

Social Media Narrative:

Issues in Contemporary Practice

hosted by The Rutgers Camden Digital Studies Center and Judy Malloy
and the Rutgers Camden DSC Class in Social Media Narrative:

Lineage and Contemporary Practice

Facebook, November 16 - 21, 2016

Transcript: Chindu Sreedharan



Chindu Sreedharan

Once again, hello! Here are a few interesting things about Epic Retold that I have never told anyone (well, not really):

The first tweets that I drafted were total rubbish, but I thought they were cool. It took two kind friends to put me straight. Luckily, they stopped me before I went live.

A crucial aspect of making a story work is the 'attitude' (which goes beyond mere 'voice') of the protagonist. This is even more crucial in [#Twitterfiction](#), where you have more demanding audiences. I found first-person telling the most effective to capture this on Twitter.

When I started ER in 2009, I had every intention of finishing it within a few months. It took me a few years.

I thought the 140-character limit would be limiting. I actually found it liberating.

I think of the Mahabharata as an anti-war story.

I think of ER an anti-war story, for which I draw from the principles of Peace Journalism and similar.

I struggled writing the love scenes. I also struggled writing the killings at Kurukshetra.

But I had great fun drawing in Marshall McLuhan into the fray and have Krishna say, when Ghatotkacha is killed: "Any advanced weapon is indistinguishable from magic to many!"

I had tears in my eyes when I killed Ghatotkacha.

ER was written on an iPhone, iPad, and Mac; at home, at work, between lectures, at dinner, at airports, in airplanes, on buses, in cars... but much of it was written in a Subway in Landsdowne, Bournemouth.

I saw the bearded face of Hemingway when I struggled with the dialogue in ER.

I heard the French of Genette when I struggled with scenes I couldn't decide on whether to write 'long or short'.

I loved getting Drishtadyumna to say: 'War is ugly. There has never been one without treachery. There never will be.'

I had O Henry in mind when I wrote the last chapter. I had a fair idea how I would end ER, but I figured out the twist only towards the very end.

I struggled a lot with the battle between Arjuna and Karna, but now it is one of the bits I like most. Which is your favourite part in ER?

One of my favourite characters is Hidimbi. Who is yours?

And here's a link if you would like to read a bit of ER: <http://tinyurl.com/htaogsv>



Comments



Alphanumu Ptk Vicky I loved Epic Retold, I can't wait to find out how you came up with that genius writing!

November 15 at 8:29am



Chindu Sreedharan Thanks, Alp. Did you read the book, or digital / online? And were you familiar with the story before?

November 15 at 8:31am



Alphanumu Ptk Vicky I read the book version and yes I did read the original! It was so amazing because you put just enough information to keep the vivid imagery alive, which is really hard to do,

especially with that strict character count. I felt like I missed nothing from the original! Your Epic Retold is truly a masterpiece!

November 15 at 8:33am



Chindu Sreedharan Wouldn't call it that, but really had a fantastic time doing it. Hope to follow it up with an alternate - but a much shorter version - of Duryodhana. Curious to hear your thoughts on the Draupadi in ER.

November 15 at 8:55am



Alphanumu Ptk Vicky Oh I would love to see a version from Duryodhana. That would be so cool!

November 15 at 9:10am



Alphanumu Ptk Vicky Hello again! I believe that Draupadi was a very crucial character in the Mahabharata and I believe that you also showcased that in the Epic Retold as well.

November 16 at 2:37pm



Judy Malloy Welcome Chindu! Experimental storyteller and former journalist, Chindu Sreedharan, is the programme leader for MA Media and Communication at the School of Journalism, English and Communication, Bournemouth University, UK.

Visit <http://www.narrabase.net/socmedianarrative.html#chindu> to find out more!



November 17 at 7:31am ·



Zack Zampino Hello Chindu. I'm interested in the your writing process with Epic Retold. Was the 140 character limit frustrating or challenging? I imagine a bit of both, but like the Oulipo, it must force out new creative writing strategies, no? How did it impact the pacing of the story?

November 18 at 5:27pm



Chindu Sreedharan Zack, actually it was quite liberating. You need to write only 140 characters - often two sentences - at a time before you could publish. So I wrote in increments, which made the writing process seem so much more achievable. Importantly, you got to know what the readers thought of your work in real time.

November 20 at 1:21am

Deena Larsen Hello Chindu. I'd also like to ask about the temporal aspects of writing on Twitter-- how do you see stories unfolding in real time?

November 19 at 8:30pm



Chindu Sreedharan

Deena, hi! Twitter is made for real-time storytelling, I feel. There is an immediacy, an urgency, about the platform that demands concurrency in narration, both in substance and style. Partly this is because of audience expectations, I think, and I don't think a story that gives the impression of not playing out in real time would fit the platform. Epic Retold is an old, old tale, but presenting it as happening now was an interesting - and enjoyable - experience!

November 20 at 1:33am



Deena Larsen Thanks **Chindu Sreedharan**! Can you give a specific example of that immediacy-- those connections? A tweet? a retweet?

November 20 at 11:16am



Chindu Sreedharan Deena, have a look at this chapter: <http://m.huffingtonpost.in/.../book-excerpt-mahabharata.../>. At the superficial level, everything that happens to Bhima is happening NOW (the effect of 'presentification', as my colleague Bronwen Thomas has dubbed it). Stylistically, the 140-character limit demands a certain pace (which is heightened in episodes such as this). I felt I had to tell a micro-story, or at least something that would make *some* sense - to move plot, tease, foreshadow, etc - to the reader on its own. **Deena Larsen**



[Book Excerpt: Mahabharata, An Epic Retold](#)

[Note: This is the day after Abhimanyu's killing, which forms episode 34 of Epic Retold. ER is told in 40 episodes.] As the first rays of the sun break through the eastern sky, Arjuna surveys the batt...
huffingtonpost.in

November 20 at 2:19pm



[Deena Larsen](#) This does feel like real time. And thank you. Do you get much reaction from others in the twitterverse? For example, has anyone retweeted something like "Seeing my troubled face, Drishtadyumna says softly, 'War is ugly. There never has been one without treachery. There never will be.'" and made a comment on modern wars (Syria, Ukraine, etc.)?

November 20 at 5:47pm



[Chindu Sreedharan Deena](#), when it was 'playing out', there was some great responses. In fact, I wouldn't have finished it but for that interaction. Just had a quick look through some of the notifications, and here's a screenshot of a few about the war that came up on one screen. The war bits -- not necessarily the poignant ones -- got RT-ed quite a bit (most people RT catchy phrases, or bits about their favourite characters).



November 22 at 2:14am



[Judy Malloy](#) I went yesterday to the opening day of "Epic Tales from Ancient India: Paintings from The San Diego Museum of Art" -- now at the Princeton University Art Museum --and was magically confronted with 91 narrative paintings of frames predominantly from Bhagavata Purana; the Ramayana; the Ragamala, and the Persian Shahnama. From the Mahabharata, notably Krishna in the Walled City (not exact title) near the entrance to the exhibition. Each work was accompanied

by a detailed description of the intricate narrative it presented.

Class, if you have time to visit this exhibition over the holidays it presents a fascinating view of visual narrative, as well as a chance to look at Chindu's Epic-Retold from the point of view of the cultural context from which it emerges. Indeed, I would have liked to see the Harper Collins edition of Epic_Retold among the books the museum made available to viewers. Here is some information about the exhibition: <http://artmuseum.princeton.edu/.../epic-tales-india...>

November 22 at 7:32pm



[Chindu Sreedharan](#) Sounds a fantastic opportunity, Judy. Yes, Harper has permission to publish ER only in India, so that blame rests on me. Yet to get my act together and get it published outside.

November 20, 2016 at 2:22pm



[Judy Malloy](#) [Chindu Sreedharan](#) Even in today's Internet of unseen audiences, an experienced epic poet can sense the presence of the audience, and there should always be an honored place for Internet-based storytellers to enthrall the audience with epic events and/or capture the imagination of the audience with serially told narrative.

Indeed, when I first experienced Epic-Retold in my Twitter feed, it seemed as if in my daily information stream, battles on ancient grounds were threaded into Digital Humanities and electronic literature celebrations and wars -- so that in the midst of pithy 140 character documentation of alliances, triumphs, shared victories and veiled feuds, we read:

“The righteous war you seek exists only in Yudhistira's mind...Come, we must prepare for the battle at night!' [#TwitterFiction](#) [#Mahabharata](#)”

Thank you for bringing your voice to this panel!

November 25, 2016 at 7:10pm



[Chindu Sreedharan](#) Great pleasure to be on the panel, Judy. Thank you for the invitation!

November 26, 2016 at 1:38am