



THÉÂTRE
DE LIÈGE



FAMILIE

Milo Rau / NTGent

Samedi 5 et dimanche 6 mars

SALLE DE LA GRANDE MAIN



1h30

En 2007, les corps d'une famille ont été retrouvés pendus dans leur demeure du Pas-de-Calais. De nature effacée et affable, les parents et leurs deux enfants ont remis la maison en ordre et laissé ce mot laconique "On a trop déconné, pardon...". Si l'affaire a été classée, le mystère demeure entier sur leur mobile. Après avoir enquêté dans l'entourage de la famille française et questionné leur propre histoire, c'est sous la houlette du metteur en scène Milo Rau que les comédiens An Miller et Filip Peeters (couple à la ville) rejouent une fin de journée familiale ordinaire qui pourrait être la leur. En compagnie de leurs deux filles et leurs chiens, chacun vaque à ses occupations, pendant que les frontières entre la représentation et le fait divers se floutent, jusqu'à l'irréparable. Après *Five Easy Pieces* et *La Reprise*, *Famille* est l'ultime volet du triptyque que Milo Rau consacre à la banalité de la violence dans une Europe avachie dans son propre cul-de-sac. Le directeur du NTGent éprouve les pouvoirs d'exorcisme du théâtre, nous plaçant face à cet observatoire anthropologique de la vie contemporaine sans idéal et sans avenir, qui semble nous hurler de réagir dans son déchirant silence.

Teaser : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDsg6cvZmLM>

PRESSE

Comme à son habitude, Milo Rau en portant ce drame à la scène, mêle réalité et fiction. Le coup de génie fut d'avoir trouvé un couple d'acteurs, An Miller et Filip Peeters et leurs deux filles, Léonce, 14 ans et Louisa, 15 ans (révélation du spectacle), tous formidables de justesse et d'émotion pour rejouer à leur manière cette tragédie »

Guy Duplat, *La Libre*, janvier 2020

Une ode à la vie qui veut que pour grandir l'on doive, quoi qu'il en coûte, accepter, tel un rite de passage, de faire le deuil de la présence des siens.

Patrick Sourd, *Les Inrocks*, septembre 2020

Quand l'effroyable renverse le banal : dans «Famille», le directeur du théâtre de Gand met en scène une vraie famille pour rejouer un fait divers irrésolu, la pendaison des quatre Demeester, dans le Calaisis en 2007.

Eve Beauvallet, *Libération*, janvier 2020



MILO RAU

Milo Rau, né à Berne, dirige le NTGent depuis la saison 2018-2019. Il étudie la sociologie et la littérature à Paris, Berlin et Zurich avec Pierre Bourdieu et Tzvetan Todorov, entre autres. Ses productions sont présentées dans les grands festivals internationaux – le Berlin Theatertreffen, le Festival d'Avignon, la Biennale de Venise, le Kunstenfestivaldesarts (Bruxelles) – et tournent dans plus de trente pays à travers le monde. Parmi ses récentes réalisations : *Hate Radio* (2011), la trilogie *The Civil Wars* (2014), *The Dark Ages* (2015) et *Empire* (2016), *Das Kongo Tribunal* (2015), *Five Easy Pieces* (2016), *Lam Gods* (2018). Il a notamment été récompensé par le Prix Peter Weiss, le Saarbrücken Poetry Lectureship for Drama, le Prix ITI de la Journée mondiale du théâtre ou encore le European Theatre Prize. Il a reçu le premier doctorat honorifique du département Théâtre de l'Université de Lund (Suède). Milo Rau est également critique de télévision et écrivain, et enseigne la mise en scène, la théorie culturelle et la sculpture sociale dans les universités et les écoles d'art.



APPLICATION

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AN EXHIBITION OF OUR ZEITGEIST

An interview with director Milo Rau | Interview: Carmen Hornbostel | Translation: Helen White

***Familie* tells the story of a family's collective suicide and their last evening together. Aren't families the embodiment of life and the hope that life will continue?**

Yes, they are. I have two daughters myself, and there is something you find in a family that you don't find anywhere else: a kind of homeland, perhaps even meaning. Becoming a parent is like an emotional homecoming after a long time in exile. And that is exactly why every family is also the site of many disappointments: children grow up and at some point they leave home. Or – and of course this is one of the issues in the family in our play, in which both parents are very successful actors – the parents don't have enough time for their children and then blame themselves when it is too late.

As Tolstoy writes: 'All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' The play is based on a true case: the Demeester family from Calais in northern France, near the Belgian border. Why exactly did you opt for this case, a very mysterious one at that?

THE INEXPLICABLE WAS WHAT INTERESTED US

We looked into a whole lot of different stories. The focal point is usually a separation, followed by depression and all kinds of disillusionments. And at the end, one of the parents murders the children, by way of revenge or as a kind of misdirected altruism. In fact all these family tragedies are very similar: there is always a psychological explanation, and of course it would be possible to re-enact that on stage. But what interested us was the inexplicable, this stark 'why?' No one in the Demeester family had psychiatric or financial problems, nobody was coping with illness or using drugs; there was no separation or desire for revenge. One evening these four people simply decided to end their lives. They wrote an absolutely minimal suicide note: 'We've messed up too much.' And then the parents and their two children hanged themselves at the porch. It's a complete mystery.

In the play, you work with the Peeters-Miller family: two famous Belgian actors and their two teenage daughters. What does this family stand for? Is it representative in any way?

It's an ideal family for what we are doing. They are about as happy as an average family, with the problems we are all familiar with. The parents are middle class, with good careers as television and theatre actors, and the children go to a good school. They experience the usual conflicts in their respective roles as a wife, father or daughter. It is precisely because the case of the Demeester family is reflected in a family that probably most theatregoers can identify with, that we can avoid the sensational when we investigate the conflicts between the desire for independence and the fear of loneliness, between self-empowerment and reliance on others.

After all, my plays are always based on a sense of normality: in the 'Europa Trilogie' I tell the story of violence in Europe from the perspective of completely average European citizens, and in 'Five Easy Pieces' we see the case of the murderer Dutroux through the eyes of Belgian children. *Familie* works the same way. We see a completely normal family telling us about themselves and we witness their final evening. I believe the Peeters-Miller family is genuinely typical of the middle class in Western Europe today. In other words: they live with exactly the same contradictions as all of us.

What do you mean specifically by that?

They have two cars and a big house, they consume too much, travel too much, live at the expense of future generations and of course at the expense of the third world. They love each other, but they are often unable to express their love the way they would like to. The everyday lives of two star actors are simply too hectic, for example, which is why the children are at boarding school.

And the two teenage daughters ask all the questions that teenagers inevitably ask: do I want to live the way my parents do? What am I supposed to do with my life? And why are we alive at all? People of that age are very preoccupied by the existential, of course, full of doubts and full of self-confidence at the same time, which is also why the play focuses more on the daughters than on the parents. After all, very young people live and think as if they were the first people ever, but also the last, which is really interesting. But – as with the Demeesters – in spite of all their doubts and disappointments, there is absolutely no pressing reason for them to kill themselves.

Merely this existential feeling that something is slipping away from them, that they have not lived and are not living the way they imagined they would.

‘THAT EXISTENTIAL FEELING THAT SOMETHING IS SLIPPING AWAY,
THAT YOU HAVE NOT LIVED THE WAY YOU IMAGINED YOU WOULD’

And of course it’s not ‘just’ about the Peeters-Millers or the Demeesters; it also has to do with the fundamental feeling of our time: that we have ‘messed up too much’ as a species, that we have not lived our lives the way we should have done. So to a certain extent the Peeters-Miller family is the ideal family to present this metaphysical suicidality of Western civilisation. If this family, with its little problems – a family that is actually completely content – could commit suicide, everyone should actually commit suicide.

Last season you made *Orestes in Mosul*, in which you examined the ongoing chain of revenge in a global context, staging the production in the former capital of the kaliphath of ISIS. After that you created *The New Gospel*, a movie about the passion of Christ, for which you worked with refugees in South Italy. This autumn you are staging in the Brazilian Amazon Sophocles’ *Antigone*, together with the landless movement and indigenous activists. These are all huge, political projects. In all three you point out the disproportions of our world. Why did you want to an intimate play about a normal and happy, western, middle class family?

Especially in the context of the great ancient texts I’m working with – Aeschylus, Sophocles, the New Testament – the analysis of the Western middle class makes sense to me. ‘The earth is desecrated by its inhabitants,’ the Bible says, ‘Its inhabitants have made themselves guilty.’ It might seem strange to shoot an activist film about Jesus with refugees and slave labourers in Italy or to stage an Antigone in the middle of the burning Amazon, while parallelly working on a small-scale ‘theatre essay’ like. But I realised that they belong together: the big and the small stories, private life and large-scale politics. After all, these refugees and farm workers are only slaves because we consume the way we do and live the way we live. And it doesn’t even make us happy.

Statistically speaking, the world’s population is growing by 2.5 people every second. It is not clear how we are going to meet those people’s basic needs, dispose of their waste and reduce their CO2 footprint. Is there any justification left at all for having children? Is there still a way out or is our situation hopeless?

Of course anti-natalism would be the easiest way out: if humanity were to disappear, the planet would no longer have a problem. I believe that today’s generation of children and teenagers are the first to grow up with this idea: that objectively speaking, every human being is one too many and that the future will be worse rather than better. Of course that is in the play too: the two narrators are the Peeters children. Teenagers wonder anyway about what it is all for. It’s an age when you’re between childhood and adulthood, when you lose the homeland of your family but haven’t yet found a new place for yourself. At the same time, the lessons of the past no longer help.

Asking about the meaning of life is one thing. It’s a whole different thing for a family to discuss it on stage with reference to a case that ended in a collective suicide. Why did you cast a ‘real’ family in this play, and such a happy and famous one?

Franz Xaver Kroetz’s *Wunschkonzer* – a play from the early seventies, in which a lonely secretary commits suicide – was the start of a genre that focuses on depressed people, usually from a minority, who kill themselves at home. I wanted to stage a play that would pick up on this idea but go deeper, both philosophically and formally. That meant working with people whose stage performances are genuinely rooted in their own lives. For the Peeters-Miller family, this is an incredibly courageous step to take and one that we greatly admire. But *Familie* is also quite radical in terms of its formal setting: we watch a family eating, taking showers, learning English and watching films. We see them talking about everyday things, making phone calls, listening to music, tidying up and so on. In a sense it is *Waiting for Godot*, but without the existential buffoonery and lofty flights of philosophy: it all plays out in the middle-class banality of our time. What interested us was to portray this nihilistic, melancholic, even suicidal Zeitgeist almost ethnologically, in a glass box.

You have often worked with mixed casts of professional actors and amateurs. But this is the first time you've worked with a family. What made that special for you? And could you detach yourself from your experiences in your own family during the rehearsal process, or did those experiences help you?

I really learned a lot! As a director you express yourself through other people, and as I said, the Peeters-Miller family is a lot like my own, except that they are all a little bit older. That made the production a bit like a glimpse of the immediate future for me: what happens to a family when the children reach puberty, how you start saying goodbye to each other in a certain sense although you belong together forever. On the other hand, 'Familie' is a play about the artistic bourgeoisie as a whole, a kind of social commentary on our time of helplessness in which the formulas for progress, success and capitalism have reached a dead end. And it is also about ultimate questions: why exactly are we humans even here? Why do we cling to life so hard, although we will inevitably get old and die, although we are quite objectively the problem and not the solution? In that sense, Familie is also a play about carrying on regardless: Let us live, let us make a home for ourselves in this wonderful world, together and in spite of everything!

'LET US LIVE!'

Concept et mise en scène Milo Rau

Avec An Miller, Filip Peeters, Leonce Peeters, Louisa Peeters

Texte Milo Rau et les interprètes

Dramaturgie Carmen Hornbostel

Décors Anton Lukas

Costumes Anton Lukas, Louisa Peeters

Vidéo Moritz von Dungern

Arrangements musicaux Saskia Venegas Aernouts

Lumières Dennis Diels

Coach Peter Seynaeve

Assistante mise en scène Liesbeth Standaert

Assistante dramaturgie Eline Banken

Production Els Jacxsens

Production technique et régisseur Chris Vanneste

Construction des décors Thierry Dhondt, Luc Goedertier, Flup Beys, Joris Soenen, Pierre Keulemans,
Bart Stalmans, Ramon Blancquaert

Création des costumes An De Mol, Mieke Vander Cruyssen, Café Costume

Techniciens Sander Michiels, Frederik Vanslembrouck, Raf Willems

Sous-titres Eline Banken, Liesbeth Standaert

Remerciements Café Costume, Stuntteam de Beukelaer, Marie Goudeseune, Cédric Cerbana, Luk Poppe,
Leen Bollaert, Moira Verhofstadt, Ghent Marriott Hotel

Production NTGent

Coproduction Romaeuropa Festival ; Künstlerhaus Mousonturm (Francfort) ; Schauspiel Stuttgart ;

Théâtre de Liège ; Scène Nationale d'Albi

Coréalisation Nanterre-Amandiers, centre dramatique national ; Festival d'Automne à Paris

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