

Interview with Can Dündar

"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.