

J O S E P H B A T H A N T I

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## Saint Francis's Satyr Butterfly

Saint Francis's Satyr, a rare, endangered butterfly, exists exclusively in a 10 X 10 kilometer, high artillery impact zone within the confines of Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

*All creatures have the same source as we have.*

—Saint Francis of Assisi

A reclusive small brown butterfly,  
white and yellow stigmatic suns

deployed along its wing ridges,  
Saint Francis's Satyr—christened

after the 12<sup>th</sup> century Italian soldier  
and POW turned mystic—

secretes itself, miraculously,  
in 10 by 10 kilometers

of the 251 square mile brash  
of Fort Bragg—exact coordinates classified—

beyond which—we know this much—  
it has gone undetected. Shy, endangered,

preferring anonymity, it hides  
in high artillery impact domains—

life often chooses death—  
the fires triggered by bombardment.

It wears Marsh camouflage,  
resembles in its favored habitat—

blasted sedge and beaver ruins—  
a tiny standard issue

Advanced Combat Helmet.  
Parsed from the chrysalis,

rent too soon from its dream of living,  
the satyr blazes in desperate glory

but three or four days,  
in its imaginal stage,

then tenders its life in writ sacrifice.  
Its gorgeous numbers dwindle.

The caterpillar has never been seen.  
We accept, on faith, metamorphosis.

# Fayetteville

—for Bruce Weigl

... I close my eyes and see the girl  
running from her village, napalm  
stuck to her dress like jelly,  
her hands reaching for the no one  
who waits in waves of heat before her.

—“Song of Napalm,” Bruce Weigl

Hurling through the endless shrouded  
gauntlet of Bragg Boulevard—  
the machinery, the certainty,  
of war secreted matter-of-factly

on either side of it—everything  
arrested, etherized—the only danger  
a broken tequila bottle  
on the sand spit shoulder, neon

signs for bars and guns and tattoos,  
a couple Rangers in camos  
who nearly drop a mattress from Badcock’s  
they’re loading in a pickup—

I carry *Song of Napalm*,  
a first edition, on its jacket face  
a helmeted GI, mouth agape  
in mute keen. The glowing font

is napalm orange—*Song and of*  
burning over the soldier's eyes,  
*Napalm* scored across his nostrils.  
In the watery lamplight,

on the table next to my hotel bed,  
the volume shape-shifts like a hologram.  
It pages to black tunnels, wending on and on.  
Even the beautiful detonates.

Yet the rounds in that book, its shrapnel,  
lethal trope and caliber, remain humble,  
almost shy, in combat—  
purity that becomes Buddha.

Versed in the lotus,  
the poet makes a small place for defeat.  
It is sleep he yearns for;  
war is an insomniac.

The little girl in the poem,  
dedicated to his wife  
(which I find soothing, here  
in a strange room, without my wife),

is Kim Phúc, naked, fleeing  
Trang Bang in '72—  
Nick Ut's famous photograph, *Napalm Girl*.  
Carefully I read each word, each

metric foot, down to the syllable—  
to help me reckon what truth travels  
into and beyond immolation,  
that I might be visited by that God.

The next morning at Howard Hall  
Elementary, where Count Basie's jazz  
pipes through its corridors, I read  
1st graders poems by Shel Silverstein:

zany tongue-twisting alliterative  
nonsense—about a bear  
in a refrigerator and how to make  
a hippopotamus sandwich.

The children sit at my feet  
and laugh uncontrollably.  
Whispering *liftships* rise  
in the haunted mist.



**JOSEPH BATHANTI** is Poet Laureate of North Carolina. He is the author of eight books of poetry. *This Metal* was nominated for the National Book Award and was winner of the Oscar Arnold Young Award. *Land of Amnesia; Restoring Sacred Art* was winner of the 2010 Roanoke Chowan Prize, awarded annually by the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association for best book of poetry in a given year. His novel, *East Liberty*, won the 2001 Carolina Novel Award. His latest novel, *Coventry*, won the 2006 Novello Literary Award. His book of stories, *The High Heart*, won the 2006 Spokane Prize. His new book of personal essays, *Half of What I Say Is Meaningless*, winner of the Will D. Campbell Award for Creative Nonfiction, is from Mercer University Press. A new novel, *The Life of the World to Come*, is forthcoming from University of South Carolina Press in 2014. Bathanti is Professor of Creative Writing at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.