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Narratives Online

Stories are shared by millions of people online every day. They post and re-post interactions as they retell and respond to large-scale mediated events. These stories are important, as they can bring people together, or polarise them in opposing groups. *Narratives Online: Shared Stories in Social Media* explores this new genre – the shared story – and uses carefully chosen case studies to illustrate the complex processes of sharing as they are shaped by four international social media contexts: Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Building on discourse analytic research, Ruth Page develops a new framework – 'mediated narrative analysis' – to address the large-scale, multimodal nature of online narratives, helping researchers interpret the micro- and macro-level politics that are played out in computer-mediated communication.

RUTH PAGE is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics at the University of Birmingham. Her research interests lie in sociolinguistic approaches to narrative, language and gender, and new media. She has published extensively in all three fields, and is the author of *Stories in Social Media* (2012) and *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* (2006). She is editor of *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality* (2010) and co-editor of *New Narratives, Theory and Practice* (2011).

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Shared Stories in Social Media

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For my mother, who taught me to read and shares with me the love of a good story.

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Preface

This is a book about the shared story as a distinctive narrative genre that flourishes in online contexts. There are two reasons to write a book about shared stories:

1 Stories remain a pervasive genre that people use to make sense of the world around them.
2 'Sharing' has become a dominant keyword in online contexts, particularly associated with the ability to distribute and redistribute content within large networks of connections.

Shared stories that are told in online contexts are interesting for a number of reasons. This book focuses on the language and the mediated contexts in which shared stories are produced and consumed. The first chapter introduces shared stories and traces their analogous conversational, artistic and journalistic antecedents. Later chapters explore shared stories as they are told in four online sites that have become well established over the last decade, and which have international reach: Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Many of the examples of online interactions discussed in this book are available at the time of writing, but their longevity cannot be guaranteed. In the quoted excerpts from the stories, I have retained the exact spelling and punctuation that was used in the original, not always using *sic* to indicate unconventional spelling or usage. Sometimes – although not always – that unconventionality is part of the narrator's style.

Shared stories involve many tellers as they unfold over time and draw together many different kinds of texts. Although this book is not a shared story, it has unfolded over the process of several years, and there are many people who have helped along the way and to whom I owe a debt of thanks. Paul Thompson helped me clean up the data from the Wikipedia talk pages and provided the reference corpus of Wikipedia talk pages. Taha Yasseri created the revert graph of the Wikipedia editors' interactions with the 'Murder of Meredith Kercher' article and allowed me to reproduce it in this book. Maria Bortoluzzi and Lorenzo Mastropierro helped me translate the extracts from the Italian Wikipedia 'Omicidio di Meredith Kercher' article and pages. Earlier versions of some chapters were presented as work in progress at various conferences and seminars over

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the last three years. I am grateful for the comments and conversations that followed. I am especially grateful to Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Anna De Fina, who helped me see the connections between shared stories and small story research. Some of the analysis in Chapter 3 is drawn from Page (2014): an article which is available via the doi 10.1177/0963947013510648, and parts of which are printed here with permission of SAGE Publications.

I began work on this book whilst I was a member of the School of English at the University of Leicester, and completed it as a member of the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics at the University of Birmingham. I have been fortunate to find truly collegial scholars in both academic contexts, whom I count as friends, and who have helped my work in numerous ways. Thanks go to Julie Coleman, who read early versions of several chapters, and to Jeannette Littlemore and Susan Hunston, who read the later versions of those chapters and helped me frame the opening and closing of the book. Thanks go also to the Discourse and Stylistics Reading Group at the University of Birmingham (Michael Toolan, Joe Bennett, Johan de Joode, Jai MacKenzie, Nick Groom) for reading Chapter 4 and helping me see at least some of the trees I needed to cut down from the metaphorical wood. Extra special thanks go to Clare Anderson, who read the entire typescript and helped me spot the corrections that were needed. It goes without saying that this book is better for my colleagues' contributions and any remaining errors are my own.

On a more personal note, there are also a number of people who have shared the story of this book and without whose encouragement it simply would not have got finished. Thanks go to Kate Coleman, whose timely mentorship meant that redrafting the chapters became a process of re-vision that extended beyond this book. Thanks also to Natalia Bateson, Libby Proctor and Becky Lucas for our early-morning meetings and to all my friends in the Northside Community who have kept cheering me on. As always, the final words of thanks go to my family, who have lived through yet another book-length project. Gavin, Isi and Toby: thank you for patience, love and understanding. I am so glad we get to share our lives and stories together.

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