

Brilliant Brat Camp

Channel Four's *Brat Camp* is the best thing currently on British television – for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. It tells us a great deal about what, before we went non-judgmental, used to be called delinquent children. It links to that unfashionable and difficult concept known to the Christian church as original sin. It also links to a news item in *The Times* for 9 February 2005-

A father of two has been jailed for 42 days for smacking his six-year old son when the boy failed to wipe his bottom properly.

As the instalments of *Brat Camp* unfold we see eight young English people aged sixteen or seventeen struggling to cope with the regime at a Utah boot camp designed to reclaim children whose misbehaviour exceeds all bounds. Their parents, middle class or what used to be called working class, are also shown in their earlier struggles with the children. Unlike so many, they are not bad parents. They love their children, and have done their very best to bring them up properly.

The *Brat Camp* children have not responded well to this kind treatment. On the contrary, they swear at, and even physically assault, their loving parents. They are hooked on alcohol and/or drugs. They get excluded from school for intolerable misbehaviour. They demand (and usually get) expensive designer clothes. And, with the willing consent of their suffering parents, they are now in the Utah boot camp - and do not like it one little bit.

It is sheer fascination to watch these naughty children meet their Nemesis in the depths of the arid, rocky Utah desert. There is no escape for them, because there is nowhere habitable to escape to. The pitiless sun glares down. The pitiless camp staff glare at the smallest misdemeanour, and will not put up with it. The children start at the harshest level, sitting before a little tent in a little stone circle. There is no talking, and no companionship. The food is of the plainest. The bunk bed has no mattress and no pillow. The only release, to the next highest level, is through good behaviour. Once they get there, conditions are a little bit better – but they are sent back down if they offend in the smallest way.

The fascination comes from watching the clash of wills. With these hard-faced youngsters, their self-will has triumphed on every occasion in the past. Now they are up against experienced, wily operators who have all the cards stacked on their side. Only one outcome is possible, provided the parents do not relent. So far, they have shown no sign of doing that.

Of course there are sneers from the bien-pensants. Predictably *The Times* (T2, 8 February 2005) writes-

The recalcitrant teenagers continue to be subjected to a relentless diet of homespun platitudes in the Utah desert. 'What I think right now', says one of the folksy good ol' boys in charge of the boot camp 'is that they need some more shaking up. They need to understand, by golly, that this is what it is and this is what it's going to be'. Nobody is suggesting that the teenagers' past behaviour was pleasant, but it is unlikely to have emerged out of nowhere for no reason. Simplistic solutions to complex problems are attractive, but they can also be destructive, abusive and just plain wrong.

Typical weasel words from the lefty brigade. An honest commentator would say (if he meant it) that this particular treatment is 'destructive, abusive and just plain wrong'. The slimy weasel dislikes committing himself, so shuffles out of it with 'can be . . .' Well, is it or isn't it? This is the smear in its classic form.

And what of the father who has been jailed for smacking his six-year old son when the boy failed to wipe his bottom properly? What has he got to do with it, you may be asking.

Well if you are asking that, I'm sorry for you. Pay attention. So far you've missed the point and lost the plot.

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