

# ANTIC ANTILLEANA

No. 42 1 May 2005 (Debouts, les damnés de la terre)  
St Augustine, Trinidad

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## JELLY IS GREATER THAN JUICE

by Francis A. Starr

One of the great things about Trinidad is the fresh native coconuts. I'm sure coconuts can be imported into Canada, but there would be a lack of authenticity, because Canada has higher prices on food items, the price would go even higher, because it would have to be imported, and it wouldn't be as fresh.

The main event of a coconut is the jelly. The juice is just a bonus, similar to the case of the movies I saw recently at the Palladium in Tunapuna. The main event was *Blade Trinity*, and *Ocean's 12* was just a bonus.

Now, there are two kinds of ways a fresh coconut is served. It can be served for jelly (a half mature coconut) or the juice (a baby coconut). But make no mistake about it, a coconut for juice is a lose/lose situation. People think it will have a better tasting juice, but it doesn't. It's not garbage, it just isn't as strong and tastes a little like plain water. The major loss is there is no jelly. There's no such thing as a good coconut that doesn't have jelly. So next time you buy a coconut at a local market or stand, get jelly rather than juice. The jelly is the reason why God created coconuts for the enjoyment of mankind.

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## GOOGLE TILL YOU PUKE

One day not long ago I caught a notion to google some folks from the distant past. It started with Richard Labonté and led through members of the Young Socialists, acquaintances at graduate school, and ended up with old girlfriends. I didn't bother with people with very common names, like Mike

Lewis and Ray Smith, even though I would dearly love to find them again, and I drew a blank with Vijay Dhaya (or Solanki). So where are they now? Here are the upshots:

Ian Angus -- together with his wife Lis, in telecommunications

Cori Bargmann -- head of a major neurophysiology lab at the Univ. of California at San Francisco

Elaine Bernard -- director of the Trade Union Program at the Harvard law school

Rolf Bettner -- photographer and environmentalist in British Columbia

Jung-tai Chao -- still a major guy at the Taiwan Forestry Institute

Jack Erion -- researcher with Mallinckrodt Inc in St Louis

Greg Gigg -- teamsters' union and Labor Party activist in Massachusetts

Rainer Gutekunst -- medical doctor, much involved with the UN

Bert Keser -- showed up as a peace activist in 1985; nothing more recent known

Bodo Kirchhoff -- celebrated fiction writer; I have two of his books and will probably read one of them

Richard Labonté -- prominent editor/publisher of gay erotica

Claude Lacour -- professor of economics at Univ. of Bordeaux

Jerry Lampert -- president of the Business Council of British Columbia

Mapiko Mashingaidze -- shows up in a bibliography only

Holly Price -- director of water quality protection at the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Don Tapscott -- a major honcho in information technology.

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## Wandering

### IN THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT by Nova Y. Starr

When I was in The Netherlands two summers ago, one day I went to the Red Light District. I was walking along the streets of Utrecht and I saw on the map there was a shortcut to the place I wanted to go. So I walked down that road, admiring the cobblestones, the beautiful architecture, and...the half-naked women! What a strange thing to see on an average-looking road -- women roaming around the street in bra and undies! At first I didn't realize where I was, but it did seem very strange to see this. And it's not like these were especially the most attractive women to see half naked! I eventually realized that I had walked through the Red Light District! So, my advice to you when traveling in The Netherlands, if you walk down a road and notice women half naked, take note that you may very well be in the Red Light District. There aren't actually any red lights there to let you know, so its not immediately obvious. Happy Travelling!

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### SETTLING DOWN

One day I got to thinking about the large number of times I have moved house as an adult. It comes to 24:

twice within Ottawa, 1971 and 1972  
Ottawa to Kansas, 1973  
thrice within Kansas, 1974-1975  
Kansas to Georgia, 1976  
five times within Georgia, 1976-1981  
Georgia to Leyte, 1981  
Leyte to Manila, 1983  
twice within Manila, 1984 and 1985  
Manila to Washington, 1987  
once within Washington, 1987  
Washington to Georgia, 1988  
Georgia to Ottawa, 1990  
Ottawa to Taiwan, 1990  
Taiwan to Trinidad, 1991  
twice within Trinidad, 1991 and 2000.

If things go as planned, I will never move again. My present house, Obronikrom, is in the Northern Range of Trinidad. It's a small place, which can get kind of crowded when I have more than two people staying with me, but most of the time it is just right. At home with me are two dogs of uncertain pedigree, Antonina Aleksandrovna and Yuri Andreevich, often joined by their friend Larisa Fedorovna. As you see, I can't be bothered to give them surnames. The other beasts in and on the house -- with one exception -- have no personal names at all. These include three species of gekkonid lizards (*Gonatodes vittatus*, *Hemidactylus mabouia* and *Sphaerodactylus molei*), the tarantula *Avicularia avicularia*, the daddy-longlegs spider *Physocylus globosus* (abundant in the bathroom) and spitting spider *Scytodes* sp., the carpenter ant *Camponotus atripes* (often in the kitchen), the stingless bees *Lestrimelitta limao*, *Nannotrigona* sp. and *Partamona nigrrior*, and several species of social wasps. For a time I had a mature female tarantula who would come in from under the eaves every night and walk about on my bedroom ceiling, a delightful spectacle when I had insomnia. The lizards get into tussles on the walls and ceiling and occasionally fall off onto the bed, twice right beside my head, but not lately.

The evident reason for this is the named exception, a Cook's tree boa (*Corallus hortulanus*). For a time, he stayed behind the books on one of my shelves, gradually poking his head out as the night advanced and it approached time to go hunting. I named him Awake. This name just came to me automatically, and if you don't like it just consider that it could have been worse. I could have been called to name him The Watchtower. After a week or so, he moved out to spend his daytime rests under a cover on the water tank, but the lizards have evidently not forgotten. They move around much more circumspectly than before, and I think Awake caught one of the *Hemidactylus*, because I no longer see it in the bedroom.

This is all deeply satisfying, as you can imagine, for a guy who grew up in the cold

temperate zone and never even set foot in the tropics until he was almost 30. Until that time I had never seen a wild gecko, tarantula, stingless bee or boa, and now I live with them every day, right in my very own house up my valley in the exotic and snowless West Indies. I tell you, folks, sometimes I think maybe there really is a god.

There is of course more to being settled than owning a house, no matter how bountifully accoutered it may be. I also have job tenure and permanent residency here in Trinidad. The latter came about one election season when my buddy Indar asked if I had registered to vote. He told me that after five year's residency I was eligible, as a Commonwealth citizen, to apply for permanent residency. That sounded far-fetched, but I made some calls and found out it was quite accurate.

Now, here is the really mysterious part. Indar just assumed that if I got my permanent residency I would vote for his party, the United National Congress. How he came up with that cornball idea has never been satisfactorily explained to me. I do vote in every national election now. I spoil my ballot. I go in there and write a short little diatribe on the quality of the candidates presented to the long-suffering electorate and then put "This ballot is spoiled." There are only about 50 or 60 votes at my polling station, and the polling officers know me, so I might as well sign my name, but that would be a breach of etiquette. When one is manifesting contempt for the bourgeois process one must observe the forms of courtesy.

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## TALKING OUT LOUD

At the electricity company one day I had to get the account switched from the house's previous owner into my name. An extended wait was expected, so I took along a notebook. I took a number and a seat and set to scribbling. Early in this waiting period, a rather extravagant old lad came in and stood near the waiting benches, casting an appraising eye over the

customers. Actually, he looked a lot like an older Dave Wilson. From his wonderfully expectant manner one could see that he had something to say and wasn't about to keep it to himself. He first addressed another old lad sitting up at the front, and the other told him testily but without real venom to buzz off, at which the Extravagant One just laughed. It was plain that they were well acquainted with each other.

And then he set to lecturing, easing gradually into his theme (whatever it was), not a prepared speech. Now, folks, this is what I like most about Trinidad. Everyone has a God-given constitutional right to express her/his view on absolutely any topic, and this right almost extends to expressing it wherever and whenever she/he pleases. The uniforms were right there, but at no point did any of them so much as caution the old lad, let alone try to move him out of the building. They were even chuckling at some of the things he said. I expect they would have felt obliged to intervene if anyone had registred a direct complaint, but it didn't seem to occur to anyone to do so, although when the other old lad had finished his business he stalked out casting very vocal aspersions on the Extravagant One's mind and character.

I of course was positively digging it. When the Extravagant One, in the course of warming up, told us sententiously that one must always use the word "verily" in such phrases as "Verily I say unto you ...", I piped up with a question. "Well now, tell me, brother man, if you don't say 'verily', does that mean you are not speaking the truth? Is there any need for 'verily' in the vocabulary of honest folk?" That jolted him, and of course he had to address it, which he pretty much did by allowing that I had a point and then changing the subject.

He was a lusty old lad. He told us about his son the medical doctor, a very smart and able man, and on the night that he was making that baby he put so much effort into it that he couldn't go to work the next day. That was more than some of the people wanted to hear, but there was enough approving laughter to encourage him. You see, he plainly wasn't

nuts, but his sanity most definitely followed a path of its own.

He and I had a great deal of banter and backchat. At one point he looked analytically at me and pronounced that I came from a mongolian father and an asante mother, to which I complained bitterly that he really shouldn't have revealed that in public, as I was trying ever so hard to pass for white. And the benches rocked.

In time, it was my turn to take care of business. When I finished, the Extravagant One had also done whatever electricity thing he came to do -- one suspects that he could just as easily have done it by mail or at the bank, but why miss a chance to lecture to the waiting benches? -- and we walked out together. We had a few more words on the side walk, and then he went his way and I, in my own peculiar state of grace, went mine.

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#### THERMODYNAMICS IS

Haiku for S.H.

Thermodynamics is the scientific study of the transformations of energy.

Thermodynamics is the struggle to understand why anything happens at all.

These two definitions are one.

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#### Cultural Conjectures

##### NAMING YOUR KIDS

It cannot have escaped your attention that almost everyone you meet is grossly mis-named. People are running around with names that very obviously don't suit them, and many of those names have no business burdening anyone else either. Unable to take revenge upon their own parents, people are visiting upon their offspring the same sorts of outrages that they have suffered, and it goes down through the generations. I would now like to give the about-to-be-parents of this world a few words of advice on the subject, out

my abiding sympathy for long-suffering humanity. It is time to put a stop to the cycle of onomastic violence.

There are two cardinal rules to observe when naming your baby.

First, look at the kid. Sure, I know this seems obvious, but it is just as obvious that a great many parents don't do it. They think that Suchandsuch is a nice name or that it would be good to name the baby after dear old Uncle Soandso, and it doesn't occur to them to wonder if this kid will grow up to look like a Suchandsuch or a Soandso. As an example, a certain statuesque stone fox of my acquaintance has a distinctly mediterranean look about her. Her parents named her Tracy. Tracy????!! What the hell were they thinking, giving her a rather bloodless north-european-protestant name when they must have known that she would grow up to look like she stepped right out of the Old Testament? There's really no excuse for this kind of mistake. I have remedially re-named the dear lady Naomi, but it may be too late to do much good.

Second, say the name out loud. No, not in a murmur, OUT LOUD. Declaim it. I am told that Flaubert used to go out in the back yard every now and then and declaim the lines he had written, just to be sure that it had the right sound. I think he was onto something. It has long been my view that all poetry should be able to hold its own in a late-night club with drums and possibly a saxophone right behind it if it is to be taken seriously. I never realized the terrible shortcomings of my own name until my high-school graduation. When my turn came, the principal, Big Tiz, cracked open my diploma and declaimed "Christopher. Kenneth. Starr." Geez, what was my mother thinking? Christopher Kenneth? I don't know, maybe she just wanted me to grow up resentful and with a chip on my shoulder -- in which case some people would say she succeeded admirably -- but ... Christopher Kenneth? By the time my baby brother appeared five years later there had been a major shift in naming practices, and he came away with Andrew Francis. Now, that's more like it. It's smooth, with just a bit of crocodile

in it, but ... Christopher Kenneth? So when my boy came along I made sure he was named Francis Andrew. And my little girl's name came to me in a dream before she was even conceived.

So, here's what you need to do. Pretend you are the high-school principal and it is graduation day. Stand up and declaim the name, slowly and with joyful solemnity, and it should be instantly clear if it has the right stuff. I did that. "SuperNova. Yerakina. Starr." "Francis. Andrew. Starr." No doubt about it, those are keepers.

Having observed the two cardinal rules, if you then want to ensure that the name has real meaning, fine. Meaning is all very fine, but it's not the main thing. Or, as the late great Louis Armstrong said on this very subject, it don't mean a thing if it aint got that swing. And most of the names we encounter do not swing.

POUM, for example, is a grand name that has it all. It comes from a righteous party, and it resonates. Po-UM. Like a mantra conceived by a riptide. If I had another son, I would be mighty tempted to name him Poum. Poum Boukman Starr, now there's a name with which to reckon. It's right up there with Smokestack Lightning Starr.

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### Cultural Conjectures

#### COMPUTER TRANSLATION AND A NEW CHENG-YU

There are now plenty of computer programmes to translate from one language into another. So far they are mostly good for amusement, and I have my doubts that they will ever serve for translating any but the most straight-forward, literal texts, but I could be mistaken. After all, 20 years ago I didn't believe a computer chess programme would ever beat a grand master, and we all know that that border has been crossed. An especially accessible one is found at <http://babelfish.altavista.com>. Give it a try with a phrase or slogan of your choice. As I said, it is mostly for amusement, and the results will probably be entertaining.

My favourite song by the late great Sun Ra and his Astro Intergalactic Infinity Arkestra is *Space is the Place*, also the title of John Szwed's biography of Sun Ra (many thanks to Al Starbuck for sending me this book). It goes on for 21:14 minutes, and as a student I used to listen to it once a day. At the end of each such session I would rise from the couch, deeply replenished and thinking in some awe "Wow. I do believe space is the place." I was once privileged to converse with Sun Ra for a few minutes, during which I got him talking by asking how he first came to conclude that space is the place, a useful metaphor for how he got to be the way he was. Years later I took my infant daughter, SuperNova, to hear him in concert, and she got to meet him. That was a highlight of her early years, whether she realized it or not.

But I digress. I ran "Space is the place" through Babelfish and got the following:

French: L'espace est l'endroit.

German: Raum ist der Platz.

Italian: Lo spazio è il posto.

Portuguese: O espaço é o lugar.

Spanish: El espacio es el lugar.

Good enough, I suppose, but this is what you would get from just looking up "Space is the place" word for word in a dictionary and then fixing the grammar as needed. I very much regret that the available translation into Chinese will not display on our machines. If any of you can get it to work on yours, please let me know. The reason this question tickles me that it illustrates the difference between what a computer can do (now) compared with what a nuance-conscious human translator can do.

When we were students at Georgia, Jung-tai Chao used to listen to *Space is the Place* with me in the lab, and one day he devised his own chinese version of the phrase. Jung-tai is a very scholarly guy (he designed my chinese name, for which I am forever grateful), and his rendition is extremely classy:

Nei4 ge di4 fang1 jiu4 shi tai4 kong1.

To render it back into English fairly literally, it says "That place is none other than Outer Space", which is certainly what Sun Ra had in mind.

It was only many years later that I realized that Jung-tai had done more than translate. He had composed a new cheng<sup>2</sup> yu<sup>3</sup>. There is, as far as I know, no standard term for "cheng yu" in English, but one might clunkily call them idiomatic set phrases. This a well recognized form of expression in Chinese, and many of them serve as proverbs for everyday use. One of the few that has entered popular speech in English, "qi<sup>2</sup> hu<sup>3</sup> nan<sup>2</sup> xia<sup>4</sup>", is commonly rendered as "He who rides a tiger fears to get down."

One of my cheng-yu dictionaries runs to more than 1000 pages, with six expressions per page. Almost all of these comprise exactly four characters, but a small fraction have eight. "Nei ge di fang jiu shi tai kong" is an eight-character cheng yu, very classical in form, tone and impact. Look for it in a dictionary one of these days.

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#### A HORRIBLY PESSIMISTIC THOUGHT

There's a bit of Richard M. Nixon in each and every one of us.

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#### INTRODUCING THE NEW POLITICAL PARTY

In number 39 I laid forth my personal philosophy, the Five Nevers. Recall that the first of these is "Never eat anything when you don't know what's in it."

Now, this may sound like a simple nutritional rule, but a moment's reflection should show that it is actually much more. Why don't you eat it if you don't know what it is? Because philosophy requires that you take personal responsibility for anything that goes into you. If someone plunks something down in front of you and says "Eat this, it's perfectly all right" your natural response is "Well, maybe, but exactly what is it?" The first Never stands squarely in opposition to all food that covers its tracks. (Think about this and you will never eat another sausage.)

But food isn't just food. In the first Never it is a metaphor for everything we consume, including ideas, a very accessible way of saying "Do your own thinking." If you must take anything on faith, do so with your eyes open and with reluctance. (Even natural science has its articles of faith, exactly three of them.)

This brings us to the new political party that I propose to launch. Its central tenet will be thinking for oneself, and its method will be democratic centralism. As a way of getting people used to this way of thinking, its main propaganda point in the initial period will be the first Never. Everyone can understand the concept of wanting to know what's in it before you eat it, and from there it is just a short step to wanting to know where it comes from before you believe it.

In recognition of the first Never, I propose to call the new party the Movement for Trophic Transparency. Join now.

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#### PLANNING AHEAD

Every 122 years Venus crosses the face of the sun, as seen from the Earth. She does it again eight years later, after which is no recurrence for 114 years. Venus is tiny against the sun, even if one has the filters to stand the glare, so that the transit was not observed until 1639, after Galileo turned the telescope to the purposes of astronomy. It was more than just a curiosity, as it could be used to estimate the distance of the sun from the Earth. In each pair of transits, one will be visible from about half of the Earth, and the other from about the other half. As with Halley's comet, then, the transit of Venus comes up once in an average lifetime.

I made sure to see Halley's comet in 1986, knowing that I wouldn't be around for the next passage in 2061, but I completely blew the last transit of Venus in June 2004. In Trinidad, with a clear sky we could have caught about the last two hours of the transit, which is not bad, but I didn't have it together. I'm not about to miss it again.

As it happens, the next transit will be all

but out of view here, just a few minutes before sunset, so I need to be somewhere else on 6 June 2012. Looking on the map, I see that the entire transit will be visible from the Philippines, where it will start in the hour after sunrise. Here, then, is my tentative plan. I will overnight on the east-facing beach of Palawan near Aborlan, all set up to watch and photograph the whole thing. I haven't set foot in Palawan since 1986, so there is plenty of motivation to go back.

So why am I telling you this? Is it to show what a progressive, forward guy I am? Not entirely. Rather, I am inviting you in on the action. Suzanne Livingstone wants to join me in Palawan to watch Venus absolutely do her thing? Who else?

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### Wandering

#### TRYING NOT TO, ACTUALLY

Your editor does a lot of traveling, and I have occasionally complained about it. This is not hypocritical, and lately I have had some success in staying put. In the last few months I canceled planned trips to Cuba and the Dominican Republic. There is an absolutely juicy opportunity coming up to go back to Russia, but other than that I hope to stay right here in the Wider Caribbean this year. Accordingly, those of you on my postcard list can look forward to somewhat less exoticism in your (postal) mailboxes for a while. I didn't want the preceding remarks about Palawan to mislead you on this point.

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### Cultural Conjectures

#### WARMING UP TO CHICK FLICKS

A few years ago some american students were over at my house, and one of them got to looking over my video movies. After a bit, she made an observation: "You know, you have a lot of chick flicks." I had never heard the

term, so she explained that chick flicks are feature movies that are much more popular among women than men. She had a point there. I like an occasional guy movie (whatever the standard term is), including such hard-core classics as *The Wild Bunch*, but I do seem to exercise my feminine side in the cinematic department. Accordingly, I hereby assume the authority to favour you with a list of the best chick flicks that have come to my attention.

Before we lay out the data, I had better establish my credentials by telling you what chick flicks are all about. After all, just watching a lot of them isn't much of a qualification, is it? There is a certain style and pacing, but the key thing that makes a flick chick is that it is about relationships. The relationships are at the core of it, and if it includes any major element that distracts from this core it cannot be truly chick. Violence is not necessarily absent, but it must be subordinate to the relationship(s). Buddy movies don't necessarily count -- if they did, then *The Wild Bunch* would be as chick as they get -- as they are about shared experience, not quite the same thing as relationship. Some movies are both buddy and chick. Just about anything with Helena Bonham Carter, Judy Dench, Philida Law, Gwyneth Paltrow, Greta Scacchi or Emma Thompson is chick. And if it's by Merchant & Ivory there's no question about it. (In a later number, if you behave yourselves, I will tell you what makes a western spaghetti; there's more to it than Sergio Leone.)

I am by no means the first person to prepare a list of best chick flicks. Several of them are available on the Internet. Some movies that I have not seen show up fairly consistently in these lists, such as *Notting Hill* and *Thelma and Louise*. I want to see them, but until I do they don't belong on this list. Okay, enough punditry, here they are.

*About Schmidt* (2002)

*Agnes of God* (1985) -- I have yet to see this one on anyone else's chick-flick list. I guess some people just don't get it.

*Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974)

*American Beauty* (1999)  
*An American in Paris* (1951)  
*Anna Karenina* -- I have only seen the 1997 production (Sophie Marceau, Sean Bean) and would like to see those of 1935 (Greta Garbo, Charles Bickford), 1948 (Vivian Leigh, Ralph Richardson) and 1985 (Jacqueline Bisset, Christopher Reeve).  
*Annie Hall* (1977)  
*As Good as it Gets* (1997)  
*At First Sight* (1999)  
*Autumn in New York* (2000)  
*Beaches* (1988) -- Personally, I don't think it's that great, but it seems to be on everyone else's list, and it is chick.  
*Beloved* (1998) -- likewise a philippine movie of the same title from about 1985.  
*Bend it Like Beckham* (2002)  
*The Big Chill* (1983)  
*Big Fish* (2003)  
*Boy on a Dolphin* (1957)  
*Bridges of Madison County* (1995)  
*Bull Durham* (1988)  
*Cabaret* (1972) -- I once asked Christopher Isherwood if he liked the portrayal of him in this movie, to which he responded that he liked Michael York's performance very much, but the character wasn't really he (Isherwood). Why do I mention this to you? Obviously, just to show you that I talk to famous authors.  
*Calendar Girls* (2003)  
*Cannery Row* (1982)  
*Casablanca* (1942)  
*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958)  
*Chocolat* (2000)  
*Circle of Friends* (1995)  
*The Color Purple* (1985)  
*Cousin, Cousine* (1975)  
*David and Lisa* (1962)  
*Dead Poets Society* (1989)  
*Driving Miss Daisy* (1989) -- People tend to sniff at this movie. I don't see why, but then, I thought *Showgirls* was pretty good.  
*The English Patient* (1996)  
*The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain* (1995) -- Don't miss the deeply philosophical moment when Tudor Vaughan says to Hugh Grant "We may be twp, but we are not so twp as to not know that we are twp." Socrates said pretty much the

same thing, but not as elegantly.  
*Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967)  
*Felicia's Journey* (1999)  
*The First Wives Club* (1996) -- All in all, a fairly ordinary revenge movie, but Maggie Smith is in it.  
*For Love of the Game* (1999)  
*Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994) -- Simon Callow is the whole show.  
*The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981) -- Ignore the story-within-the-story, which is pretty lame.  
*Frida* (2002) -- I hear tell that there was an earlier production that is even better.  
*Good Will Hunting* (1997)  
*Great Expectations* (1998)  
*The Green Years* (1946) -- I admit to some difficulty in justifying this choice, as coming-of-age is not the same as chick. Still, it feels right, and I'm sticking with it.  
*How to Make an American Quilt* (1995) -- The title is about as chick as it gets.  
*The Importance of Being Earnest* (2002)  
*Jefferson in Paris* (1995)  
*The Joy Luck Club* (1993) -- After *The Remains of the Day*, the chickest of them all.  
*Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love* (1997)  
*Last Orders* (2001)  
*Legends of the Fall* (1994).  
*Love, Actually* (2003) -- Normally, I loathe Christmas, but this hilarious movie has a great storyline and enough edge to pull it off.  
*Love's Labours Lost* (2000)  
*The Man from Elysian Fields* (2001)  
*The Man Who Loved Women* (1983) -- Presumably a remake of François Truffaut's 1977 movie of the same title.  
*Message in a Bottle* (1999)  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1999)  
*Monsoon Wedding* (2001) -- This is what  
*Moonstruck* (1987) -- As the old guy said to his dogs, Andiamo vedere la bella luna.  
*Much Ado about Nothing* (1993) -- The credits sequence, in which Don Pedro and his crew approach the villa while the homefolks get ready for the party, is a wonderful short in itself.  
*My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002)  
*My Fair Lady* (1964) -- The virtue of watching this on video is that one can fast-



forward past all those wretched songs.

*Oscar and Lucinda* (1997)

*An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982)

*On Golden Pond* (1981)

*Out of Africa* (1985)

*A Passage to India* (1984)

*The Portrait of a Lady* (1996)

*Pretty in Pink* (1986)

*Pretty Woman* (1990)

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1969) --

The first Maggie Smith movie I ever saw.

*The Remains of the Day* (1983) --

Positively and beyond the shadow of a doubt the chickest flick of all.

*A Room with a View* (1986)

*Roxanne* (1987) -- *Cyrano de Bergerac* set in Colorado today.

*Runaway Bride* (1999)

*Ryan's Daughter* (1970)

*Sabrina* (1995) -- The 1954 original is on my wish list.

*The Sandpiper* (1965)

*The Serpent's Kiss* (1997)

*Shades of Fear* (1993)

*Shakespeare in Love* (1998)

*Sleepless in Seattle* (1993)

*Sliding Doors* (1998)

*Something's Gotta Give* (2003)

*Sophie's Choice* (1982)

*The Sound of Music* (1965) -- My appreciation doesn't flow solely from lust for Julie Andrews, but let's be frank, it's a definite factor.

*Steel Magnolias* (1989)

*Suddenly Last Summer* (1959)

*Sweet November* (1968) -- The original (Sandy Dennis, Anthony Newley); spare yourself the 2001 remake.

*Tender Mercies* (1983)

*Terms of Endearment* (1983)

*Tom and Viv* (1994)

*Tom Jones* (1963) -- The fake orgasm in *When Harry Met Sally* is certainly amusing, but get a load of the eating scene here.

*Travels with My Aunt* (1972) -- Maggie Smith can do no wrong.

*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945)

*Waiting to Exhale* (1995)

*Washington Square* (1997)

*The Way We Were* (1973)

*When a Man Loves a Woman* (1994) -- Remake of *Days of Wine and Roses*, which seems to be generally preferred.

*When Harry Met Sally* (1989) -- It was about time someone pulled the mask off this "Can't we just be friends?" nonsense.

*The Winter Guest* (1997)

*Women on the Edge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988)

*Wonder Boys* (2000)

*Wuthering Heights* (1939)

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### ANALYTICAL THOUGHTS ARISING FROM CLEAN LIVING

The notable thing about everyday life of the titled aristocracy everywhere is the posing that imbues all social interactions. Much of the training of an aristocrat is in striking and keeping the right pose for the moment, like training to be Miss America. Michael Jackson seems so ridiculous to us because he is such a humourless poseur, but how is he different from a titled parasite or a beauty queen? Just that his poses are of his own design.

What is the difference between straights and gays, anyway? I'll tell you. Straights get stoned and want to watch *Yellow Submarine*, while gays get stoned and crave *Fantasia*.

How can we explain, in a way that anybody can understand it, the difference between "recalcitrant" and "obstreperous"? Here are two ways:

1. A donkey, digging in his heels and refusing to budge, possibly even lying down on the road, is recalcitrant. That same donkey becomes obstreperous when he turns around and kicks the bejesus out of you.

2. Martin Luther King was recalcitrant. Malcolm X was obstreperous.

The two best-known portraits of black people by others are of Uncle Tom and Othello. Yet Harriet Beecher Stowe never lived among Blacks, and Shakespeare probably never saw one. Note the similar observation with respect

to Shylock; as I understand it, the Jews had already been expelled from England by Shakespeare's time.

The following passage appears in a classic of psychoanalysis:

"In simple maniacal exaltation in men, courting, frivolity, and lasciviousness in speech, and frequenting of brothels, are observed; in women, inclination for the society of men, personal adornment, perfumes, talk of marriage and scandals, suspicion of the virtue of other women; or there is manifested the religious equivalent -- pilgrimages, missionary work, desire to become a monk or the servant of a priest; and in this case there is much talk about innocence and virginity.

Now, I have to wonder, except for the religious manifestations and the "frequenting of brothels" -- which no longer serve the central social functions they once did in western society -- aren't we talking about things that are regarded as pretty well normal, both in men and women?

When I first got to utilizing the Internet just a few years ago, I was reminded of the two things that struck me most when I returned to North America in 1987 after six years in Southeast Asia: a) how electronic information processing had penetrated into just about all aspects of daily life, and b) how little difference it made.

Thanks to Al Hook for bringing to my attention the movement for the liberation of garden gnomes in France. It's a righteous cause. You Americans can emulate it by grabbing all those lawn jockeys and setting them free in Memphis.

Most historians have very little interest in time, often no more than a passing notice of its existence. This seems rather shocking, yet we take it for granted that most geographers have so little sense of distance or direction.

When a host of intellectuals enjoying international reputations upholds any particular government or even a given society

without apparent coercion, you know they're onto something. I am of course thinking mainly of Cuba.

The nice thing about painting and poetry is that every society of no matter what economy can afford them in abundance.

Wherein lies the superiority of science, anyway? It is the only branch of learning in which discipline is a constant presence, at least looking over your shoulder. At the same time, to be any good at science one must keep the doorways to the imagination wide open, in order to give this discipline something with which to work.

Sitting in a business office, I noticed the calendar on the wall. It was a one-pager, each month with an image of an outstanding human-made artefact: the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, the Parthenon, the Kremlin (or maybe that cathedral on Red Square), a dutch windmill, the Sydney Opera House, the Statue of Liberty, Chichén Itzá, a japanese torii, the Taj Mahal, the Great Sphinx, the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Only one of those is from the last 100 years. Not really an analytical thought, but a curious observation.

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**MY 18TH BIRTHDAY PARTY**  
by Nova Y. Starr

A few weeks before [13 March 2005] we had reserved the VIP lounge at this cool sushi restaurant at the Square One mall. Mom gave me the car for the night, so I picked up my friend DJ, and we went on our happy way to the mall. The reservation was for 6:30 but DJ and I had makeup appointments with Lancôme for 5:30. We pulled into underground parking at around 5:10. I parked, put on my coat and locked and slammed the door. OOPS!! I had left the keys in the ignition, with the car still running! Ahhh! So DJ and I were freaking out. Stupid, stupid! We didn't want to die of carbon monoxide poisoning, and we also didn't want to be late for our makeup appointment. We waited 40 minutes till my aunt got there with the spare key! Thank god! Yayy!

So we got our makeup done a little later than scheduled, but that was okay. We then rushed over to the restaurant. A few of our people were already there. Wow! The room looked soooo cool! There were streamers everywhere, and the lights were dimmed, and it all just looked soooo sophisticated!!! There were three large tables where we were all seated, and we had large plush couches to lounge around on. Lots of space.

So everyone had arrived within an hour. I had insisted that everyone dress up for me! There were about 25 people there. Almost all of the girls there were from my school, and some of the guys were my friends or their boyfriends. And I also brought along my cousin Abigail and her best friend. We all had some sort of seafood dish. I had the Green Dragon, a sushi roll with avocado, shrimp, crab, fish eggs, and there was wasabi on the side (eww). I got one of the guys to eat the wasabi, and he ended up burning up. Some people had sake. Apparently that was a major hit, but I didn't try any.

And then the cake! Aahh! The cake! A huge super-chocolatey cake, in the shape of a hemisphere and covered in chocolate shavings. I had my best friends Natasha and Maggie sit next to me for that, and they put 18 candles on

it with a sparkler in the middle. They sang to me loud and proud! It was great!!

I had soooo much fun!! And we stayed till the restaurant closed. It was really cool, because I was the only one there who knew everyone. So everyone got to know everyone else, and we had so much fun!!! It was one of the most fun birthdays I ever had. Another significant birthday was my fifth, when we lived in Trinidad. I was bossy then (snicker), but not anymore!

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**MY CLASS TRIP TO SPAIN**  
by Nova Y. Starr

Spain! España! It is soooo gorgeous! Our trip lasted 7 days and 6 nights [in April 2005]. We arrived in Madrid first. I was stunned to learn so many interesting things about Spain within 2 hours of being there. E.g. You can order a beer at McDonald's, people smokes everywhere, they love to make out on the streets, and they love to decorate their cities with lots of fountains and statues. On our first night we didn't do much, just a short walking tour around the city and eat dinner at a meat museum.

The second day we went to an art gallery and saw paintings by Miró, Dalí and Picasso. Then we took an hour-long ride to Toledo! Wow! I love Toledo! Our tour director for Toledo, Fernando, was really cool! We checked out this massive cathedral which is only the third largest cathedral in Spain. It had art by El Greco, himself. There were sculptures and statues all over the place, and everything was soooo big. There was such cool stained glass everywhere! Then we went to the top of the hill and looked at the whole city, which was soooo lovely. We saw old buildings that had ancient bullet holes in them when they had a civil war. It was wild! We saw lots of other cool stuff in Toledo. Then, we drove back and had dinner, then walked to a place where there were flamenco dancers! One of my friends thought the male dancer was hot. We kept telling her that he was gay, but she refused to believe us and said that he's the

father of her future Spanish babies! We then walked back to our hotel which was relatively close. On our way there, we saw authentic Spanish hookers!

The next morning, we flew to Mallorca (pronounced "my orca"). It was soooo lovely when we arrived. There were palm trees everywhere!! We unpacked and went to check out the whole strip. Yes, our hotel was on a beach! There were cool shops everywhere. We saw a tattoo place. It was too windy and cold for the beach, unfortunately, but that night a few of us went out to a karaoke bar. And we met lots of British boys! And some of my friends got really really drunk and started singing! It was quite a sight!

The second day in Mallorca, we went to a place called Valdemosa. It's a small little city protected by a fortress and a huge castle! Its really cool and big. We saw some local artists and their products, which were interesting. We did a little bit of shopping and then came back to the hotel. Now this is my highlight of the whole trip ... we went clubbing! We went to a BET club somewhere in downtown Mallorca. On our way there, we saw male hookers! They started to follow us, so then we started running. We got to our club and found it pretty empty. But within an hour it was packed! Wow! That was soooo much fun! I met British boys, Italians, Americans, Germans, and of course some Spanish boys! That was our last night in Mallorca.

The next morning, we took a ferry to Barcelona! We were on the Mediterranean! Oooh, impressive! That day we just got settled in and got to spend the rest of the day to ourselves, so some of us did some shopping!! Woohoo! We saw all kinds of interesting people. There were people statues who looked like actual statues! They were soooo cool! We took pictures with them. There was one of Don Quixote!

Our last day in Barcelona, we went to this place that was a smaller version of Spain! It showed the different cultures of Spain, differentiating the north and south by its architecture and the types of plants they had. There was a large main square where they joined. There were many cool shops! I bought

a cool leather bracelet for my friend there.

We were sad on our last night. We admired the lights and fountains and all that stuff. It was soooo much fun! We wanted to cry on the plane home! Waaah! I really like my principal a lot more now. She and her husband came, and we all really love them.

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## ON THE EXERCISE OF GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

I have dreadful work habits. In particular, I am an inexcusable procrastinator. Having been raised as a Protestant, I was aware of this personal shortcoming at an early age, and over the decades I have made numerous attempts to rectify it, in vain. The best I have achieved is some modest success with Robert Benchley's approach of pretending that I should be doing something else, so that I perversely attend to the real task as a diversion. One would not like to claim that this method works very well, but we're dealing with a deeply flawed human being here, so we have to try.

There came a time last year when I got really exasperated with myself on just this account. I had wasted several days in not attending to a paper that my long-suffering editor was awaiting, and there was absolutely no excuse for it. I had this job to do, nothing stood in my way, and it was perfectly within my capabilities, and I just put it off and off and off, letting myself get distracted by almost anything.

So I thought, "This is ridiculous. It's pathological. This is why there are psychiatrists. Sure, I know psychiatry is for people with serious mental problems, drug addiction, delusions, that sort of thing, and this is nothing but some persistently sloppy habits that you seem unable to correct, but it's not healthy, and you're going to get your head examined."

So I made an appointment to see a psychiatrist at the university's medical school at 15:30 the next day. I arrived a few minutes early and checked in with the receptionist. Dr Hutchinson wasn't there right then, but she

would phone him and tell him I was there. Fine. I sat down in the waiting room, where there was a woman already waiting. She chattered away on her cellular phone, but other than that she appeared to have her wits about her, so I didn't really pay her any attention. 15:30 passed, and it got to be 15:40. The receptionist came out and told the woman that Dr Hutchinson was on his way to see her, and then she told me that I would be next. I thought that was looking pretty rinky-dink, but I kept quiet about it.

15:45 came, and the woman was called in, while I just sat there, waiting for 15:30 to occur. Finally it was 16:00, and I got to examining the situation. I come to see the psychiatrist about a problem of chronic procrastination, and this silly twit isn't even in the building when it's time to meet me. Then 15 minutes after he's supposed to have started with me he finally gets to the person before me. Does this really sound like somebody who can help me with my problem? I don't think so. In fact, I would have to really nuts to wait any longer.

So I got up, told the receptionist I wasn't that crazy, after all, and walked out. I think it was the only sane and rational course, and I'm sure Robert Benchley would have done exactly the same thing.

Or, as Will Rogers once said, "Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment."

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## Cultural Conjectures

### WHY DO THE ARGENTINIANS LOOK LIKE THAT?

Argentiniens are a puzzling lot. They just look so dreadful, and I can't account for it. My buddy Urwald, who was with us in Brazil in 2000, commented on this after he had moved on to Argentina. After getting used to brazilian women, he was rather shocked at what he found there. Like Urwald, I don't know whether the women in Argentina simply don't have the same natural beauty as brazilian women or if they go out of their way to cover it up.

But the question that really exercises me is a generational one: Is the dowdiness of middle-aged and elderly Argentinians an extension of the scruffiness of argentinian youth, or are these two separate phenomena? What I really need to do is find someone who has lived there for a generation or so and has been able to watch individuals go from scruffy to dowdy, noting whether there is a quantum leap in there or if it is an even intergradation. It would be best if the long-term observer were of the marxist or at least the hegelian persuasion, as we are diddling here with the unity of quantity and quality.

What would be even better would be a set of voluminous family photo albums extending over a couple of generations. Of course, one can't very well go and ask an elderly Argentinian for the use of her/his prized photo albums "so I can figure out why you-all look so wretched", can one? As you see, the life of the conscientious inquirer into the human condition is fraught with pitfalls and snares.

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## TO DO BEFORE I DIE

I have just come across Jamieson & Else's book *100 Things to Do Before You Die* (Profile, London 2004). It is compiled from submissions from *New Scientist* readers, so you can be sure that the desiderata are mostly quite rarified (but practicable). This gave rise to the following additions to my own list:

1. Swim in a bioluminescent sea.

Quite feasible, as there are several places around Trinidad & Tobago where the sea is replete with little luminescent beasts at some times. Chacachacare island is supposed to be especially good for this.

2. See the aurora borealis and/or the aurora australis.

This one is a bit tricky, as I avoid cold places. Still, one could see a quick winter trip to, say, Spitzbergen, for a worthy cause.

3. Experience rush hour in Bangkok.

Now, just about any hour is rush hour in Bangkok. And this is a glimpse of the future, the direction we are headed. I've been in rush hour in Caracas, which I suppose is some sort of preparation for the real thing.

4. See and smell a *Rafflesia* flower.

The world's biggest flowers, several species of them. To see them is definitely to smell them, as they are pollinated by flies, which they attract with a smell of rotting meat. I have often been on Mt Makiling in Luzon, where one of the smaller *Rafflesia* species is found, but I never got a whiff of it.

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