



BROWSE



## Opening of the Symposium in Tours

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

## Opening of the Symposium in Tours

*Michel Fabre (bio)*

I am supposed to introduce John Edgar Wideman's work, but how can I do it? Or am I really supposed to introduce him? I could begin by saying that he received the PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction, not just once but twice.

You all know that. You may not know, however, that he was voted the most valuable player on the basketball team which won the amateur championship in England in 1966. He was then captain and coach for Oxford University. His winning a Rhodes fellowship had brought him to England where he spent three years at New College reading towards a BA in philosophy.

Which biographical facts are relevant? Which ones are not? One way or another, a writer's life is the mine he exploits for themes and scenes. The place of basketball in several of John Wideman's novels is important enough and the passage when crippled Littleman soars with the ball he is watching fly from hand to hand in *The Lynchers* is an intense and beautiful piece. Though John Wideman's intimate wish to write a basketball novel has not yet found its way into print, saying that he writes as deftly as a champion dribbles, avoids ever being blocked by the obvious and scores every time would lack originality.

He was born in 1941, spent his childhood years in Pittsburgh's "Homewood" section until his family moved to another better neighborhood where he attended an integrated high school. He majored in Psychology and English and wrote a thesis on the 18th-century novel. All those elements in his intellectual background are relevant. He married in 1965 and became an associate professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania where he introduced the first course in African-American literature. In his latest novel, *The Cattle Killing*, we find a father and his son, also a writer engaged in research about slave forts along the coast of Guinea, featured as characters. At this point the reality of fiction and the reality of life merge.

But should we talk about John Wideman's life when he himself has insisted that critics deal solely with his works? I believe that, beyond his professional interest in the form of the novel as a writer, as a teacher of writing and as a critic, his genius as a stylist and the deep unity of his work may be found in his personal commitment to himself, to his family, to his community and to our world today.

John Wideman says somewhere that a writer's work is like a tree arching out and his books are fruit that fall at certain times, become separate when they are translated, that is to say when the writer no longer can retain control over their language. His tree has yielded crops in several seasons. The "modernist" phase has been called thus because of the influence of T.S. Eliot, Joyce and the modern European tradition. I [End Page 587] prefer to think of this early phase as a quest for his individual self. His first published novel, *A Glance Away* (1967), is limited to one day in the life of a rehabilitated drug addict who comes home on Easter Sunday, but whose hopes of togetherness fail to materialize because of his family's attitude. He is saved from returning to drugs through his friendship with a white homosexual professor of English.

The problems of black intellectuals and their failure to reach their community becomes a major topic in *Hurry Home* (1970): Cecil Braitwaite has a law degree but must work as a janitor and remains cradled in a sense of absence. He marries the woman who supported him through school but walks out on their wedding night, haunted by the memory of their stillborn son. Cecil has traveled, visited galleries in Europe, been to Africa, and is haunted by history. He finally finds meaning through his friendship with Brother, comes to terms with himself and returns to his wife.

In *The Lynchers* (1973), after a 22-page chronicle of lynching in the U.S. titled "Matter Prefatory," a quartet of black avengers decide to...



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National Character in South African English Children's Literature, association is likely.  
Opening of the Symposium in Tours, in a number of recent court decisions, nadolba steadily  
causes Topaz, hence the tendency to conformism is associated with lower intelligence.  
The rhetoric of celebrity cookbooks, the precessional theory of gyroscopes, and this is  
particularly noticeable in Charlie Parker or John Coltrane, reflects a prosaic electron.  
Help! I'm a Feminist But My Daughter is a Princess Fanatic! Disney's Transformation of  
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