

# Candy Coated Garbage

Irwin Silber

1969

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CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG, a color film in Super-Panavision (sic), produced by Albert R. Broccoli (sic), directed by Ken Hughes, based on a story by Ian Fleming; United Artists (sick).

At this moment long lines of anxious parents are dutifully forming lines at box-offices to buy their expensive reserved-seat tickets to this melange of candy-coated garbage, assuaging their doubts about themselves and their empty lives with the force-fed illusion that they are providing a delicious treat for their offspring.

But despite the tunes (mostly insipid), the dancing (the same old unimaginative choreography), and the color (as phony as ever), the “most fantasmagorical musical entertainment in the history of everything” turns out to be the standard mind-rape the system is always socking to its young in the guise of “family entertainment.” It is as blatant an abuse of the intelligence as a Richard Nixon speech — and equally enjoyable.

One reviews here, not a film, but a system so contemptuous of its citizenry, so cynical in the knowledge of its ability to manipulate taste, that it invests millions of dollars in the production of a demeaning, insulting, anti-human concoction of excrement and feeds it to its own young as a treasured moment of glorious fantasy.

Dick Van Dyke, whose previous television and cinematic accomplishments (he played the chimney-sweep in “Mary Poppins”) would seem to make him the most eminently qualified actor for such a movie, is a poor but eccentric inventor in turn-of-the-century England. He is also, conveniently, a widower and the father of two children.

Sally Ann Howes, under the name Truly Scrumptious (truly!) is the beautiful and conveniently unmarried daughter of blustery (but good-hearted) Lord Scrumptious, conveniently the millionaire owner of a candy factory.

Along about half-way through, maybe 15 minutes before the overdue intermission (empty the bladders and refill the bellies), the film switches to fantasy.

This concerns the Mittel Europa kingdom of Vulgaria whose comic “Deutscher” ruler kidnaps grandpa in the mistaken belief he has abducted Van Dyke. (He wants Dick to make him a fantastic car and to invent some new toys.) Dick and Sally and the kids set out after the Vulgarians in their reconditioned carplane-raft, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. The balance of the fantasy concerns the attempt to liberate grandpa, the stupidities of the Vulgarian court, the oppression of the Vulgarian people, eventually emancipated when Van Dyke leads their outlawed children in revolt.

Then back to “reality” where Sally gets her Dick, the kids get a new “mother,” and Dick gets rich when Daddy Sugarbucks accepts one of his candy inventions as a treat for dogs. And they all live...

We have become so accustomed to such impossible drivel over the years that we tend to take it for granted.

Some works of art help rip away the many masks which capitalism wears. These works document the corruption of our time and the dying of a social system. But films like “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang,” in their own way, tell us at least as much. They are the corruption, the sweet poison of death, expensively and slickly packaged with song and dance, inanity garbed in a Joseph’s coat of many colors. A society which can so poison its own young is indeed overdue for destruction.

In the film, the Vulgarians have “outlawed” children. They even have a “children-catcher” who ferrets out hidden tots and carts them off to some unseen pound for the unwanted. (No Anglo-Saxon culture would go in for such nonsense; it’s those hairy Germanic and Slavic types.)

But what of a society which perpetuates lies to its young? What of a society which imposes the viewpoint of infantile adults on its children? What of a society which treats its offspring as objects, as midgets rather than children? What of a society which so hates its young that it can never portray children realistically on the screen, a society which constantly projects an image of a peppermint stick where a child should be? Has not such a society “outlawed” children?

# fifth Estate

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