



Bruno: Some Dare Call It Art

Cohen, known for doing mock interviews as the characters Ali G and Borat Sagdiyev, has always specialized in outrageous, often politically incorrect humor. In *Bruno*, however, critics tell us that he has created not just the outrageous but an outrage, a movie so vulgar that some wonder how it managed its R-rating.

Given *Bruno's* content, one gets the feeling it is akin to a certain film genre, one in which the plot doesn't really matter. But for those who are interested, here is a synopsis of the plot from family-oriented

[MovieGuide.org](#):



Cohen (BORAT) plays Brüno, an effeminate homosexual fashion designer from Austria who has a TV show called "Funkyzeit" in Germany.

... Brüno gets blacklisted from the fashion industry after wrecking a fashion show by wearing a velcro suit. His male assistant/lover leaves him and his TV show is canceled.

Brüno decides to go to America to seek fame and celebrity. Lutz, his former assistant's assistant who loves Brüno, follows him. Among the things he tries are acting, his own pornographic Cable TV fashion show, a modeling/acting agency, and non-profit work. Many of these attempts involve Brüno interacting with, and provoking, real people.

Interestingly, one of these hapless victims is Ron Paul. Cohen [cons the congressman into granting an interview](#) with the ruse that the topic will be Austrian economics. Instead, Cohen exhibits sartorial economy, pulling his pants down during the interview and prompting Paul to make a hasty exit. MovieGuide continues with the plot description:

Brüno finally realizes that all the big male celebrities, like George Clooney and Tom Cruise, are heterosexual. So, he turns away his current homosexual partner Lutz. He also goes to a real Christian pastor and Christian doctor Paul Cameron to get transformed into a heterosexual. He also turns to a heterosexual swingers group and to a group of male Southern hunters to show him how to be a real man.

Everything culminates at an ultimate fighting competition, where a macho Brüno shows up and gets the lower-class Southern crowd to chant, "Straight Pride! Straight Pride!" Lutz, however, has other plans that night for Brüno. His plans finally get Brüno the celebrity and fame for which he has lusted.

As the above indicates, the movie has an agenda. Cohen not only works to inure people to deviance, he also tries to bias the viewer against an eclectic group of enemies, among them Southerners, Christians, Orthodox Jews, and blacks. And while it may seem strange to find all these groups in the same crosshairs, there is method to Cohen's madness (albeit more madness than method), in that these targets share a commonality: opposition to the homosexual agenda. I know — that again. It really is



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high time for a titanic-size walk-in closet.

In *Bruno*, however, nothing is in the closet. Movieguide.org [puts it](#) bluntly, writing, “Cohen’s new mockumentary (or fake documentary), BRÜNO, is worse than any decent human being can imagine. It is full of pornographic images unfit for human consumption.” Now, the review explains these artistic trespasses in painstaking detail, providing a litany of lascivious depictions so numerous that I do believe my eyes literally glazed over reading about them. Here is a sample:

BRÜNO is full of extremely graphic and pornographic sex scenes, including perverse and disgusting homosexual and sado-masochistic practices as well as real men and women having real intercourse. Also, an extensive scene from Brüno’s TV reality show, shown before a small focus group audience of incredulous real people, shows a close-up of, allegedly, Sacha Baron Cohen’s private parts, which he purposely swings back and forth for the camera. There is also a scene of a fully nude blonde woman viciously whipping Cohen as Brüno repeatedly in a private bedroom at the swingers orgy. In that scene, Cohen is only wearing Brüno’s trademark, leopard pattern bikini briefs.

Providing even more bizarre detail at British tabloid *The Sun*, Gordon Smart [writes](#), “The pygmy sex scene [Cohen as Bruno has a pygmy flight attendant boyfriend] is one of the most horrific incidents ever committed to celluloid. I’m talking fire extinguishers, champagne bottles and mechanically adapted fitness equipment.”

Given this content, it’s not surprising that many would lobby authorities to ban the film from their jurisdictions. One of these culture warriors is MovieGuide.org publisher Dr. Ted Baehr, whose publication [tells us](#):

A 2000 Federal Trade Commission study showed that nearly half of all movie theaters in the U.S. actually sell tickets to children and underage teenagers trying to get into an R-rated movie by themselves, without an adult.

"Supreme Court rulings on obscenity allow local, state and federal governments to ban such movies like ‘Brüno,’ or at least restrict them to 17 and over regardless of adult accompaniment," Dr. Baehr added.

Unfortunately — but not surprisingly — these efforts haven’t prevented *Bruno* from enjoying wide distribution and even wider audiences, as the film opened this past weekend and captured the number one box office spot. Regardless, Baehr is correct about obscenity law, and something relating to this bears mentioning.

I would be naïve if I didn’t think that the greater mass of Americans is happy to be titillated by Cohen’s foray into Kinseyville. Yet there are also those who would object to censoring the movie based on what they consider their absolutist position on the First Amendment. Such people often fear that if you stifle one type of “free speech,” you embark upon a slippery slope and others are sure to follow. The truth, however, is just the opposite.

In reality, the Founding Fathers intended for free speech to apply to just that — speech — in particular, the political, religious, and social variety. They never meant for the scope of the First Amendment to be expanded inexorably so as to encompass ever more bizarre forms of “expression.” In fact, the assertion that those 18th-century men would have tolerated the application of it to flag burning and pornography, for instance, is so preposterous that it’s amazing it can be made with a straight face. And to accept this application is to threaten legitimate free speech.



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This is because it adulterates protected speech, and this can bring us to a point at which it will no longer be protected. In other words, if free-speech protections were limited to the all-important categories of political, social, and religious discourse, it would be clear that we were offering a very special protection for a very special reason: the protected is a very special category. But once we lump the frivolous and vulgar in with speech of grave importance, we diminish the latter. We engender disrespect for it. And, then, when this frivolous expression is sometimes censored, what will have happened?

We will have banned “free speech.”

And once this precedent has been set, what type of free speech would be the next shoe to drop?

As for *Bruno*, I wouldn't watch it even if it were truly “free” expression. It's not worth your time any more than your money.



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