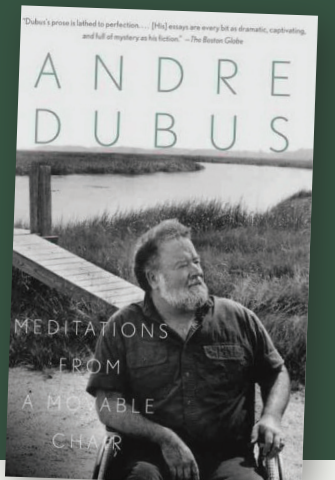


SEEING THE HAND OF GOD IN ALL THINGS



Andre Dubus (1936 – 1999) was an American short-story writer and essayist, Marine Corps veteran, husband, father and creative writing professor.

In July 1986, on his way home from Boston, Dubus was struck by an oncoming car while stopping to assist two motorists in a disabled vehicle. In the accident, Dubus lost one leg and the use of the other. He remained wheelchair-bound for the rest of his life.

Dubus subsequently experienced a long period of depression and disillusionment, caused, in part, by numerous surgeries, prolonged infections, painful physical therapy and other medical setbacks.

His most powerful weapons against his physical and emotional struggles were his writing and his faith. A practicing Catholic all his life, in this tragedy he turned to God for consolation and came to see this period of his life as an occasion for intensifying his relationship to God and to the Church.

REFLECTING ON THE CRUCIFIXION

He reflects on this journey from pain to joy in the collection of personal essays titled *Meditations From a Moveable Chair*.

The essays in this volume derive part of their beauty from their startling honesty and forthright discussion of the physical realities of human existence. Dubus grapples with the resulting impact on his ideas of masculinity, disability, fatherhood and physical identity.



Ann-Maria Contarino holds a master's degree in English literature from the University of Pennsylvania and a bachelor's degree in classics from Brown University. Since 1995, she has taught in the English Department at Saint Anselm College, where she also coordinates the Writing Center. Since 2004, she has facilitated a lively book discussion group at St. Raphael Parish in Manchester.

We are by nature spiritual beings, Dubus contends, but also beings with bodies that have wants, needs and limitations, all of which bind Christian believers to Jesus, the perfect model of triumph through suffering.

In the Eucharist, Jesus' own body becomes both sacrifice and nourishment, and so Dubus reflects deeply on the sustaining power of communion with the crucified Christ. Although some of the details of the essays may be harsh and raw, they are no more intense than Dubus' exhilaration at the human joys of life and love.

In *Meditations From a Moveable Chair*, Dubus frames the accident that cost him the use of his legs as a sudden, external force acting on his body, which shatters not only his corporal self but also his sense of wholeness and autonomy.

Although the accident clearly functions as the central event in the collection, Dubus narrates it in stages and fills many essays with flashback, memory and reminiscence. He surrounds the story of the accident itself with other events that contain the same dynamic: an external force breaking our boundaries and forcing us to re-imagine ourselves.

The external force can be negative or positive, but in all cases, it elicits a response intense enough to lay bare the fundamental components of our identity. After the impact of a negative force such as violence or physical injury, we often perceive ourselves as broken or as having lost something of ourselves.

We must undertake a process of healing, coming to equilibrium, learning to add or take in something new to make us whole.

ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN HUMAN AND DIVINE

Dubus talks frequently about the literal loss of his legs, but also about grieving for his ability to fulfill his own idea of masculinity, because he attaches that idea to being able-bodied. In meditations such as "Imperiled Men," "Digging," "Brothers," and "Giving Up the Gun," Dubus considers the risk of physical danger and the reality of violence and loss.

In all cases, he concludes that restoring wholeness requires replacing what is "lost" by learning to understand something greater, like friendship, gratitude and mercy. "About Kathryn," the first meditation in the collection, relates the story of Dubus' sister's rape outside her home and highlights Kathryn's revelation that she "said God bless you" to her rapist, even in the midst of her assault.

When Kathryn is violated by an intruder, when someone literally transgresses the physical boundaries of her body, she combats the invasion with forgiveness and asserts her power by using faith as a mechanism of healing.

Dubus presents his sister's response as the first step in an ongoing process. "He is gone from her flesh, and she is cleansing her soul; she prays so she can forgive him. It is hard work and will take a long time," but Kathryn will ultimately transform from victim to victor.

When, on the other hand, we encounter a positive force such as grace, genuine physical intimacy, the Sacraments and God in any form, we transcend our understanding of ourselves as autonomous and self-contained and we connect with something greater.

The ultimate human experience of this connection, for Dubus, is the Eucharist. In the image of Christ on the cross, Dubus sees another body, broken like his and broken for him, so that he might have eternal life.

When he consumes the Eucharist, Dubus writes in "Bodily Mysteries," "peace of mind came to me and, yes, happiness too, for I was no longer a broken body, alone in my chair. I was me, all of me, in wholeness of spirit ... one with all people in pain and joy and passion; one with the physical universe, with Christ, with the timeless dimension of the spirit; ... one with God."

Through the Incarnation, God, the eternal external force, takes on a human body that shares all our pain and joy. Jesus acts in time and history as an external force sacrificed to win our redemption. In the Eucharist, Christ also becomes an internal force — one we take into our bodies to heal, nourish and sustain us.

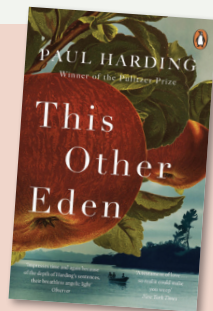
Meditations From a Moveable Chair shows us many encounters between the human and the transcendent. It invites us to consider how we might respond to tragedy, whether we have the awareness to recognize our blessings, and most importantly, whether we see the hand of God in all things. ■

COMING UP

This Other Eden

By Paul Harding

Harding tells the true story of the destruction of Malaga Island, off the coast of Maine. If you would like to read along, please consider the following questions:



Harding's title comes from a line in Shakespeare's Richard II, where John of Gaunt issues a warning against political authority left unchecked, even if that authority is also divinely ordained. Where do you see the intersection of political and ecclesial authority in Harding's novel and what are the consequences?

Harding's title also references the Book of Genesis. How does Harding echo the Genesis narrative in the novel's themes of creation, destruction and (re) establishing Paradise?

Learn more about women's religious communities.

Q1: The Sisters of Holy Cross were founded by:
 a. Bishop Ignace Bourget
 b. Father Basil Moreau
 c. Father John McLaughlin
 d. Father Jacques Dujarié

Q2: Who founded the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary?
 a. St. Julie Billiart
 b. Sister Madeleine of Jesus
 c. St. Marie Rivier
 d. St. Katharine Drexel

Q3: Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood were founded by:
 a. Mother Catherine Aurelia Caouette
 b. Bishop Joseph LaRocque
 c. Mother Marie Antoinette
 d. Father Jean-Baptiste Debrabant

Q4: Which religious community of women was founded in Poland?
 a. Daughters of Charity
 b. Little Sisters of St. Francis
 c. Sisters of Notre Dame
 d. Felician Sisters

Q5: Who founded the Sisters of Mercy?
 a. St. Elizabeth Seton
 b. Sister Catherine McAuley
 c. St. Jane Frances de Chantal
 d. St. Louise de Marillac

Q6: Bishop Peter Libasci commissioned which community of sisters to organize the Eucharistic Revival in New Hampshire?
 a. School Sisters of Notre Dame
 b. Little Sisters of St. Francis
 c. Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
 d. Daughters of Mary, Mother of Healing Love

Q7: The Sisters of Charity of Montreal, commonly called Grey Nuns, were founded by:
 a. St. Angela Merici
 b. Mother Mary Veronica
 c. St. Marguerite d'Youville
 d. St. Frances Xavier Cabrini

Answers are on page 31.