

instrument of nationalism, they prefer to explore “the sexist aspects of both French language structures and language usage in Québec.” She also contends that women writing in Quebec have often availed themselves of translation to create networks with other women of similar concerns and experiences.

A third volume is in the works and will complete this admirable study that introduces new perspectives to the knowledge of Quebec theatre and theatrical writing. One might hope that they will also open up avenues of analysis within the study of translation as it is applied to Quebec theatre, inasmuch as a critical discussion of the translations presented in this collection has yet to take place, something Forsyth indicates in her presentation.

**JERRY WASSERMAN, ed.**

***Spectacle of Empire: Marc Lescarbot’s Theatre of Neptune in New France.***

Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2006. 108 pp. Illus.

ANTON WAGNER

Jerry Wasserman’s *Spectacle of Empire* is an exciting compendium presenting the original 1609 French edition of Marc Lescarbot’s *Le Théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France*, Harriette Taber Richardson’s 1927 English translation, Eugene and Renate Benson’s 1982 translation, and, as an example of similar court masques: Ben Jonson’s allegorical 1605 *The Masque of Blackness*. Wasserman’s introduction draws on a rich variety of historical and theoretical frameworks ranging from ritual performances, mumming, the cultural hegemony of Renaissance ideology, Margaret Atwood’s *Survival*, Daniel Francis’s *The Imaginary Indian*, Alan Filewod’s *Performing Canada*, and Richard Schechner to Joseph Roach’s explorations of circum-Atlantic interculturalism. Seen through this post-colonial lens, *The Theatre of Neptune in New France* emerges as “an elaborate, small-scale spectacle of wishful imperial triumphalism,” as “a snapshot of European strategies for imperial conquest,” and as “Lescarbot’s Franco-Christian imperialism and Noble Savage romanticism.” Twenty-two lavish illustrations by Lescarbot, Champlain, and of the reconstructed Port Royal in Nova Scotia, as well as costume designs by

Inigo Jones and illustrations of European court spectacles, localize the performance of Lescarbot's text on 14 November 1606 and the theatrical, imaginative, and ideological sources from which it emerged. A substantial bibliography completes this handsomely-designed 400<sup>th</sup>-anniversary edition of *The Theatre of Neptune*.

In his preface, "Getting to Know Neptune," Wasserman describes the thrill his theatre students experienced in discovering Lescarbot's masque, performed in the harbour of Port Royal six weeks before Shakespeare's company premiered *King Lear* in London. He demonstrates the potency of *The Theatre of Neptune* as "a living colonial artifact in a postcolonial age" by referring to Montreal's Optative Theatrical Laboratories *Sinking Neptune* project, an intervention designed to subvert and deconstruct Lescarbot's text and to interrupt the 400<sup>th</sup>- anniversary re-enactment of the masque by the Musique 400 Society. Optative's extensive website (Google *Sinking Neptune*) features the deconstructed text—a mixture of agit-prop and living newspaper documentary theatre forms—a brief video of its performance and Donovan King's thirty-page "dramaturgical toolbox" analysis of the play that rivals Wasserman's.

The website also includes print and media coverage of the controversy over the staging of the 400<sup>th</sup>-anniversary re-enactment on-site by the waters of the Annapolis basin. Optative pegs *The Theatre of Neptune* as the beginning of the cultural genocide of Canada's First Nations. It staged *Sinking Neptune* at the Anarchist Theatre Festival in Montreal, at guerilla theatre culture jammings in various other Quebec venues, at the University of Guelph, at the King's Theatre in Annapolis Royal, and at Halifax's Bus Stop Theatre. The initial attempt to stage the masque by Ken Pinto's Theatre 400 was aborted when the Canada Council twice rejected grant applications. Pinto, director of the Atlantic Fringe Festival, hopes to stage the play in Halifax in 2010. Optative is raising funds to take *Sinking Neptune* to the 2010 Vancouver Olympics in order to challenge colonial attitudes and the theft of aboriginal land. Wasserman perceives this ongoing theatrical and political ferment as proof that "after four hundred years *The Theatre of Neptune* remains a living, breathing dramatic enterprise, not just a theatrical museum piece."

Yet, as Alan Filewod pointed out in his review of *Spectacle of Empire* in the Winter 2007 *Canadian Literature* posted on the Optative Theatre website, Wasserman does not fully engage with the radical critique offered by *Sinking Neptune*. Filewod is right that the Talonbooks 400<sup>th</sup>-anniversary reprint edition of

Lescarbot's masque comes more fully alive when confronted with the multi-media performative cyberspace *Sinking Neptune*. The teaching of documentary theatre history collides with the teaching of cultural theory. Filewod's students were surprised by the real anger of *Sinking Neptune* when he invited the production to the University of Guelph as an example of insurgent aesthetics for his 2008 Political Intervention Theatre course. In an endorsement on the *Sinking Neptune* website, he links Optative to the agitprop workers' theatre of the 1930s and to the Mimmers Troupe in the 1970s. Filewod suggests that today the work of agitprop companies like Optative "is to form networks and communities, often across cyberspace, using theatrical processes as coalition activation." Students will have to decide for themselves how to interpret *The Theatre of Neptune in New France* and what were the primary objectives of this kind of dramatic event Jerry Wasserman analyses in *Spectacle of Empire*.