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The world premiere of “Yala Ama Yutma” (Lick But Don’t Swallow) written by Turkish playwright and director Özen Yula and produced by an independent theatre has been targeted by religious fundamentalist newspaper “Vakit” and its readers. The genre of the play is fantastic realism and involves a woman who upon her death becomes an angel and is sent back to earth as a porn star. Though it is a comedy Yala Ama Yutma addresses issues of human rights, women’s rights, and economic disparity both in Turkey and throughout the world.

Vakit has made factually incorrect and libelous statements about the authorship of the play, the producer of the play and the intent of the play. Vakit’s website includes posts which are dangerous and which appear to be inciting others to violence and criminal action. The venue Kumbaracı50 that is rented by the independent theatre group had been receiving threatful phone calls and emails from unknown callers, which have referred to Vakit’s inaccurate statements. On February 8, Kumbaracı50 has been closed down by officials of Beyoglu district. The reason given for the closure was the absence appropriate fire escape. Many newspapers and theatrical circles joined together to protest the condition and the news of “Vakit.” On February 9, the mayor of Beyoglu has announced that he is supporting the independent theatre and their play “Lick But Don’t Swallow”. He also claimed that the venue will be open after they had their fire escape completed. He also announced that if the fire escape cannot be completed in time, he will provide a suitable venue for the production. However, threatening commentaries are continuing on some websites and a provocative propaganda against the play are being created in these websites by mostly anonymous guest writers. The future of the play is still uncertain because of the growing potential for violence, the loss of valuable rehearsal time, and the financial costs of disrupted production.

Özen Yula states the following

1. Yala Ama Yutma is an artistic expression and calls for human rights and social justice.
2. Yala Ama Yutma is not a commentary on Islam and is not speaking against Islam or any religion.
3. Yala Ama Yutma should be given the full opportunity to be judged based on its artistic merit through an unimpeded production.
4. Vakit has made incorrect statements about Yala Ama Yutma and about this specific production of the play.
5. Vakit continues to support violence and intimidation through posting comments on its website and continuing to publish incorrect and mean-spirited articles about Yula and the play.
6. Freedom of Speech is an essential human right that should be protected by governments. Violence towards freedom of speech should not be tolerated.

ÖZEN YULA

Özen Yula was born in 1965 in Eskisehir, Turkey. Completed his senior year at the high school in Albany, Oregon. He completed his graduate studies on Economics and his postgraduate studies on Drama at Ankara University. His books were printed since 1993. Short story collections, novels, essays and 18 plays were printed by well-known publishing houses. His plays have been translated to English, German, French, Italian, Finnish, Polish,

Bulgarian, Bosnian, Japanese, Arabic. Different productions were shown in England, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Bosnia, Cyprus, Egypt, Japan. He got several Theatre Awards as the best playwright including the prestigious Afife Jale twice.

His reading theatre performances or theatrical performances were held in Chartreuse-Avignon, Theater Scahubuehne am Lehniner Platz-Berlin, Theater Weimar-Malmö, Municipal Theatres-Cyprus, Mauro Avogadro Company-Torino, Teatro di Rifredi-Florence, Martin E. Segal Theatre-New York, Teatro di Rifredi-Florence, Zenica State Theatre-Bosnia, Theatre Frankfurt-Frankfurt, Kellertheater Winterthur-Switzerland, Maison des Metallos-Paris. He worked as a co-playwright for several international projects including Free Theatre-Minsk, Schaubuehne am Lehniner Platz-Berlin.

His plays are being performed by National Theatres, Municipal Theatres, University Theatres and private companies all around Turkey.

Also as a playwright and director his plays were shown in last Bonner Biennale in Germany, kontext:europa in Wien, Istanbul International Theatre Festival, Toga Festival in Japan, Cairo International Experimental Theatre Festival, Turkish-Holland Theatre Meeting in Amsterdam. Several thesis have been written on his theatre in different universities in Turkey and Europe. He lives in Istanbul and Ankara, working as a free-lance director and playwright. He is currently Artist in Residence at Cleveland Public Theatre and Guest Lecturer at Cleveland State University in Cleveland, Ohio, United States, where he is developing two world premiere plays.