

BEVERLY HILLS COP

Directed by Michael Brest
Produced by Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer
Distributed by Paramount Pictures
Released in 1984

Sometimes foulness offends and sometimes it obscures. Cursing can lend to a film a sense of realism, since in real life certain people curse all the time.

Of course, people don't go to the movies for a shot of realism.

As the situation has stood for many years, the choice of curse words depends on the ratings goal. Since producers Simpson and Bruckheimer decided a PG crowd was not their target audience (or, more accurately, target impression) they sought the R (as PG-13 was not yet an option).

In their determination to batter the ratings board with expletives, the producers failed the story. *Beverly Hills Cop* plays much better on television. Here are some examples from the film to show why:

- The guy on the other end of the cigarette deal says "F___ this. Nice doing business with you" when the cops arrive. On television he says, "Uh, nice doing business with you," which is better because it shows some fear of the cops. As it stands in the theatrical release, this guy is not that concerned, his nonchalant attitude indicated by his choice of language.
- Serge and Axel reviewing the \$130,000 piece of art, which is airy and fun on t.v., is rendered coarse when unedited. By having Axel say "Get the f___ out of here" instead of "Get the heck out of here" all sense of whimsy, that innocent Axel is marveling at this strange new world of California wealth, is gone.
- A minute later, Jenny Summers says "F.U." to Axel in response to his mild insult regarding her age. The problem here is that she has got to be the good girl so that Maitland is a threat to her later in the film. This makes her too tough. (And cursing women are not attractive.)
- Axel accosts Victor Maitland in the latter's office and says that Michael Tandino has been killed. Maitland says, with laughably fake concern, "Oh, my God—that's...terrible! On t.v. Axel stays silent, like he's not buying the act, and then Maitland says, "...And?" But in the theatrical release the humor and tension of the exchange is lost because of Axel's own take on the situation—"It's f_____ up."
- When Axel gets thrown out of the window, and the cops drive up to arrest him, he cusses up a storm, which lessens his appearance of innocence. Yes, of course he's frustrated at the treatment he's received, but the point here should be to emphasize the queer injustice of it all. His harangue concludes with, "What's the charge for getting thrown out of a moving vehicle? Jaywalking?" That's where the scene should end, with a joke, but instead we get another, "This is bull s___!"

That kills the joke and also reinforces the idea that Axel is a hoodlum not deserving the police officers' sympathy.

- Soon Axel is discussing these matters with Beverly Hills's finest. Taggart questions what Axel was doing, and Axel is belligerent, repeatedly saying "F.U." until Taggart punches him. On t.v., however, the comment that really gets Taggart mad is Axel's observation that Taggart has "a pig face." Now if that was in the theatrical version, Taggart's anger is more understandable. The repeated F.U.s are just a tired mantra to be professionally dismissed. But if Axel gets really personal, says he looks like a pig, and then, as they're squaring off, yells an F.U., the final curse would come as a hammer blow inciting Taggart's punch to the gut. Because of all the profanity, their exchange doesn't reach its full potential.
- Later that day all three—Taggart, Axel, and Rosewood—find themselves sharing some drinks at a strip bar. A protracted joke about the guys being aroused is not funny and just stretches an already unlikely scenario past its necessary length. The point of the scene has got to be Axel besting the local cops at their own game, not showing the cops' discomfiture.
- Jumping way ahead, when the police converge on the Maitland estate, one brown car is in the mix. It is driven by the brown-suited Lt. Bogomil. On television we see him stoic as he prepares to do battle. But in the theatrical version he says, "Oh, s___!" which makes no sense, because we can't understand what exactly he's upset about. It also shows him kind of frazzled, and the short scene is far more effective with him totally in control, because we can see that he is the man Axel needs to finish off Maitland.

Television broadcasters have less artistic pretensions than filmmakers. Since they don't make the movies being shown, but are merely profiting on them, we can understand why they love to cut. Sometimes they even make films better.

Beverly Hills Cop is a buddy movie with a revenge narrative. The challenge is balancing the fun with the threats to arrive at an appropriate concoction of adventure leavened with humor. The slow-mo instant replay of the fruit truck being hit by the rig, the city bus doing a 360-degree spin in no relation to the truck chase, the double pop on Michael Tandino, and the shots of the topless stripper are all pandering and gratuitous, denying the story a chance for innocence. When Axel goes up against the slick hoods of Victor Maitland, he's assaulting the castle and rescuing the princess. It's an archetypal construct, and the climax comes when Lt. Bogomil, the unknown buddy in this buddy picture, aids Axel in eliminating Victor Maitland in self-defense (Maitland fires first!).

The operating principle for the film should be that Axel Foley, fish-out-of-water, doesn't know how to function socially in Beverly Hills, but he still knows how to be a great cop. And his unorthodox methods, cultivated in a city where fighting crime is more than an intellectual pursuit, produce a comic frission which provides the film with its funniest moments. But,

AN ILLUMINED ILLUSIONS ESSAY BY IAN C. BLOOM

sadly, the fun potential of the film is soured by a despondent cynicism. Overall, the movie is a frustrating near-miss, for all the wrong reasons.