The fictional world of Andre Dubus is so often marked by brokenness—specifically in the fractured forms of divorce and familial violence. Yet at crucial moments personal integrity and familial unity are, if only briefly, restored. Violence is thwarted, wholeness recovered. How is wholeness recovered in Dubus’s world? Recalling the etymological meaning of Catholicity as “wholeness,” we might look to Dubus’s Catholic imagination for ways of understanding how such wholeness is achieved. In his essays of personal reflection, Meditations from a Movable Chair, Dubus emphasizes the importance of the Eucharist to his own experience of wholeness: “I go to the Mass because the Eucharist is there” (“Love in the Morning” 144); “for most of my life I have tried to receive the Eucharist daily” (“Bodily Mysteries” 101). The Eucharist graciously restored Dubus’s sense of personal integrity and communal unity, and granted him the capacity to contemplatively focus his attention. Dubus’s personal meditations on the Eucharist can enrich our reading of his fiction. His essays offer clues as to the way in which his characters recover and maintain a sense of wholeness, implicitly or explicitly, through Eucharist. In Dubus’s fictional world, the Eucharist founds and fosters his characters’ efforts to live whole, even holy lives.

I. WHOLENESS AND SELF-EMPTYING

In his essays, Dubus explicitly testifies to the way the grace of the Eucharist nurtures personal and communal wholeness. On an individual level, the Eucharist transfigures Dubus’s sense of integral selfhood; it “surround[s] by light” the oppressive shadows of death and sin (“Love” 144). At the consecration, Dubus no longer feels physically or spiritually broken: “I was me, all of me, in wholeness of spirit” (101). Moreover, when he receives the Host, Dubus senses his oneness with the gathered assembly, and the assembly’s unity with God: “I placed [the Host] in my mouth and was in harmony with the old man, the priest, the walking communicants passing me and my chair to receive the Eucharist; one with all people in pain and joy and passion, one with the physical universe, with Christ, with the timeless dimension of the spirit, which has

no past or future but only now; one with God” (102). Dubus testifies to the way the Eucharist calls and carries us to recognize that, despite our individual brokenness, we are each made in the image and likeness of God; that despite our separateness, even divorce from each other, we remain whole, one Body in Christ.

Further – and this comprises a third and crucial part of Dubus’s understanding of Eucharist – the sacrament employs physical signs to recall us to the timeless dimension of the spirit. Such recollection allows us to attend to the here and “only now,” “the moment at hand” (“A Father’s Story” [463]) and not the distracting, debilitating phantoms of past and future. The present reality is that God’s Real Presence extends beyond the necessary walls of tabernacle and church and infuses everything – each leaf that trembles, each breath we draw (86, 90). Eucharist – “thanksgiving” – calls us to attend gratefully, to focus on the sacramental giftedness of reality, infused as it is by God’s encompassing love. In our usual state of forgetting and inattention, we isolate ourselves from God’s love and the love of others. We forget that “we are always receiving sacraments,” and, Dubus writes,

Eucharist calls us to remembrance through receptive focus,3 a paradoxically willed openness akin to what the Buddhist tradition calls mindfulness, and Simone Weil calls attention. In her classic essay on “School Studies,” Weil writes: “attention is an effort, the greatest of all efforts perhaps, but it is a negative effort . . . it consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object . . . to receive [it] in its naked truth” (111). Thus, to say, “I am receptively attending” is to speak neither actively nor passively, but in an open and cooperative “middle” voice. Further, and here a link with the Eucharist emerges, Weil makes explicit the self-emptying entailed in attention. Loving one’s afflicted neighbor “means being able to say to him ‘what are