

# New Poetry by Saramanda Swigart: “Reckoning” and “The Small I”



BY THE ROOTS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

## RECKONING

don't worry about me  
i am not well but you've worried enough  
my prosperity has a body

count—

this shielded flesh  
conspicuous & allowed to be  
balks at being back-

ground—

this mouth taught (without being taught)  
it is clearest & loudest & purest  
squirms when it must shut up & become

ears—

i do not know how to be ears  
i know how to open my mouth monstrously  
wide to spew & eat

words—

words are my birthright & we the  
authors bulldoze other stories to rubble  
so the Other trips over each foregone

conclusion—

i am trained to make murder invisible  
but understories cling, bloody mine  
with the dragged, sullied

bodies—

of those disappeared beneath my  
own soft landing  
we need other & better

stories—

speak please, whatever you have to say—  
pull out this blighted story by the roots  
& plant a new one, green, tender, & worth

loving—

## **THE SMALL I**

this is my country

look

i overturn the junk  
drawer of my

white/middle-class

life and take stock

rifling

i find i am not a capital letter anymore

first person singular has shrunk

wizened down

to that apple core i found beneath the car seat

last month

or that ivy there, brown and dead

because i killed it

the waxy leaf tree outside

the front door

(the city said we were its stewards

in a single-page note  
in our mail-  
box) my heart  
brimming then  
with the largesse of new motherhood  
i thought i could  
take on the health  
of every tree  
in California but  
over the course of six  
years the ivy became a cloak around  
its trunk  
then an embrace  
then a stranglehold  
until tree leaves thinned  
i spent a long time  
tearing up the roots  
of that ivy  
now it browns—  
saved the tree but  
ivy clings  
a flammable bolus  
around its midsection

and the small i—  
how to locate i  
when i  
am both tree  
and ivy?