

more than 40,000 words in the course of a day? All men.

While Mehl and his associates admit that their study sample—all students—wasn't typical of the whole population, they believe that sex differences among the general public would be about the same. Their conclusion: "The widespread and highly publicized stereotype about female talkativeness is unfounded."

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

A Solid B+ for Prediction

THE SOURCE: "Anticipations: The Remarkable Forecasts of H.G. Wells" by Paul Crabtree, in *The Futurist*, Sept.-Oct. 2007.

IF H. G. WELLS WERE IN A *Jeopardy* category, it would almost certainly be science fiction. But at the turn of the last century, Wells (1866–1946) was regarded as one of the leading intellectuals of the West, with an influence that was felt in science, biology, history, and education. In widely popular books, he predicted an astonishing number of the seminal events of the 20th century, from the splitting of the atom to the creation of limited-access freeways, from guerilla warfare to the rise of the Boston-Washington megalopolis.

About 80 percent of the dozens of predictions in Wells's 1901 book, *Anticipations*, were at least partly right and 60 percent were "extremely accurate," writes Paul Crabtree, a retired federal analyst. Wells foresaw dramatic increases in the speed of travel, with most people transported in independent road

vehicles and only heavy freight moving by rail. He recognized the future of the airplane, but relegated it to a footnote. He expected the size of cities to expand exponentially until the New York metropolitan area encompassed 40 million people—it has 19 million residents today. He thought the "irresponsible" wealthy class would grow, as would a poor, uneducable underclass whom technology would render unemployable. He predicted the decline of marriage and an increase in childless unions. Machines and technology would become the primary means of waging war, he wrote; military victories would be won "in the

schools and colleges and universities." He foresaw English—"but perhaps French"—becoming the dominant world language. He recognized the globalization that is a hallmark of the world economy a century hence.

In later books, Wells forecast the use of atomic energy and the dropping of nuclear weapons from airplanes. In 1933, he wrote a novel that was only a few months off in predicting the date of the outbreak of World War II, according to Crabtree.

But as prescient as Wells was about technological change, he was clueless about religion and



A gas works erupts in flames as German bombers fill the sky over London in 1940. In a 1933 novel, H. G. Wells was only slightly off in predicting the date of the outbreak of World War II.

women. He failed to recognize the possibility of the rise of world faiths beyond a version of Unitarian Protestantism, which he expected to dominate. It apparently never occurred to him that women might go to work in numbers nearly equal to men.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Unfreeze Antarctica!

THE SOURCE: "Antarctica's Frozen Territorial Claims: A Meltdown Proposal" by Jill Grob, in *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*, Spring 2007.

DESPITE ITS LACK OF NEARLY everything necessary to sustain human life, Antarctica is a surprisingly popular continent. Britain staked its claim in 1908, followed by New Zealand, France, Australia, Norway, and Chile. Argentina polished its effort to gain title between 1927 and 1957, while the United States and the Soviet Union reserved the right in 1959 to make ownership claims in the future.

The reason behind this land rush, unsurprisingly, is minerals and, quite

possibly, oil. They are thought to exist in large quantities under the polar ice, which is up to three miles deep in places. The "Gondwanaland hypothesis" holds that Antarctica is one of seven continents that broke apart from a larger landmass more than 150 million years ago, and that because minerals exist on the other six, Antarctica must have them as well. Coal and iron ore have already been found, writes Jill Grob, senior production editor of *The Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*.

Three of the seven claimants have staked out some of the same land, and during 1947–48 "war-like scuffles" broke out among the rivals. As the Cold War became more heated, the Soviets hoisted the hammer and sickle over a research station they had established on land claimed by Australia. And though scientific research continued peacefully, the United States called together an early coalition of the willing to work out a treaty governing the territory. The eventual document, the Antarctic Treaty of December 1, 1959, banned military uses of the continent and encour-

aged scientific research. Territorial claims were "frozen" and left unresolved. The continent is jointly governed by treaty "consultative" signatories, which can include only nations that conduct "substantial scientific research" there, effectively excluding any but the richest nations.

With the threat of accelerated global warming raising environmental concerns, the time has come for nations to drop their Antarctic claims, Grob contends. They are based on long-ago discoveries, geographic proximity, or connections via submerged mountain ranges, and are ultimately irresolvable.

Antarctica should become an unclaimed global commons where scientific research can take place that will benefit all humankind, Grob says. This may require increased United Nations involvement, or merely a broadening of the conditions under which interested countries can become consultative signatories to the 1959 treaty. In any case, Antarctica is too important to the global environment to be held hostage to the concerns of nations "hoarding their frozen claims."

ARTS & LETTERS

The Heavy Hand

THE SOURCE: "Divine Comedy" by Julian Gough, in *Prospect*, May 2007.

WHY ARE MODERN LITERARY novels so earnest, so praiseworthy, so serious, and in the

words of novelist Julian Gough, "so bloody dull"? Why is tragedy overvalued and comedy underrated? Such undeserved inequality, he says, goes back two millennia. Many writers believe that the

ancient Greeks considered comedy to be the superior form of literary endeavor, but tragedy, instead, has reigned supreme for centuries as the defining spirit of great literature. The "Best Young American Novelists" list published by the noted literary magazine *Granta* this year featured 21 writers, all exploring death, sorrow, and uncertainty.

Comedy originally superseded