

Traditions And Transformations:Five Years Of Civil War Books

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Interview

TRADITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS: FIVE YEARS OF CIVIL WAR BOOKS

Dyja, Thomas

Summer 2004

Interview with Thomas Dyja

by Christopher S. Freeman

Thomas Dyja is the editor of five anthologies and the author of two novels: Play for a Kingdom, named one of the best first novels of 1998 by Library Journal and winner of the Casey Award as Best Baseball Book of the Year, and Meet John Trow, selected by the Times of London as one of the best novels of 2003. He lives in New York City with his wife and two children.

Civil War Book Review (CWBR): Over the last five years, what trends have you observed in Civil War Era literature? Do any hold any particular promise or are you troubled by any of these recent trends?

Thomas Dyja (TD): While it seems like navel gazing at times, I think the cumulative weight of all the niche research has kept the Civil War alive and placed it within the broader context of American history. We really don't need any more dissections of battle plans for a long time.

CWBR: Are there any recent books on the war that you feel have been overlooked by the scholarly community and/or the general public?

TD:I think Gordon Rhea's latest book, *Carrying the Flag*, is a terrific contribution to the literature. Rhea is the most cogent and insightful historian of the Grant/Lee campaign and it was extremely satisfying that he brought all his talents to bear on a more personality-driven story.

CWBR: Can and should Civil War literature address current social, political, and moral issues?

TD:We live in a nation that becomes more and more unreal every day, and more and more of our fellow Americans seem either willing or simply apathetic to this fact. Somehow we've let ourselves be convinced that every moment we breathe here in America is a unique and exceptional one; that we're comparable to no other time or place, that even the history of our own nation means nothing in face of political expedience. History, in whatever form you want to take it, is a vital corrective to the vicious, insensible immediacy that seems to run us now. Knowing history is the only way to guarantee a future for this country.