messages to the world  
the wind carries them invisibly,  
staccato impulses to the world

I'm the woman stirring the soup pot  
the woman who makes circles  
with her arm  
stirring, singing this song about the  
Woman-Who-Does-Things  
many actions complete themselves  
& repeat  
she does this  
I'm the woman who does these things  
many actions carry words  
I say them, woman-who-signifies  
I light the fire  
I sit like a Buddha  
I feed the animals outside the door  
I blow out the lamp

29

I'm the woman traveling inside her head  
I'm the woman on the straw mat  
I bewitch the stars to my heart  
    points of light, arrows to my heart  
    pierce me as I sleep

I'm the night woman  
I'm the terrible-night woman  
I travel to steal your lover  
    to steal your food, to take your words

I'm the day woman  
I'm the doll woman  
I'm the dew woman

day woman mends & organizes  
doll woman sits & stares  
dew woman is moist to the touch

I'm the Amoghasiddhi woman  
I'm activity demon  
I wait for him  
I walk away  
busy woman to light up the day!

don't touch me I'm hurrying hurrying  
fierce light of day he doesn't exist  
mayhem on the next block a proletarian urge  
& old tones deep from his gut I shut ears to  
hold back, hold back

I'm the woman shouting "Hold"  
I'm running down the street now  
shout: "Hold, hold!"

& old tones hold back ears sharp lobes hold  
tainted I'll strap pathos back  
that love comes to this ecto-morgue  
& ties on craving & passion  
but face I loved —  
die! die! I'm the woman who loved  
a woman who lost

turn it around  
I'm the woman in charge  
the woman who never succumbed  
woman off the couch  
woman up and about  
I'm the organizing woman  
I'll put this place under my spell

I'm the woman who drives  
the woman who drove to Siliguri  
I'm the woman who walked to Nepal  
I took a train to rest my weary limbs  
I'm the one who took a sponge bath  
the water was cold  
another woman soaped my back  
I'm the woman slept upright in a cave a hundred years  
I'm the woman over the next peak  
I learned to drive on the Peak to Peak Highway  
all my signals intact

I provided fresh fuel to the hikers  
fed children from my milky breasts  
I rode the crest of my own wave  
I thirsted for books, books  
I took a plane to not calm my nerves  
I rode a boat for expediency's sake

I'm the chopping-wood woman  
the woman with the axe  
I'm the trailblazer  
I clear the woods  
I take out my own mind

I can out-boast all of you  
I can scribe my heart  
I thrive on passion  
I hang out my shingle  
in business for a night

I'm the ribcage woman  
the ribald woman  
the beribboned woman  
the woman can taking a ribbing, can you?  
I'm the imbibing woman  
I'm the woman revived  
the survivor  
the insider woman  
the woman who provides  
the plied woman  
the stymied woman

the woman under clouds  
the woman under shrouds  
the woman breathing inside her house

I took a trip  
woman-left-home  
went out to see the day  
what would come  
what the day would bring  
walked among the buildings  
walked among the power fronts  
inside them: men organizing money  
walked on inside neighborhoods  
out on the street all kinds of women

I'm the dressed-up woman  
the creased woman  
the lethargic woman  
the sprightly one

wave of woman-future, I ride it  
*(she conjures long life, fire, tantrums)*  
no my mother was intellectual  
But I'm the body woman  
*books are same*  
*I'm the head-in-a-book woman*  
the travellingest fingers typing are mine  
*classiest accoutrements, smart talk here*  
with me it's pleasure weather style  
*one note of Thelonious Monk is mine*



*I'm the five senses woman*  
outings in any town I'm good at

*long legs all mine*

particular jab

*rub at the edge*

I'm *not* sentimental

I'm the clever woman

*standing in for tolerance*

standing outside whim

*move over*

I write books

*I write more books*

elegant fibula

*parallax sensibility*

sleek

*fondling*

all the world fits in my mouth

I'm the multiple-universes woman

*my hair sparks desire*

my mouth breathes holy fire

*mahakalas roam the yard I inhabit*

dakinis sit on my shoulders

elephantine rage

vajra nipples

mistress of the keyboard

no slut to life

I'm the woman who dreams

I'M THE ARTIST INSIDE HER MAGIC HOUSE.

## “FAST SPEAKING WOMAN” & THE DAKINI PRINCIPLE

As I began to write “Fast Speaking Woman,” I had in my head that I would do a list-chant telling all the kinds of women there are to be, interweaving personal details (how I see myself: “I’m the impatient woman,” “the woman with the keys”) with all the energetic adjectives I could conjure up to make the chant speak of/to/for Everywoman. Chant is heartbeat. Chant is an ancient efficacious poetic practice. One of the oldest European chants is the *Song of Amergin*, a Celtic calendar-alpha bet, found in various Irish and Welsh variants, which has such lines:

I am a stag: *of seven times*,

I am a flood: *across a plain*,

I am a wind: *on a deep lake*,

I am a tear: *the Sun lets fall*,

I am a hawk: *above a cliff*,

I am a thorn: *beneath the nail*,

I am a wonder: *among flowers*

I am a wizard: *who but I*

*Sets the cool head aflame with smoke?*

This also resembles the Welsh *Cad Godden* (*The Battle of the Trees*) with its ubiquitous litany:

I have been a drop in the air.

I have been a shining star.

I have been a word in a book.

I have been a book originally.

I have been a light in a lantern.

I wanted to use this elemental modal structure to capture Everywoman's psyche. The "bottom nature," Gertrude Stein calls it, of any human. But in this case, I was focused on my own femaleness and, by extension, any woman's. There was an unprecedented tidal wave of strong women writers and artists coming to the fore on the American cultural landscape. Any woman might be thinking, saying the same things I was to say and name.

I wrote down a list with all the "A" words in a notebook, beginning "I'm an abalone woman" to "the artist inside her house." I wanted to assert the sense of my mind, my imagination being able to travel as artist, maker, inventor. To see beyond boundaries. The poem arrived in distinct sections with more sound associations than anything else mnemonic, thus "D": defiant, demented, demimonde; "S": solo, sapphire, stay-at-home. Then simple, quick, almost childlike associations, letting the drive of the repeating assertions take over. Naming, that was the thrust. And the chant was to be spoken, or sung, or even more interestingly, *sprechstimme*, spoke/sung.

I was downtown-white-New York-young-sophisticate-college-graduate bohemian, but a real poet too, reading books, writing books, listening to jazz, dabbling in psychotropic drugs, magics, beginning an apprenticeship in tantric Buddhism, attracted to shamanic energies of all kinds. I was already "director" of the very oral-based Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery and

was reading poems aloud, protesting the war in Vietnam, improvising and working collaboratively with other artists and musicians.

The litany continued on a trip to South American in 1972, a voyage that triggered an abiding interest in Latin American tantra. Tantra literally means "continuity" in the Tibetan Buddhist sense, and relates to the quick path of practice, or Vajrayana, whereby initiates work to overcome basic ego attachment in this lifetime. Working to cure one's own psychophysical being, synchronizing body, speech, and mind. Recognizing the suffering we carry and need to transmute. Powerful demonic visualizations are invoked and mantras sung to invite the energies in. In the Native American context, tantra refers to the unequivocal energy, magic, and healing properties of human mind and sacred language, and the unbroken continuity of enlightenment as well. The fierce images one sees in Olmec, Toltec, Aztec, Maya iconography are not unlike the fierce shamanic deities of Tibetan Buddhism; the legends and myths handed down in one wisdom tradition resonate with the other.

Comrade poet Michael Brownstein, with whom I'd traveled South, brought me the Folkways recording of Maria Sabina, Mazatec shaman, which had been recorded the night of July 21-22, 1956 by V.P. and R. Gordon Wasson. It included Sabina's text, translated from Mazatec into Spanish by Alvaro Estrada and Eloina Estrada de Gonzalez and into English by Henry Munn. He knew I would be gripped by it, and could "use" it, appropriating shamelessly, as poets do. Fired by her

potent voice—both the sound and sense (in translation)—I interwove many of her lines, and picked up on the refrain “water that cleans as I go,” using it as a place to pause and shift rhythm and acknowledge the cleansing impulse of the writing. Neither shaman nor psychic healer, I was a product of my generation, ignorant then of “cultural colonialism,” and eager to learn from other/wiser cultures. When I meditated or took peyote or tried to imitate Navaho chant I heard on recordings, I did so not to co-opt but to “taste” as a timeless seeker in my own imagination’s interstices, passionately in love with the magics of the phenomenal world.

Sabina’s work comes out of chaste vision. The sacred mushrooms speak through her as she guides young female initiates to confident womanhood and into the Mazatec healing lineage. Her litanies are of radical empowerment. Like highly realized adepts in Tibetan Buddhism her consciousness manifests in many directions simultaneously. She’s in all the corners of the universe. Her body of chants (as transcribed and in translation) is clearly one of the great transformational language texts of any time.

My own composition, pale by comparison, is merely exploratory—a bit like Gertrude Stein’s “Lifting Belly”—impulsive, free associative, naive. I didn’t want to use Sabina’s lines literally but to absorb the experience of her work and let it re-emerge in kind of intuitive “re-working.” In my early public readings I would often add or improvise lines for the particular situation. I remember a reading for the “street people” of Boulder, Colorado, in 1974, which was held in a park, and the

organizers hadn’t secured the proper permit for a public gathering. I was in the midst of reading the poem when I saw two cops approaching from a distance, and as they closed in I ascertained that they were both women! I immediately sprang to “I’m the blue cop woman,” “I’m the woman with the billy club,” “I’m the powerful bust-cop-lady assigned to close this reading down,” and so on. I was able to dispel the tension of the situation and complete the performance.

Alvara Estrada’s book, *Maria Sabina: Her Life and Chants*, is both an invaluable ethnographic text and a heartbreaking account of the adulteration of a sacred practice. By 1975 the impact of outside visitors to Huatla was great, as it had become fashionable for vision-seekers to make the trip to imbibe the *bongos*, the mushroom-saint children, source of her vision. Estrada’s transcription of Sabina’s own explication of her difficult life and the subsequent karma that resulted after her healing practices became publicized and abused is a document for these dark times. At least the poetry of Maria Sabina remains, a poetry that still has remedial power, as the best poetry does.

Here is some of what she says about sacred language and healing and wisdom:

At times the Wise Man sang, sang, and sang. I didn’t understand the words exactly, but they pleased me. It was a different language from what we speak in the daytime. It was a language that without my comprehending it attracted me. It was a language

that spoke of stars, animals, and other things unknown to me.

\*

The Book was before me, I could see it but not touch it. I tried to caress it but my hands didn't touch anything. I limited myself to contemplating it and, at that moment, I began to speak. Then I realized I was reading the Sacred Book of Language. My Book. The Book of the Principal Ones.

I had attained perfection. I was no longer a simple apprentice. For that, as a prize, as a nomination, the Book had been granted me. When one takes the *saint children*, one can see the Principal Ones. Otherwise not. And it's because the mushrooms are saints; they give wisdom. Wisdom is Language. Language is in the Book.

\*

Language makes the dying return to life. The sick recover their health when they hear the words taught by the *saint children*.

I cure with Language, the Language of the *saint children*. When they advise me to sacrifice chickens, they are placed on the parts where it hurts. The rest is Language.

\*

Language belongs to the *saint children*. They speak and I have the power to translate.

If I say that I am the little woman of the Book, that means that a *Little-One-Who-Springs-Forth* is a woman and that she is the little woman of the Book. In that way, during the vigil, I turn into a mushroom—little woman—of the book . . .

If I am on the aquatic shore, I say:

*I am a woman who is standing in the sand . . .*

Because wisdom comes from the place where the sand is born.\*

Since the first publication of "Fast Speaking Woman," I've taught classes on shamanic and ethnopoetic literatures at The Naropa Institute, using, among other texts, Jerome Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred*, as well as Sabina's imaginative chants. The class one year tried out various enactments of words to create a force field of energy for protest demonstrations at Rocky Flats plutonium plant in Boulder. One evolved into an antinuclear work that was subsequently performed as a group piece. I also began chanting "Mega mega mega mega mega mega death bomb—ENLIGHTEN!" the summer of 1978, later working the lines into lyrics for a "new-wave" recording of "Uh Oh Plutonium!" The constant decades' pressure by poets artists, and other concerned individuals on the Rocky

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\*From *Maria Sabina: Her Life and Chants* by Alvara Estrada Santa Barbara, CA.: Ross-Erickson, Inc., 1981.

Flats issue led to numerous exposés, an eventual “bust” of Rocky Flats itself (!) by the FBI, and subsequent disclosures and public involvement.

In some respects the whole shaman concept is problematic, considering the hardships and trials of indigenous practitioners. Poets are hardly shamans, a critic exclaimed. They’re jetsetters, bunglers, indulgent egomaniacs! No doubt, I retorted. Poets don’t claim to be enlightened curanderos, but sometimes, making themselves available as “antennae of the race,” they might receive or tap into energy sources we are usually impervious to. I remember the delight I had when I began “Fast Speaking Woman,” thinking every woman can do this, every woman *is* doing this. Like the dakini principle in Buddhism, Everywoman *is* a dakini or sky-walker who changes the world through the play of her imagination. She is both messenger and protector and embodies the qualities of compassion, emptiness, and sagacity.

## HAG’S HEART

*Pre-Adamite sun pours down on aged stones & ferns  
(my hag’s heart sings these things)  
Roof patched with stinky tar, not old but . . . looks shabby.  
Turn-of-the-century miners’ ghosts haunt these canyons  
flecks of mica & gold sparkle in geezer eyes  
Nyingmapas—ancient Buddha-Ones—sit in neolithic  
caves mumble vernal formulae to keep the orb a-spin*

See a five o’clock shadow  
Hear the noon shadow  
new shadow, old shadow  
Touch the eye’s shadow  
Write down the noun’s shadow  
Smell shiny grass

My telephone wears a modern long-shadow face  
Wears a rhinoceros face  
The clock’s faced is tuned-up, staid & wise

The mind’s a relic, a fossil, antiquated soldier  
The mind’s a crone, a dowager

My body is unprecedented, maturing  
My mind is antediluvian  
My hag’s heart scowls at this waning planet  
It speaks of its viridity, its crispness  
in the mist of fustiness