

## QUEBEC WOMEN AND LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIONS

Manon Tremblay. Translated by  
Kathe Roth  
Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010

### REVIEWED BY HANS ROLLMANN

The politics of representation is complicated, but few take the time to consider how complicated it really is. Manon Tremblay is one of those few, and with the recent translation of her 2005 work *Quebec Women and Legislative Representation* into English, the non-Francophones in the field now have access to Tremblay's masterful resource. The work, which theorizes ideas and analyzes data pertaining to women's underrepresentation in political governance, has a broader appeal than its title would suggest. While offering an in-depth study of the Quebec case, it enters a discourse which is global in scope: how most effectively to increase women's representation in legislatures? Tremblay is among the key theorists in this field, and the book is destined to become a key text in Canadian political discourse.

The approach is methodical: it breaks down the question into its component variables (role of parties, role of electoral system, qualities of candidates, impact of women representatives, and much more) and addresses the significance of each variable, at both the provincial and federal level. Although Tremblay has a clear predilection for statistical analysis, the work is accessible and relevant for those with a more philosophical and qualitative bent. The first section of the book—a history of the Quebec suffrage movement—offers an unexpectedly gripping narrative; the book then gives way to denser theoretical

debates. Tremblay does not so much provide answers as provide evidence: there are never any clear answers to big questions, but the value of this work lies in offering us a summation of the existing evidence and data. One thread which does emerge is the significant role of political parties in Canadian and Quebec politics: while many activists flag Canada's increasingly stale electoral model as a problem, Tremblay demonstrates the true problem—and potential—for women's representation may lie in party selection processes more so than in voting reform. She does, however, assess various proposals for voting and electoral reform, and often from a comparative perspective.

Of course, the politics of representation, being political, is a field that is constantly in flux, and no sooner does an exhaustive work of research appear in print than a dozen new political happenings occur to challenge and question its key findings. This is of course a positive thing: it is what keeps academics employed and encourages us to write new and updated versions.

A key question for the next edition of the book would be how the recent NDP electoral success at the federal level fits into the picture. The surprise success of the NDP—especially in Quebec—left researchers in many fields distraught, for it upset the careful theoretical models which require so many years of work (and, if one is lucky, years of electoral consistency) to construct. No less so with the question of women's representation in Quebec: the election of a non-traditional (in Quebec) party, coupled with the election of a number of women who are in stark contrast to all traditional models of elected women (young, limited experience in politics, in some cases with little to no involvement in local community or civil society) demonstrates the limits of models. But it demonstrates also

that there are other factors which can play into voters' choices (the final component of representative selection). Considering the extent to which the NDP is dismissed in much of this book, it would be interesting to revise those assessments and consider what contributed to the unexpected triumph of women running under its banner in the recent election.

Another question worth considering is how existing models of representation reflect not only various models of liberalism, but how they reflect an essentialized gender duality as well. It is surprising more theorists of political representation do not address this, and speaks as much to the failure of leading trans and queer theorists to engage in critical—and concrete—debates about political representation, as it does about the lack of scope of normative political representation research. A good example is Tremblay's fairly positive—albeit qualified—assessment of the potential of parity legislation such as that adopted by France. Yet parity—a perspective on political representation that is grounded in the notion that the one universalizing, cross-cutting dimension of human identity is a division into the duality of male and female—requires a rebuttal from the perspective of queer and trans theory. The trans challenge to the notion of a basic duality of gender identity has implications not only for human rights but for political representation as well. This critique should not come from the perspective that transgender identity comprises an additional identity that is excluded: that would merely spark parity's well-seasoned rebuttal that a female-male duality is the primary and universal duality. The trans critique must challenge the existence of a universal gender duality itself. Yet it ought to do so not from a liberal perspective concerned only with pointing out an intellectual incon-

sistency, but rather with a discreet attention to the very real and concrete question of how to overcome men's domination of legislatures.

These minor critiques aside, Tremblay's work is masterful and a vital contribution to the study of representational politics that should be read not only by political theorists in Quebec, but around the world. It is the sort of 'state-of-the-field' overview which performs that rare function of combining an assessment of the key philosophical ideas grounding a debate, with the statistical and empirical data to anchor those debates in real-world policy. It is, in short, a book not just for the academics, but for the policy-makers and the politicians as well. It should be required reading for party officials—particularly given the strong evidence it provides that the parties hold the key to retrenching, or overcoming, gendered inequality in representation in Quebec and in Canada in the twenty-first century.

*Hans Rollmann completed a Masters degree in Cultural Anthropology at Memorial University of Newfoundland and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Gender, Feminist & Women's Studies at York University. His research focuses on gender representation and the labour movement.*

## **MY LEAKY BODY: TALES FROM THE GURNEY**

Julie Devaney  
Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane, 2012

**REVIEWED BY VICTORIA  
KANNEN**

Julie Devaney's *My Leaky Body: Tales from the Gurney* is about pain and shit and the failures (and successes) of Canadian healthcare, and it is beautiful. It is not just beautiful in

a breathtakingly-real, cliché sort-of-way, but it is beautiful for its uncomfortable truths. Devaney uses her body-story as a way to educate and entertain her readers in order to hear that which we (often) try to deny—the wilful ignorance of our individual experiences with Canadian social systems—within both healthcare and higher education.

Devaney's book is auto-ethnographic, performative, educational, and surprisingly funny. In it, she explores her physically and emotionally painful experiences negotiating the Canadian healthcare system. Through the treatment of what some believe is ulcerative colitis—while others claim it's Crohn's disease—she masterfully paints a portrait of the power dynamics involved in doctor-patient experiences: when our bodies don't fit with expert diagnoses, when our bodies leak without explanation, when what we feel is not heard or believed by those who are supposedly there to care for and heal our bodies. Her book is powerful for a variety of reasons, but it is particularly powerful because it is scary. We all want to be heard and she wasn't. Using refreshingly accessible language, Devaney invites us into a candidly-graphic account of her symptoms/'leaks', diagnoses, hospital-izations, and pain, but she also allows us in on her very 'normal' and youthful experiences of love, pets, and friendship.

Being an aspiring academic, Devaney simultaneously documents her struggles with the institutionalization of knowledge, as that process was developing alongside the medicalization of her body. These institutional forces in her life led her towards her work as a healthcare educator, activist, and performance artist. Devaney is inspiring because she is honest—this is not a one-sided exploration of triumph over illness. Rather, Devaney accounts for the

varieties of emotions that we all encounter throughout our lives: the doubt, hope, love, fear, anger, and relief. She channels these encounters into her work and it allows us to see what transformative potentials are possible when we believe enough in social change.

If there were any critique that I could offer, it's that initially, while reading, I could not always locate the time period and follow the sequence of events within which I was finding myself. Upon reflection, however, I think that this strategy embodies what Devaney may have been experiencing. A blurring of time, pain, aggravation, and a confusion about where, how, and why these relapses and hospital visits keep happening again and again. (I think this needs a comment to tie it together—about the trade-off between clarity and verisimilitude. Implicitly, you're saying it's acceptable to deal with a bit of confusion/frustration/annoyance, maybe even desirable, but I think that needs to be explicit.)

Since reading this book, I find myself telling everyone I know to read it, but particularly the women in my life: women who are variously positioned in terms of age, racialization, education, etc. Devaney's candour, whether intended or not, positions her reader not as a spectator, but as a friend. She allows the reader to care about her body and struggle in solidarity against a system that we all—at some point—find ourselves within and find ourselves pushing against. Bodies leak, but for bio-women the leaking (or not leaking) of our bodies is imbued with gendered meanings that we are forced to acknowledge or encounter continually throughout our lives. For this reason, I feel that Devaney's text functions as a conversation between friends on our rights as patients, our reflections on our exposed and naked bodies, and our leaks.