Thomas Crombez, Luk van den Dries (eds.), ***Mass Theatre in Interwar Europe: Flanders and the Netherlands in an International Perspective*** (Leuven: Universitaire pers Leuven, 2014, 164 pp., ISBN 978 90 5867 992 5).

Aimed as an overview history of mass theatre in the interbellum period, this multi-authored richly illustrated volume is a useful, albeit a strangely organised, addition to the historiography. It offers multiple perspectives on the usages of public spectacles in the history of the Netherlands and Flemish-speaking Belgium. The volume reflects a much wider time frame than the title suggests covering the period from the French revolution to the 1970s. In the process, it jumps from the interbellum to the French revolutionary period, to the early twentieth century, back to the interbellum and then beyond the Second World War, in a rather bizarre chronological mishmash. Despite the mishmash, the volume's focus on what Thomas Crombez and Frank Peeters call socio-theatrical events is well done and shows why these public spectacles mattered in the Netherlands and Belgium, especially between 1918 and 1940.

According to Crombez and Peeters a socio-theatrical event is defined by its political and public context. Its purpose is encapsulated in the phrase 'theatre for the masses, by the masses' (9). The heyday for its popularity and impact was the age of mass politics between the two world wars. Almost all socio-political and religious groups of the era utilised mass spectacles, including mass theatre, to engage the public and propagate their essential messages. Many of the spectacles were documented further through the use of photographs, film and commemorative publications. Numerous examples of this rich primary source base are published throughout the book. The text is also richly detailed, with plentiful descriptions of various productions and their contexts. Above all, the volume shows how mass theatre aimed at visualising and, thereby, realising the hopes, dreams and perspectives of the movements in question. As a result, the Flemish movement was particularly strong in using mass theatre to advance their political legitimacy within the Belgian nation. But it was not alone: mass theatre's origins lay in the Soviet Union with Lenin's 'Plan for Monumental Propaganda' of 1918. Through the 1920s, Catholic, Communist and National Socialist organisations adopted similar techniques to mobilise the people behind a message. As the authors note, however, mass theatre was much more than a technique, in many respects the medium was also the message. Mass theatre encapsulated the idea that the message was made by the people, for the people and enacted in public space. Hence why it was so powerful.

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Across eight chapters, the volume explains the changing role of mass theatre in Dutch and Belgian history. Of particular note is the lengthy chapter by Ad van der Logt and Thomas Crombez on 'community art' and 'lay theatre' in the Netherlands and Belgium, which narrates the types of uses made of mass spectacles across both countries between the end of the First World War and the outbreak of the next world war. Frank Peeters' and Evelien Jonckheere's well-written chapters on national feasts and public spectacles in the 'long' nineteenth century (1789-1914) offer an important reminder that public spectacles aimed at political propaganda were not a new phenomenon in the inter-war period. They suggest important antecedents and highlight how modernity and mass spectacle took time to mature into new forms. Of course, today, mass spectacles are highly commercialised social events, epitomised by sport matches, pop concerts and music festivals. The separate chapters by Ad van der Logt, Staf Vos and Karel Vanhaesebrouck on styles of mass theatre in the inter-war era suggest how integrated the medium was within society of the time. As a conclusion, Luk van der Dries explains both the decline of mass theatre in the post-World War II era and the rehabilitation of its form in specific events, including the *IJzerbedevaart* (Pilgrimage of the Yser) in memory of fallen Flemish soldiers of the First World War.

What the volume does well is to narrate the nature and uses of mass theatre within a Dutch and Flemish context. Where it is less convincing is in situating those events within a truly international context. While mentioning the Soviet Union and National Socialist Germany, there is little engagement in the volume with the wide scholarship available on public theatre in the United States, or within the wider world. The volume sorely misses an introductory framework explaining why scholars interested in mass theatre need to look at the Dutch/Flemish examples. Still, it is heartening that this book was published in English, ensuring that it is more likely to reach an international academic audience. As a result, no reviewer should quibble with the odd lapse in English grammar, although the publisher might have invested a little more care in proof reading the final text. The high-quality finish of the final product, including the excellent pictorial materials and heavy paper, nevertheless, ensure that it is a very readable volume.

Maartje Abbenhuis, University of Auckland