

Two Poems for an Exceptional Child

by [Cristina Nehring](#) (November 2023)



The Three Ages of Woman (detail), Gustav Klimt, 1905

In Praise of Disability

Je t'aime, maman,
Says my lovely girl
As she sticks her head
Into my mezzanine bed.

Go back and sleep,
Say I,
She wonders why;
It's 4 in the morning already

An hour
At which she starts to flower
She begins to sing
Her false notes ring

Around the room
As silent as a tomb
Only moments ago.
What a show

She stages
This handicapped child
How wild she is,
How full of vigor.

Go figure.
Children with Down Syndrome
Are supposed to be tame
And easily tired;

Whoever conspired
To give them this reputation?
I wonder

As I blunder

Barefoot around our Parisian flat
In search of something to make her fat
At age fifteen
She's lean as a foal.

That's not really the goal
To flourish she should have
Something to nourish
Her growing forms.

Who came up with the norms
For adolescents like her?
Her energy and love
Seem to come from above

No fatigue and no frailty
Disturb her deep gaiety
There's no child in the world
I'd rather see
Than my Eurydice—
Even at 4 am.

Ode to an Extra Chromosome

My child she cannot read,
My girl she cannot write,
My babe she barely speaks,

But what a blur of bliss!
What a cacophony of kisses,
What an opera of affection.

She is the sunshine
Missing from Paris

She is the whirlwind waning worldwide.

She is her mother's impertinent ecstasy.

Betrayed by her papa

She is courted

By comely young men;

The femme fatale of her school,

Attentive to all,

Indebted to none.

Together

We make a perfect pair

Of girlfriends. Sitting

Round a café table

We feed each other

Avocadoes and olives

And scatter the scruples

Of intellectuals adjacent.

Eurydice, my love, my

Light, forge on, fight on, flash on

Until the dying of the day.

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Cristina Nehring published *The Child Who Never Spoke: 23 1/2 Lessons in Fragility* on October 24, 2023. She is also the author of *A Vindication of Love* which made the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* as well as of two books in French. She writes for the *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. She lives in Paris with her daughter.

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