

Interview with Can Dündar during the rehearsal of “Verräter”

“I love writing. Writing is my harbour, my survival.”

WLT: How did you like the first days of rehearsals with Christian and the actors?

Can Dündar: So moving, really exciting. I was excited before I came here because I was expecting this. I was so curious to meet the actors and actresses and to be part of this play, which is very important for me.

WLT: You became part of the team immediately and worked very intensively with the director and the ensemble. What did they ask you about?

Can Dündar: Well, if you are playing Shakespeare or Molière, of course you have to stick to the text. You can't ask the writer, what was his feeling while writing the text. But for the actors and actresses now, with me, it's easier to check the feelings, the situation, the anger, my psychology. The writer and the text are here, so that's why they are asking. They are trying to clarify or crystalize my character, my behaviour, the reasons for my decisions, my sadness, my joy, whatever...

I'm sincerely sharing those feelings with them, but not only me. Just yesterday they met with my wife via Skype, faced with her and asked their questions to her. It's a very good opportunity for us, what I guess for them as well, because they had the chance to face with the *real* actors and actresses.

WLT: That's a good point. Maybe it's easier for them to create on stage the characters of your book, but at the same time, I can image, the pressure is bigger because they want to fulfil your expectations.

Can Dündar: Yes! I can totally understand that feeling. That's why I tried to tell them at the beginning, that I'm not here to check, I just want to enjoy. I know that a play is different than a book or than life itself. It should be. So I respect that as I respect the script, the director and the artists.

WLT: That's right. Theatre can definitely express other things than a film or a book.

Can Dündar: Yes, the director has the right to see it differently than the author.

WLT: Talking about the play, what do you think about the stage design? You already told me that you liked the idea of the cage representing a bird cage and a prison at the same time. Does it represent your feelings living in exile?

Can Dündar: I love the idea because it's like the prison in Turkey, where I was, but at the same time it shows that I feel like in a golden prison in Berlin, in a free country and in a free city. That's important. But more than this, I see the whole humanity in a cage nowadays, in today's world, because of the dangers, the fears, the dictators and the populist movements. They are all trying to push us in a cage, without knowing it. Many people are trying to hide in a cage or they have difficulties to leave the cage. Or they are forced to be in a cage. Like the refugees, who are trying to get out of the cage. It's a global issue. So that's why I love the idea of the stage. If you can see it like this, it is not my story, but rather a global one.

WLT: Even if your story is special, you told us that you are only an example for many other journalists. You don't want to be seen as a victim. Why is this so important to you?

Can Dündar: I never regret what I've done. In the first rehearsal day, I asked the whole team what the audience would expect from this play and what kind of a feeling we want to evoke in the end. It shouldn't be pity or sadness; it should be hope, the power of resistance, importance of solidarity... It's true that so many bad things are going on in the world, like journalists are suffering, dictators are coming and populist movements are rising. But we have the power to resist, if we come together. That should be the message of our play.

WLT: So that's what you like to tell the spectators?

Can Dündar: If this play will get the chance to be on stage in a school, I would like to tell the young students, that one person has the power to change the world. Even when they are alone in a prison cell like me. That's the feeling I am looking for.

WLT: I was very impressed when we met for the first time and you showed us the video of your project with the Royal Shakespeare Company. When you were in prison in Turkey everything was grey and dark, but then by painting with the juice of the peel of apples and oranges you made your world colourful again.

Can Dündar: Yeah that's it. That's the feeling we should convey to the others.

WLT: That's why I love working at the theatre because with projects like "Verräter" you can give a voice to people like you and tell your story to so many people.

Can Dündar: Yes. In fact, there are so many problems and there will be more problems. We are not in the best period of the human history. Maybe just the other way around, the situation is getting worse day by day. So we must be prepared for a resistance. I'm just trying to share my experience of how we can resist. With your family, with your job, with yourself. Even if you are unable to talk to anyone in a prison cell, you can do something. That's the message I want to give.

WLT: I guess that sometimes you feel sad or alone. How do you stay positive?

Can Dündar: When I feel depressed or down, I read history books or biographies. They make me happy, they make me stand up. They remind me that I'm not the first and I will not be the last person, who lives such a collapse. There has been so many people throughout the history, threatened, attacked, jailed, sent to exile or even killed, but they were brave enough to challenge it. Without struggle, you cannot achieve anything. Nowadays we don't name leaders like Hitler, Stalin or Erdoğan with respect. But what about Che Guevara, Atatürk or Nelson Mandela? Thanks to their courage and their struggle, today we are living partly in a free world.

WLT: Society tends to remember the negative parts of history. Here in Germany, looking at the AfD, we say "History is repeating". But listening to you, we should never lose hope.

Can Dündar: Everything depends on your point of view, on how you see the world. Couple of months ago, there was an AfD meeting in Berlin, but at the same time there were seven other demonstrations against it. You have to see the whole picture. That may make you more

optimistic. It's not easy to be optimistic, you need more effort, but it's worth it. Don't forget that once there was a wall in Berlin, separating the nation, the friends and the families, but as you saw even the strongest walls can be fallen. Therefore, history books are so important to me because they show me how darkness can be turned into light.

WLT: Talking about Turkey and Erdoğan. What do you think about the current situation? Do you think it might change soon?

Can Dündar: It depends on our struggle. I don't think that some aliens from the space will come and take Erdoğan into another planet. That would be nice, but it won't happen. So it depends on our struggle. I'm sure he will go. In Turkey, at least half of the people are resisting against him and I'm sure we will overcome this aggression. But of course we need to fight for it.

WLT: Christian told me that it was very important for you that your wife Dilek will be one focus of the play. Why is that?

Can Dündar: Usually the attention is on me. In fact, she deserves more care because she has worked and sacrificed a lot during this struggle. She suffered more than me. She is the hero behind the story. Thanks to the play and to Christian that there will be more light on her now. At the moment she is suffering a lot, but we are a bit shy to express this because there are so many people suffering in jail. We have to defend them. But thanks to this play we can show what our family has been going through; it's a great opportunity. I'm very thankful to Christian for giving my wife a place in his play.

WLT: She probably is very excited about the project, too?

Can Dündar: Oh yes. She talked to the actors and actresses via Skype and was very excited about it. She always asked me what to say, what to answer. You can imagine, we are not together as a family, but with his play Christian helps us to reunite – at least on the stage.

WLT: A last question. What are your current projects here in Germany?

Can Dündar: I'm still writing for my column in "Die Zeit". I also write for the website of the Maxim Gorki Theatre and I make videos for Cosmo, doing documentaries for ARTE and ZDF. Furthermore, I have two book projects. I love writing. Writing is my harbour, my survival. When I have a pen and a paper, everything is possible. I don't feel insecure.