

Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, 2015 Winner

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A Woman from the Infant Mortality Review Board Calls

By: Amanda Newell

No, I am not an addict.
Yes, I had a doctor.
No, we are not smokers.
No, I do not want you
coming to our home.

You could see it
on the sonogram's
chalk sketch, the club-
foot and cleft palate,
fingers like vines.
Some extra ones.
A one-in-ten-thousand
error of cell division,
the specialist said.
Most women
miscarry before it gets
this far.

Thirty hours
after the pitocin
and morphine,
after the resident
shoved his gloved
fist into me
to ripen my cervix
with a kelp stick,
I gave birth
to a shiny bruised
doll, small enough
to fit into a wicker
Easter basket
and whose silence
was welcome.

Judge's commentary

Poet Lynn Emanuel, the judge of the 2015 Dobler Award, wrote this about Newell's poem:

"Poetry faces the problem of making itself distinct from the common, everyday uses of language. Music has to make itself distinct from noise, and poetry has to take back language from the clutches of the internet, the W9 form, the committee, and the TV. It is this taking back of language that is at the heart of Amanda Newell's powerful and brave poem, 'A Woman from the Infant Mortality Review Board Calls.' The title points to the poem's struggle. The 'Infant Mortality Review Board,' invades the narrator's world with ever more ridiculous and intrusive questions, and after those questions, (are you an addict, a smoker, did you have a doctor) asks to be let into the narrator's home. Brutal language is present throughout this fierce poem: 'the resident/shoved his gloved/fist into me/to ripen my cervix'. Against its awfulness the narrator tenderly asserts herself. Unlike the 'specialist' who describes what is on the sonogram as 'club-/foot and cleft palate' the narrator/mother offers her own language 'fingers like vines,' 'a shiny bruised/doll, small enough/ to fit into a wicker/Easter basket.' The narrator brings into the poem the language of childhood, the language of a growing, green world, the language of divine birth. Beyond even this effort, however, the poet offers her stunning ending ('and whose silence/was welcome') in which she asserts that, perhaps, the only possibility of escaping the naming world may be the escape into death's silence."

About the author

Amanda Newell's work has appeared or is forthcoming in such publications as *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Pearl*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Poet Lore*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Somerset Review*, and *War, Literature & the Arts*. She has been the recipient of scholarships by both the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and The Frost Place. In addition, she has also been the recipient of a fellowship by the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. She chairs the English Department at The Gunston School in Centreville, MD, and is pursuing her MFA at Warren Wilson College.

About the judge

Lynn Emanuel is the judge of the 2015 Patricia Dobler Award. Emanuel is the author of five books of poetry: *The Nerve of It*, *Poems New and Selected*; *Noose and Hook*; *Then Suddenly—*; *The Dig*; and *Hotel Fiesta*. Her work has been featured in the *Pushcart Prize Anthology* and *The Best American Poetry* numerous times and is included in *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*. She is the recipient of two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Poetry Series Award, the Eric Matthieu King Award from the Academy of American Poets, and, most recently, a fellowship from the Ranieri Foundation.