

A high-contrast, black and white close-up portrait of a man's face. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a serious, intense expression. His right hand is pressed against his forehead, with fingers spread. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows on the right side of his face and bright highlights on the left. The background is solid black.

**NYU
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**MILO RAU & EDOUARD LOUIS
THE INTERROGATION
MARCH 26-28
NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE**

THE INTERROGATION

Text **Édouard Louis & Milo Rau**

Direction **Milo Rau**

Performance **Arne De Tremerie**

Dramaturgy **Carmen Hornbostel**

Assistant Director **Giacomo Bisordi**

& François Pacco (On Tour)

Technical Direction **Jens Baudisch**

Lighting Design **Dennis Diels**

& Ulrich Kellermann (On Tour)

Production Management **Mascha Euchner-Martinez**

Translation **Erik Borgman & Kaatje De Geest**

The Interrogation is a production of the International Institute of Political Murder (IIPM) in co-production with Kunstenfestivaldesarts, NTGent & International Theatre Amsterdam ITA.

Duration: 65 min

WHO'S WHO

Édouard Louis is the author of four novels, *The End of Eddy*, *History of Violence*, *Who Killed My Father*, and *Struggles and Metamorphosis of a Woman*. He is also, with Thomas Ostermeier, the co-author of the play *At the Heart of Violence* and the editor of a book on the social scientist Pierre Bourdieu. He is a translator of the Canadian poet Anne Carson and he regularly collaborates with artists, such as Ken Loach, James Ivory, Stanislas Nordey, and now Milo Rau. He considers literature as a weapon. His books have been translated into thirty languages and have made him one of the most celebrated writers of his generation.

Milo Rau, born 1977 in Bern, is the artistic director of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna. Critics call him the "most influential" (*Die Zeit*), "most interesting" (*De Standaard*), "most controversial" (*La Repubblica*), "most scandalous" (*The New York Times*) or "most ambitious" (*The Guardian*) artist of our time. The director and author has published over 50 plays, films, books and actions. His theatre productions have been shown at all major international festivals, including the Berlin Theatertreffen, the Festival d'Avignon, the Venice Biennale, the Vienna Festival and the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels, and have been touring in over 30 countries worldwide. From 2018 to 2024 Milo Rau was Artistic Director of NTGent, Belgium.

ÉDOUARD LOUIS & MILO RAU DISCUSS ART, LIBERATION AND AN AESTHETICS OF MELANCHOLY

Carmen Hornbostel: Let me ask you first the most obvious question: how did your collaboration start?

Milo Rau: Oh, we've asked ourselves that, too ... There are, as with every friendship, many different beginnings. Édouard had seen some of my plays, and of course I knew his books. A few years ago, before the pandemic, we were both independently of each other asked if we wanted to do a play together. Since we appreciated each other very much, we immediately said yes.

Édouard Louis: There have already been so many adaptations of my plays — in one I even play myself, *Who Killed My Father* — that it was immediately clear that we wanted to do something completely new. A new piece that emerges from our encounter. Because of Covid, there were then all kinds of formats: first a play, then a film, in which Isabelle Huppert should have played my mother and Wajdi Mouawad my father. And at one point I wanted to cancel everything, I was afraid of being on stage, and I wrote Milo an email — that's where *The Interrogation* now begins. But that same evening I met Isabelle and she told me: "You can't do that! You have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to work with Milo Rau, you won't miss it!" (laughs)

The title *The Interrogation* suggests a search. What are you searching for in the play?

MR: When doing theatre, I always search for a necessity: Why and for what do we make this piece? Why do we need theatre — and not film, literature, a political campaign? Édouard and I, we are friends for some time, we discuss a lot ... Why not just friendship? In your work as a writer, Édouard, it's interesting how you use your life, how you interrogate your biography to understand our time. Your novels are perfect, they are complete in themselves. Why would I stage them? So the question of the whole play is: Is there, in theatre, another liberation, another possibility of reflection, another (physical) concreteness than in writing? Asking this simple question, of course a kind of an *argumentum ad infinitum* starts. Why are we doing theatre, why am I telling what I am telling? Can we escape our biography, the system we are in? Or are we only reproducing it? Where did all this start? And is there an exit?

ÉL: We need an interrogation on the realities that surround us. The big paradox with reality is, that we are built by it. Our very flesh, our very skin, our very language, our way of walking, of watching is built by a reality that started before us. We are like fragments of reality and at the same time, reality is the hardest thing to see and to change. Therefore, in politics or in the arts — I don't make any difference there — the purpose is to interrogate what surrounds us. That's

what we are exploring in *The Interrogation*: What is this violent reality that built us? What are our hopes? Why do we have them and where do they come from? How do we revolt against it, by inventing ourselves? Can we escape reality?

MR: Yes. *The Interrogation* is an extremely simple play, exposing the “Édouard Louis” method and/or the “Milo Rau” method, so to say. To question and to deconstruct it. Yes, we try to deconstruct the myth of realness, of individuality, of authenticity, of liberation through art itself.

ÉL: Absolutely. In art we try to grasp the reality, but it’s never over. There is no “end” in the play, not towards the reasons for violence, not towards a possible liberation of it. There are so many things that we don’t understand, that we don’t control, that we miss. That we simply can’t describe.

How to describe violence — if the victims themselves try to hide it, because they are ashamed? Can art change reality?

ÉL: We know that art has changed some people’s life, that many people have been liberated by books. There is a potential liberating effect in art. People come together — not necessarily to change the whole reality at this very moment like a social or political movement. But art can create a collective symbolically. Often, we just don’t recognize collectives as collectives because they are made out of, let’s say, a superposition of loneliness. But at the same time — and that’s why we need to interrogate art — we feel the hopelessness of arts. I know so many people who went to see a movie by Ken Loach or the Dardenne brothers. They were so moved by what they have seen: by the poverty and the exclusion that the people in the film suffer from. But they still vote for right wing parties, they still support conservative policies. I think, our play is also navigating between those two realities: the powerlessness and the power of art, of performance, to change an individual and a collective reality.

MR: We had a film, *The New Gospel*, which was cast amongst African illegal farmworkers in South Italy. I was constantly campaigning so that people would donate for the linked campaign, to house people, to give them documents. So for me, the movie is an artwork in the sense that it’s actually a tool to house people, to give them papers, to become citizens instead of slaves. To get proper shelter as well as to promote fairtrade products and build sustainable relationship to local activists. I am not a pessimist: You can use art to structurally and sustainably change the basic relations that link people. But I think there is also a place to question art, the act of art, the act of representation. There is a dialectic between the meta- and the sub-level, art as social change and art as questioning the act or representing itself. Both things are linked. In *The Interrogation*, the idea of “change” and of it’s impossibility are linked in a very personal and vulnerable way. The play starts with a mail of Édouard saying: “I’m here on stage and I don’t want to be here. I’m tired of this eternal search of presence, of freedom, of myself. I’m tired of being an artist.”

ÉL: It’s very true. Before starting this play with you Milo, I have been writing a lot about social violence and destruction. *Who Killed My Father*, *History of Violence*, *The End of Eddy* — all these titles are already so violent. Now, it was logic to me to go a step further and to do a play about the vulnerability of this very act, about the melancholy of this fight. The melancholy that always comes with political or existential struggle: Why do I always have to fight? Why do I have to be all the time on stage? Why can I not just be happy, disappear behind the scene? I think that the existence of constant fighting, the exhaustion of struggling, creates a new political vocabulary that is not less real in people’s flesh. *The Interrogation* is not a political play in the classic sense, it’s a show full of beauty, full of silence, of longing, of absence, of sadness — because those are political emotions. Of course, politics means policies, governments, legislations, campaigning and everything. But these emotions are also part of it. To open a new political vocabulary, that’s what we can maybe do with arts and what we try to do with this monologue. Because it’s very difficult to go on the street and to demonstrate for the right of vulnerability.

MR: Yes, you name it: the stage as a place to demonstrate for vulnerability. *The Interrogation* is a kind of an entr’acte, a moment of standstill, of solipsistic interrogation: After all, who are we? Who did we become by fighting? We have this big black space — the “stage” — and there is only this person, there is Édouard. Vulnerable, alone. Plus some sounds, some music. Yes, it’s a deeply melancholic play, a fragmentary play, a tender play. I think it’s the opposite of what in a bourgeois sense you would call “political.” But we both needed not another “political” play, as we see so many on our stages since decades, we needed to stand still and describe the melancholy of the fight itself. Why is there always another end to the story? The Golden City on the hill, why doesn’t it exist?

Édouard, you are one of the most successful authors of your generation, your books brought up social discussions. What do you need theatre for now? What is the difference, your hope in theatre in comparison to literature?

ÉL: It’s exactly what I say in the *Why Theatre?* book: What makes theatre particularly powerful is, that people are there in front of you. It’s not like a book that you can put down. You are in a room, perhaps you are terrified, you are bored, but there is no escape. And the other reason is much simpler: Theatre is a place to escape literature. I feel that I am, despite myself, part of something — you called it the “Édouard Louis story,” right? And as soon as I’m part of something, I want to be part of something else and run away.

MR: Yes. Like all of us. And of course, this is a story we’re going to tell in *The Interrogation* as well.

DIG DEEPER: THE INTERROGATION

NYU Skirball's Prep Schools are online study guides that deepen your engagement with the performance. For *The Interrogation*, we brought together curated readings, interviews, and contextual materials that illuminate the questions at the heart of the work. Scan the QR code to explore the ideas behind the production.



THE INTERROGATION PREP SCHOOL

ABOUT NYU SKIRBALL

NYU Skirball is a leading center for contemporary performance and ideas, where world-class artistry, intellectual inquiry, and civic engagement converge. Presenting bold theater, innovative dance, adventurous music, and timely conversations, Skirball serves as a vital platform for artists who expand the boundaries of form and meaning, and for audiences eager to engage work of depth, rigor, and relevance. Each season reflects a commitment to artistic excellence, risk-taking, and cultural impact.

Beyond the stage, Skirball advances a distinctive model of engagement that connects performance to scholarship and public discourse. Through curated study guides, artist and faculty dialogues, archival projects, post-performance conversations, and symposia, we foster sustained encounters with the work — inviting audiences to deepen understanding, ask difficult questions, and participate in the life of ideas.

NYU SKIRBALL FUNDING

NYU Skirball's programs are made possible in part with support from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature; and the Howard Gilman Foundation; Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels; Culture Ireland; The Shubert Foundation; Collins Building Services; General Delegation of the Government of Flanders to the USA; Goethe Institut New York with support from the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany; Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation; Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation; New England Foundation for the Arts; Harkness Foundation for Dance; and Marta Heflin Foundation; as well as our valued donors through memberships, commissioning, and Allies for Arts Access Fund support.



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