

“homosexual” because it is “descriptive” and does not “connote a form of modern sexual identity” (63), Greenfield examines the threat that mother-daughter love “poses to compulsory heterosexuality” (60).

In her chapter on *The Wrongs of Woman*, a book that focuses “on the law, which discriminates against women of all classes and favors men by treating the female body and its offspring as male property” (86), Greenfield discusses the “politics of maternal breastfeeding” and how breastfeeding influenced the passage of the Infant Custody Bill (1839). “Supporters of the act repeatedly drew on images of breastfeeding to demonstrate the naturalness of maternal custody rights” (84). Greenfield believes Maria’s famous court defense “logically extended ... might include a defense of the mother’s right to child custody” (99).

Greenfield explores “the rise of maternal ideals” in Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray; Or, The Mother and Daughter*, and she examines “inadequate mothers,” like Lady Delacour in *Belinda* and Mrs. Mowbray, and the necessity of surrogate mothers. Savanna, an escaped mulatto slave, is the surrogate in Opie’s novel. “Though [Opie’s] novel condemns slavery, it also suggests the value of importing West Indian women to England to perform the maternal and psychological work biological maternity cannot guarantee” (134). Savanna’s role “prefigures the ‘racialized history of child care’ that grew out of colonial slavery” (134).

“The Riddle of *Emma*: Maternity and the Unconscious” best exemplifies Greenfield’s general thesis that “the mother’s absence highlights her indispensability” (13). Emma’s “internal troubles ... stem from the very motherlessness nobody acknowledges as a problem” (146). “Though there are a wide variety of ways to account for Emma’s mistakes,” Greenfield believes that each mistake “can be explained as her unconscious reaction to her mother’s absence” (153). Since the novel encourages readers “to understand Emma as she herself cannot, *Emma* might be said to anticipate the role of the modern psychotherapist” (153).

Underpinning Greenfield’s compelling analysis is a wealth of careful research. Her three approaches—historical, literary, and psychoanalytic—will appeal to scholars in a variety of disciplines.

## ***A Slant of Sun: One Child’s Courage***

Kephart, Beth.  
New York: William Morrow, 1998.

### **Reviewed by Trudelle Thomas**

*A Slant of Sun* is a carefully crafted memoir by a mother who is coming to terms with her young child’s developmental problems. As the book opens, Kephart is

a freelance technical writer married to an architect from El Salvador. They are both ecstatic over the birth of their first child, a boy named Jeremy. The early chapters are a tender account of Jeremy's first years.

When Jeremy is a toddler, Kephart notices disturbing quirks in his development: a tendency to withdraw, obsessions with certain toys or clothes, a reluctance to talk. At two and a half years old, Jeremy is diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Delay-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), a little-understood set of symptoms that includes social, language, and behavioural impairments. There is no clear course of treatment for PDD. Kephart writes, "We saw our child disappearing—a rapid descent into silence. We met with doctors. We were given terminology. The terminology was a dark room, a dead end, an imbroglio not an enlightenment" (234). The rest of the book describes the parents' desperate efforts over the next five years to "pull" Jeremy back into the world of human interaction.

Late in the memoir, Kephart summarizes her quest: "We haven't healed our son—we have given our son the room to heal himself—a safe place, the right friends, information, conversation, a buffer from the world when he needs that buffer. We have learned to look for ... people and institutions that understand that kindness is the deepest cure, that there is always room for hope" (240). But along the way Kephart is not at all sure they will find kindred spirits, kindness, or hope. Much of the book recounts her difficult search for schools, therapists, and friends for her disturbingly "different" child. She often doubts herself; her marriage falters; neighbours and "professionals" are sometimes cruelly judgmental.

As I read, I recalled the comment of poet Pattiann Rogers: "To write well of ... [motherhood] requires overcoming the many examples of poor literature ... To write with power of the subject means creating new perspectives." Kephart succeeds in creating a new perspective—no small accomplishment—an unsentimental close-up of the interplay between a mother and a young child at risk.

Kephart is a gifted writer working with difficult material. Motherhood is by nature highly charged and this mother is often in agony—angry, confused, lonely, in the dark – even as she is fiercely committed to her son's well being. She conveys these emotions through understatement. One chapter, following Jeremy's diagnosis, is made up of nine lines, ending "I am earth beneath storm, the air inside a snapped reed. I scream my helpless anger into an empty room" (77). Kephart is equally skilled in conveying the joy of Jeremy's gradual recovery.

Both mother and child come across as human. Kephart is a night owl and a loner who loves to ice skate. Jeremy loves a green hat, toy cars, the Red Baron. My favourite sections are Kephart's interactions with Jeremy as they talk or play in such places as their home, a park, or a fast-food restaurant. Their conversations prove to be key to Jeremy's recovery, "stretching him bit by bit from compulsion toward conversation" (238).

This book is of special interest to any parent of a child with PDD, OCD, autism, or other “special needs,” especially neurological needs. I could use *A Slant of Sun* in classes that address language acquisition, speech therapy, or the power of literacy. Potential readers include anyone interested in fine writing about one woman’s discovery of her deepest sources of strength. *A Slant of Sun* was a finalist for a National Book Award (U.S.) in 1998.

## ***Before Deportation***

Feiner, Herta.  
Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999.

### **Reviewed by Ruth Nemzoff**

*Before Deportation* by Herta Feiner contains eighty-five pages of letters from a German-Jewish mother living in Berlin to her half-Aryan daughters at boarding school in Gland, Switzerland. The letters cover the period January 1939 to December 1942. Amidst the trivia of daily concerns and the usual parental affectionate expression of love is a powerful description of pre-deportation Nazi-Germany, with its insidious erasure of freedoms and rights for Jews in Germany. The Nazi machinery left few aspects of life untouched. Their gradual encroachment in each sphere of life occurred in small increments, allowing the Jews to adapt to the changes. They manipulated this human capacity for adaptation and ensnared the Jews in their trap.

We learn, for example, that at first the Nazi government allowed the flow of mail; then they required a special stamp; next they limited the length of the letters; subsequently they limited the number of letters that Jews could send. Finally, they stopped mail delivery altogether. We learn that slowly the Jewish schools were diminished, first by forced moves to smaller quarters, then by staff reductions and, in time, by shortened school hours.

At first the spouses or parents of Aryans were protected. Finally, no one was protected. We see the effectiveness of the gradually tightening noose when this loving mother actually asks her daughters to return to Germany in the belief that their Aryan status could protect both mother and daughters.

Although this book is not as powerful or emotionally wrenching as Elie Weisel’s *Night*, its very ordinariness demonstrates the thorough and methodical way the Nazis were able to lure the Jews to their deaths. This book helps answer the question, “Why didn’t the Jews see what was happening?”