

# Call for Papers:

## 'Narratives of War'

Huizinga Institute conference, Amsterdam,

24-26 February 2016

**Keynote lecture: John Horne, Trinity College Dublin,**

**'Narrating Battle in the Great War'**

*Each year the official Storyteller of Amsterdam performs an act entitled, 'Why Tram Line 8 No Longer Runs'. It is 'a deeply personal story of the heroic rescue of children by the Dutch Resistance during World War II', told to 800 Amsterdam primary school children.*

War has been set down, recorded, and narrated for thousands of years, from Thucydides to Tolstoy, in fiction, non-fiction, museums and in the private sphere of the family. War narratives form a key component in historiography, from classic historicism to post-modern narrativism. This conference sets out to map out this rich range of insights, and to do so by means of highlighting certain core themes.

War is often 'a good story', sometimes even a source of tall stories, told through a wide range of classic and modern media. Victims of traumatic war memories can find relief in telling their stories, but tales of war have also long been a source of regular entertainment and even pleasure. War narratives fulfil a function in processes

of regime change, and have become part of trajectories of transitional justice. Narratives can help to identify and deny notions of victimhood and agency; competing versions often contain themed stories that may facilitate the recycling of repression of memories. They can provide foundational narratives for nations and states, and can become part of processes of mnemonic socialization. Such stories are often articulated, in the language of Michael Rothberg, in a multidirectional exchange between memory traditions, but this by no means excludes competition and disagreement about the story lines themselves. War narratives rarely remain unchallenged.

## Call for Papers

The Huizinga Institute is the national Dutch research network for Cultural History in the broadest sense, and in 2015-16 it is celebrating its twentieth birthday. As part of the celebrations it will host this international conference in Amsterdam, partly in commemoration of 1914-18, on 'Narratives of War'. The distinguished war historian John Horne, Professor of Modern European History and Director of the Centre for War Studies at Trinity College Dublin, has agreed to deliver our keynote lecture, 'Narrating Battle in the Great War'. The organizers welcome papers and panels from all disciplines within the humanities; in these years of commemorating the First World War, the twentieth century will feature strongly, but proposals concerning all periods since the Middle Ages are welcome. Papers of 20 minutes or panels of three papers should address one or more of the following topics:

1. **War as a (good) story.** Does the war story have a special narrative structure? Can war be recounted as simply a story of triumph or of loss? What are the other possible story lines? What are some of the overarching themes? Which

narrative strategies can be identified? What is the influence of performance, and of different media on the representation of war?

2. **War narratives and the politics of remembering and forgetting.** Every war has its own post-war working-out and representation, and a politics of memory and forgetting. Issues of guilt and responsibility can lead to denial and *Schuldabwehr*. The urge to normalize the situation can lead to a desire to put aside memories of war, and to effect closure on the past as a sealed and finished period.
3. **War Narratives and Transitional Justice.** What is the role of the war story and of the witness in processing the past and in legal restitution? What is the function of the search for shared narratives in post-conflict societies? Is such a shared narrative necessary, and if so, how might it be achieved? Can any patterns be identified in the stories of perpetrators and of victims? And how to reconcile in this context the tension between the desire to remember in order to achieve closure, and the desire not to remember so as not to open old wounds?
4. **Collective and individual war narratives.** How does the personal story interact with collective forms of storytelling, whether by the state or by other interest groups? For example, how should we evaluate the substantial influence of war veterans on the national narrative of war? And how should we approach the narratives of collaborators – or those of their children?
5. **War narratives in the museum.** As Jay Winter once asked rhetorically, 'Does war belong in the museums?' The museum is the site *par excellence* where conflicting war stories compete for recognition. How do museum war storylines materialize, and what has been the effect on those lines of recent historiographical insights? How has the narrative of war as represented in

museums affected views of war at large held by the state, and by groups and individuals?

6. **Changing concepts of war, changing narratives of war.** Do war stories alter in kind or form with new modes in the conduct of war in which friend and foe, front line and hinterland, are less clearly distinguished from each other, or where the enemy is hidden behind a drone? Do guerrilla warfare and jihad generate their own narratives?

Abstracts of up to 300 words for papers, or 500 words for a panel, which should clearly indicate how the proposed paper addresses the conference aims outlined above, should be submitted to the programme committee at [huizinga-fgw@uva.nl](mailto:huizinga-fgw@uva.nl) before **15 October 2015**. Please include a one-page academic CV. We will notify you of whether your abstract has been accepted before 1 October.

The Huizinga Institute intends to publish a selection of the papers with a refereed academic press.

Conference organizers

Remco Ensel, Michael Wintle (Huizinga Institute)

Nanci Adler, Ismee Tames (NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies)

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