

BIROL ÜNEL - THE CRASH (an excerpt)

An Interview by Robert Rigney

(...) **Miron Zownir:** Birol was really a legend. Birol always told me, years before I went to Istanbul, that he would love to do a documentary about the homeless kids in Istanbul. Him and a friend of his and me - we were supposed to go to Istanbul and work on this film. But this was at a time when Birol couldn't have done anything on his own account, organizing anything. For most people it was even impossible to cast him in a film because he was completely alcoholic. He was anti basically everything. But I was lucky that he really believed in my work. It was tough to work with him, but I knew how to handle him. But the plan was too ambitious. I would have had to pick him up at seven o'clock in the morning. Then at nine and ten we would have to do the filming. But by noon, Birol would be already on his seventh or eighth bottle of beer. It was hopeless. I knew that it would have been impossible to deal with Birol on that level, because you would have to bring everything and drag him from here to there and be his bodyguard and babysitter. It was more than I could deal with. It was tough enough for me to do two films with him in Berlin.

Birol was at Sternchen in Mitte, reading my poems. But every fucking sentence he started I had to correct him because he was so drunk. And at some point, he even fell off the chair, and they had to stop it. There were relatives of his and his son in the audience. It was such a fucking flop. At the end of it I said: "Look, no reason to be frustrated. We are going to make a film out of this." And that's exactly what I did. The film was called *Absturz*.

When he had money Birol would be constantly giving it away. But when he had nothing, he would do anything for a euro. He had no problem asking or taking. I saw him treating waiters like they were shit. I saw him getting excited about things, almost attacking women. And the next moment he would give a little Gypsy kid his last cent. He was very temperamental and erratic. Basically, yes, he was a good-hearted person, but he could be poisonous. If he didn't like someone, he didn't care, he would smash him. He intentionally fucked up everything.

Birol was supposed to play the bad guy in a James Bond film. And he would show up completely drunk with his girlfriend, who was pushing him to make more money, more money. He must have been so outrageous, that they said in the end, "Fuck you. Do you think that we need you? We are trying to do you a favor." He closed every fucking door. *"Every open door, I will bang shut, because it bugs me to eat out of a golden bowl."* This was his attitude. For some people he was an asshole, and for others he was a saint. Ha,ha. That was Birol. But I respected. I didn't take any fucking shit from him. I knew how to deal with him. I respected him, he respected me. I don't think we ever got into a fight.

Birol, unfortunately, doesn't mean anything to Americans, but he was a big name for European insiders. Turkish people knew him. Even your run-of-the-mill Turkish housewife knew about Birol Ünel. Every Turk, didn't matter if he had a döner shop or a newspaper stand, knew Birol. He was a big shot for them. And Birol played it up. When he was in Kreuzberg everyone had to kiss his ass. And they did.

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