

Jackie and JFK spent time. If you do insist on getting out before nightfall, say, after lunch, trudge up to the Newport Book Store on Bellevue Avenue, where a recent tour turned up a September 1963 *Esquire*, a first edition of William Shirer's *Berlin Diary*, and a first paperback edition of Ladislav Farago's *Patton*, the lot liberated for under seven dollars.

When night falls, the Smart Set heads over to the Black Pearl on Bannister's Wharf for dinner, stopping at the bar for pre-game cocktails and an

explanation from the bartender with bristling red moustaches of why he, a 34-year-old man, remains at work in a resort area, when logic might dictate that he move on. This is a signal to proceed to dinner, starting with the chowder and clams casino, then on through the beef "torpedoes" (as one of our party has dubbed them), and finishing up with the leaden chocolate mousse, which settles the stomach into a molten mass. Successful drinkers, like professional skiers, know that adequate preparation of the base is all, and the

Black Pearl has never disappointed. Then again, perhaps only the fare served aboard the *Bounty* would disappoint me.

The main show is right next door: The Candy Store, which includes a restaurant, a couple of bars, including one overlooking the harbor, and a basement disco. The bar on the ground floor is presided over by the diminutive "Five-O," a man of infinite and inscrutable wisdom, and a Rutger Hauer lookalike, both of whom whip up extremely tasty Bloody Marys. With just

the right timing, you can bring down the bar with the famed quotation, "Hi Curt Gowdy, this is everybody," a three-run homer in any saloon, and well worth the \$1.75 you paid for this magazine.

The angels congregate to The Candy Store, and are attentive to all tales, ranging from "I'm working on my municipal bond novel, *Yield to Maturity*," to "I'm first mate on the *Mary Deare*." The Candy Store is full of sweets. There are less innocent and rewarding ways to spend time. □

## THE TALKIES



### LUV STORIES

by Bruce Bawer

At the beginning of *Letter to Brezhnev* two young Soviet sailors stand expectantly at the railing of a ship entering port, like Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly in *On the Town*. "Liverpool!" one of them exclaims; "Beatles!" the other replies, demonstrating, apparently, that young Soviet sailors are like young people everywhere. We cut to a seedy working-class neighborhood of Liverpool, where young Elaine (Alexandra Pigg) and Teresa (Margi Clarke) decide to forget their troubles and get happy for an evening. And do they have troubles: sexy, streetwise

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Teresa holds down a dismal factory job stuffing chickens; sweet, stolid Elaine is unemployed, a victim of Britain's crumbling economy.

Though they can't afford it, the girls take a taxi downtown, sharing a joint with the driver; Teresa's original plan is to stiff him, but she ends up paying the fare (plus tip) because "he's one of us." Which is more than can be said for the pair of well-heeled gents who, in the first pub the girls step into, crudely offer to rent them for the night. Teresa takes revenge for this insult by lifting the bigger one's wallet—thus proving herself a proud, clever, and gutsy foot soldier in the British class war (not to mention providing the motivation for a brief chase scene).

But the story doesn't really get underway till our young ladies hit a flashy dance club. There Elaine and Peter (played by the pallid Peter Firth), one of those two Soviet sailors, lock eyes across a crowded room and fall in love. They meet, they dance, they wander the grimy streets and neck, they gaze up at the stars and deliver some astoundingly corny dialogue. And they have a conversation whose purpose is patently to suggest that the girls' negative image of Soviet life is wholly the result of ignorance and insidious Western propaganda. When Peter, for example, announces that he's from a warm, sunny resort town on the Black Sea, the girls protest: Isn't Russia cold? Not all of it, Peter informs them; it has many different climates, "not like here." When they ask about Soviet food shortages, Peter explains patiently

that there *are* no shortages; if there are long lines at the stores, it's because the men in charge of distribution are idiots. (Peter, for his part, is surprised by Elaine's unemployment; he observes that in the Soviet Union, if you don't work, you don't eat. Elaine, who's on the dole, replies that "it works that way here too.")

The four end up at a hotel. Teresa and the bearlike Sergei (Alfred Molina), who speaks no English and whom Teresa calls "Eye-gor," have a lusty time of it; but Elaine and her bright, sensitive Peter (who seems to understand the Liverpoolian brogue much better than I do) spend the night jawing about life and stuff. By the time the next evening rolls around—and the men have to rejoin their ship and head back out to sea—Elaine and Peter have cornily declared their mutual ardor. (Peter: "We will be together again." Elaine: "When, Peter, when?" Peter: "I'll always love you, you know.") Screenwriter Frank Clarke doesn't miss a cliché.

During the weeks after Peter's departure Elaine tries to forget him. She attends a party, but the crude English lads there want only one thing from her; she realizes that all she wants is to escape from this dismal, loveless corner of the world and marry Peter. When her letters to the proper authorities don't result in permission to do so, she does what we are apparently meant to see as a gutsy thing: she pens an obsequious plea to the late Uncle Leonid.

The missive does the trick. The Kremlin bosses permit the marriage and invite Elaine to Mother Russia. Elaine becomes a local celebrity. But everybody in town (except Teresa) is against the marriage: her classic foul-mouthed English working-class movie witch of a mother, her horrible Commie-hating friends, a grotesquely cruel reporter who harasses her about being a Red, and an improbably slimy Foreign Office chap who tries to convince her that Peter already has a wife. They all keep yammering at her that if she goes to Russia she'll be sacrificing her freedom. You've got to be prepared, the Foreign Office chap tells her, "to give up *everything*." Her reply: "I haven't got anything to give up." Elaine, you see, is savvy enough to recognize this "freedom" jazz for what it is: a dastardly fiction designed to keep nice English girls and nice Soviet boys from getting to know and trust and love each other.

For all the message-mongering, of course, *Letter to Brezhnev* is really nothing more than an old-fashioned fourth-rate love story with a twist—girl meets Red, girl loses Red, girl wins Red. Directed by Chris Bernard, it's packed with not only verbal but visual clichés: a newspaper headline spinning into focus, lovers gazing up at a phony-looking skyful of stars. And it's got more than its share of dubious plot developments. Would a British girl really have so much trouble trying to get into the Soviet Union to marry a sailor? Would the Liverpool papers carry it on the front page, if at all?

Would a Foreign Office chap actually try to convince her that the young man was already married—considering that the Soviets, presumably aware of the boy's marital status, had already permitted the wedding?

Probably not; but then this is not a realistic film (the graphic *mise en scène* notwithstanding) but a romance. And it's a romance in more ways than one. For it's yet another document in the history of the Western left's long-distance romance with the Soviet Union—or, rather, with some vaguely and rosily conceived *idea* of the Soviet Union. If the love story in this film recalls countless banal tearjerkers of the thirties, its view of Russia is astoundingly reminiscent of the blinkered perceptions of American and British Communists during that same decade.

**M**y *Beautiful Laundrette* is also set in the English slums—London this time—and is likewise concerned with England's faltering economy, with the moral crisis of her working classes, and with a love affair between two young people who are supposed to hate each other. Like *Brezhnev*, it has a grainy, inexpensive look (were both originally shot in 16mm?) and is heavy on grim urban atmosphere. But that's where the similarities end. For *Laundrette* is far

more imaginative and sensible, more honestly and delicately felt, than *Brezhnev*. The author (Hanif Kureishi) and director (Stephen Frears) are out not to present a simpleminded argument upon a theme they know little or nothing about, but rather to explore perceptively and dispassionately a milieu they obviously know very well.

The film's protagonist is Omar (Gordon Warnecke), a sweet and gentle young second-generation Anglo-Pakistani who lives in a gloomy flat with his poor, ill journalist father. The old man, who has strong (mostly socialist) opinions, wants Omar to go to college and become a journalist, a leader of his people. Omar, however, chooses instead to work for his wealthy wheeler-dealer of an uncle (Saeed Jafrey), and soon develops into a canny small-time entrepreneur, graduating from a job washing cars in the uncle's underground parking garage to the managership of his rundown laundrette.

At the same time Omar renews a childhood friendship with a tough Anglo punk named Johnny (Daniel Day Lewis), from whom he has been estranged for years because his father once glimpsed Johnny at an anti-Pakistani rally. Before long the young men are not only friends but lovers, a development that the film treats matter-of-factly. (Interestingly, though

there isn't a line of "romantic" dialogue between them, their love is a good deal more convincing than the soppy proclaimed *amour* of Elaine and Peter in *Brezhnev*.) They also become business partners, and together the two of them turn the laundrette into an elegantly hip, almost surrealistically glitzy establishment.

**L**aundrette has many virtues: wit, intelligence, perceptiveness, an exquisite tone, a well-paced narrative, a gallery of vivid and variegated characters, an excellent ensemble of players. But perhaps the movie's greatest strength lies in its unpolemical yet *engagé* approach to virtually everything it touches. It is plainly the product of a sophisticated moral sensibility, of a mind (or a pair of compatible minds) too fine to be easily violated by a mere idea. The film thus refrains from drawing facile comparisons of value between Omar's homosexuality and his uncle's heterosexuality, between his father's stubborn socialism and his uncle's fanatical capitalism, between Omar's devotion to the Western way of life and his aunt's obstinate loyalty to Pakistani folkways, or between the conflicting claims and grievances of the Anglo-Pakistanis and the lower-class natives. The film's goal, remarkably, is not to score points for this or that side but to understand and

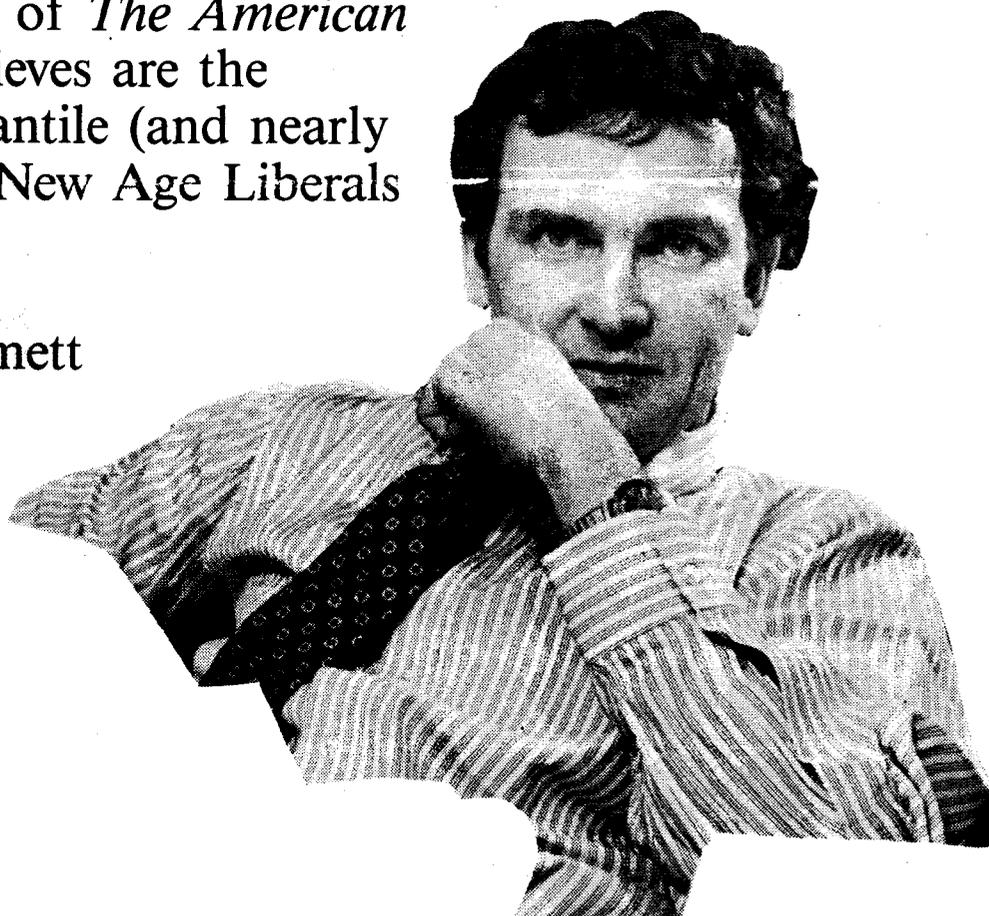
illuminate the human condition in all its motley manifestations, and to discover the pathos and humor—and humanity—that proliferate on every front. The only side it takes, indeed, is that of family and friendship—and, most of all, love, of whatever variety—against hatred and factionalism and violence.

This is not to suggest that Kureishi and Frears shrink from an honest examination of working-class despair and racial tension in contemporary England. They don't. But neither do they wallow in nihilism or depict Britain (*à la Brezhnev*) as a place fit only to escape from. On the contrary, they have made a life-affirming film that touchingly and persuasively proclaims the potency of affection, kindness, and hope, a film that celebrates the modest triumphs which bring meaning and even a sort of magic to ordinary lives. The film begins with an image of death—an elevated train rattling past the apartment where Omar and his father live, and where Omar's mother, we learn, recently committed suicide by throwing herself on the tracks—and concludes with an image of life: Omar and Johnny playfully splashing water on each other, cleansing bloody wounds. It's a lovely image, the perfect ending to a wondrously original and affecting film. □

The founder and editor-in-chief of *The American Spectator* examines what he believes are the frequently incoherent, often infantile (and nearly always dangerous) ideas of the New Age Liberals in **The Liberal Crack-Up**.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

Sidney Blumenthal is the jaundiced eye through which the *Washington Post* views the politics and culture of the New Right, the neoconservatives, and those it believes are the "objective" allies of these distasteful usurpers. My colleagues and I at Prodemca—many of us Democrats who had the presumption to favor aid to the Nicaraguan resistance—have been a regular object of his attentions. I accepted the offer to review his new book with the expectation that it might explain whatever broader perspective underlies his animadversions. I am still confused.

*The Rise of the Counter-Establishment* includes some useful research and has some stretches of lively writing. It presents a series of intellectual portraits of conservative and neoconservative thinkers, especially those who have shaped economic debate during the Reagan era—Jude Wanniski, David Stockman, Milton Friedman, Irving Kristol. It also treats figures such as Norman Podhoretz and William Buckley, whose efforts have centered on foreign policy and politics. It is, however, badly compromised by Blumenthal's inability to resist catty, ad hominem thrusts which overwhelm his intellectual and journalistic judgment. Over and over he transforms offhand remarks or trivial incidents (which, despite his sporadic footnotes, are obviously based at best on hearsay) into events of momentous significance.

This book takes great relish in the intellectual contradictions that can be found in the pro-Reagan camp—contradictions that conservatives themselves have addressed in quite open ways. It notes how the zest for tax cuts and go-go entrepreneurialism of Jude Wanniski, Jack Kemp, and Irving Kristol conflicts with the born-again fiscal conservatism of David Stockman; how Milton Friedman's hostility to big government is challenged by the massive defense buildup advocated by the hardliners of the Committee on the Present Danger; how the Protestant right's call for a return to straight and narrow morality jars the unbuttoned-down, me-first yuppies of Wall Street and Silicon Valley. It argues that Ronald Reagan has overcome these

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## THE RISE OF THE COUNTER-ESTABLISHMENT: FROM CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGY TO POLITICAL POWER

Sidney Blumenthal/Times Books/\$19.95

Penn Kemble

contradictions with a shameless optimism and appeals to America's sense of national destiny, and that a network of foundations, think-tanks, and propagandists is now in place—the counter-establishment—that will strive to sustain this mystical synthesis when the President leaves office.

It is not clear, however, whether Blumenthal really fears this prospect, or merely finds it contemptible. His scornful style works against his efforts to make the reader take his subject matter very seriously. His polemical stance is not unlike that of our recent British "entryists"—Alexander Cockburn, Christopher Hitchens—who appeal to the readers of the *Nation* and the *Village Voice* with a mixture of high

Tory snobbery and Leninist scorn for the ungainly workings of democracy.

Blumenthal is dismissive of the neo-conservatives: "a motley collection of exiles, ex-communists and nostalgists..." It is also evident that, although they make only a cameo appearance in this book, he has a similar contempt for what could be called the mainstream elements of the Democratic party: the Democrats who nominated and campaigned for Walter Mondale in 1984. (He describes them as "catatonic" centrists whose policies reeked of "fiscal gloom and intellectual exhaustion.") But what Blumenthal seems most to despise is the American tendency toward a politics that embodies elements of faith. He worries that the new conservative counter-establishment will exploit this popular

weakness to seize American politics in an enduring grip of irrationality and myth: an ideological dementia where anti-Communism, religious fanaticism, and crackpot economic theories all hazily commingle.

This effort at conservative myth-making is explicitly compared to the liberals' prolonged exploitation of the epic of the Great Depression and the triumph of FDR over Herbert Hoover. Ronald Reagan, like Roosevelt, is a purveyor of dreams. Roosevelt raised himself up on his crutches to declare that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Reagan has raised conservatism out of its sectarian feuds and isolation by insisting that "all we need to have is faith, and that dream will come true."

Yet the personalities and the intellectual propositions of the new conservative counter-establishment, as Blumenthal portrays them, are so far-out and far-fetched that they seem bound to self-destruct. That is, of course, unless one believes that you can delude most of the people most of the time—an undemocratic premise that Blumenthal might be reluctant to acknowledge. But Blumenthal's explanation of the victory of Ronald Reagan and the rise of the conservative counter-establishment cannot stand without just such a cynical premise. Even if one should grant that the new conservatives are a gang of cranks and mercenaries, in two successive elections Ronald Reagan won substantial electoral majorities. If Blumenthal is right in his contention that the voters simply succumbed to snake oil salesmanship—and in his fear that they will do so in the future—then one has to conclude that the voters themselves are contemptibly gullible.

There is, however, another explanation for the rightward trend in presidential voting and in popular political opinion—and for the rise of the new conservative ideologists—that Blumenthal curiously neglects. It is at once less demoniacal and less scornful toward our democracy. It affords a much firmer explanation for the intellectual realignment that has taken place than the lure of the long-neglected writings of Whittaker Chambers and Milton Friedman. It played as great a part in the resurgence of ideological politics in the United States as *National Review* and the Goldwater campaign. This is, of course, the rise of the New Left in the

