

### Rhetorical Analysis of *Cities at Your Feet*

*Cities at Your Feet* is a story about ants, about how they live, farm, and fight. Ants come in a variety of sizes, shapes, colours, yet one thing unites them all- they are a cooperative species. Each ant in the colony has their own specialization, either as queen, worker, soldier, or mate. Some ants are farmers that nurture the food source, whether it be animals (aphids) or vegetables (fungi). Other ants are fighters of war, owners of many weapons- among them stingers, jaws, and acid. And, despite their small size, ants can change the shape of the Earth because they work together, each doing their own job in support of their society. In fact, there is another species that collaborates to achieve great things, that lives, farms, and fights together. Humans.

This article was written by David Rolnick, a current graduate (and former undergraduate) student of MIT. It was published for *The Tech*, MIT's student newspaper, and is available both in print and online. Accordingly, it is geared towards MIT's students and faculty, though it is still very accessible to the scientifically interested public. This is supported by the nontrivial vocabulary, including "defoliates", "filaments", and "teeming", which hint at an educated audience, yet also the lay descriptions of scientific terms and animals, such as referencing "those ants that you get in ant farms" instead of the "*Pogonomyrex californicus*" (as he later mentions for those more scientifically inclined), which demonstrates that this article is for a wide range of people. Additionally he uses casual language, like "poop" and "superpowers", and directly engages the reader, using the second person in "all you chemists" and "here in Massachusetts, you often find ..." indicating that he is writing for people he is comfortable and familiar with, who live here with him in Massachusetts.

The purpose of this article is to educate the MIT community about ants, thereby spreading a sense of awe and appreciation. From the first paragraph, when ants are compared to humans, their position is elevated in the eyes of the reader because animals, and in particular insects, are typically considered inferior to humans. The author then amazes us with the vast number of ants, ant colours, and ant sizes, far greater than that of humans, beginning the idea that ants are perhaps superior to humans. This is a perfect example of how the author entwines his use of pathos and logos to show us the wonder of ants. To appeal to our logical minds, he gives us detailed explanations of the activities of ants and numerous examples of ants in action, facts that impress us with their ingenuity and remind us of ourselves, or astound us in other ways. For example, when it is explained that ants often build their nests under rocks for warmth, I was very impressed by the ants' intelligence and primitive scientific knowledge, something that is normally attributed only to humans. Moreover, the description of a synchronized orgy once a year seems to suggest that ants have powers and senses beyond that of humans, that they can somehow communicate and co-ordinate over long distances. These examples are a powerful play on our emotions because they cause us to empathise with the ants, to recognize them as one of us, the humans, and perhaps, even be beyond us, with abilities that we do not have, "superpowers" that are only for superhumans.

The author's other diction choices include calling the ants "underappreciated wonders" and explaining that they have "an alliance with a tree" causing us to subconsciously think positively of them and almost consider them to be like humans, negotiating for alliances and trade deals.

Other rhetorical choices include the extended metaphor of ants as humans prevalent throughout the article, as well as repeated references to Massachusetts, because it is the home of his intended audience and thus the most relatable and relevant for them, drawing their interest.

Another choice of the author is what information to include. In this case, while ants are being humanized and glorified, there is nothing relating them to more primitive behaviours, such as scavenging, or the negative aspects of humanity, such as slave making, which some species of ant participate in. This makes it clear that the author is biased in favour of the ants, but I still see this article as fundamentally trustworthy because I believe that the author, as an MIT student, would not write an article that was misleading or inaccurate. This is his one and only piece of ethos, but for me, it somehow means everything. I guess I'm biased too. ;)

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

21W.035 Science Writing and New Media: Communicating Science to the Public  
Fall 2016

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.