

Di Bo Chet

—for Philip and Ed
Joseph Bathanti

I'm at the foot of the cross:
Brother Christ,
my Communion partner,
an Abruzzese kid
from East Liberty;
521 ½ Collins, a row-house
between Concetta and Minnie Papale;
His phone, Emerson 1-5691;
Son of a Union carpenter,
who moonlighted as a chef
at the Kennilworth.
His mom was Russian.
His brother was sent off
to Saint Joseph Military Academy,
run by Sisters of Divine Providence,
at the top of Lincoln Hill
on the way to Mount Carmel Cemetery.
Our bedroom windows faced across the avenue.
Nightly he rehearsed the hallucination
that left us behind—envious and terrified
(though we didn't want to be Him—
God forbid—just like Him).
He had a deferment—4F

(The Art Institute of Pittsburgh)—
but he volunteered:
Boot at Parris Island,
shorn, the long brown hair;
shaved, His first beard;
Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines;
christened by Ho Chi Minh
Di Bo Chet—
The Walking Dead.
Shipped to Hue during TET,
He was crucified:
above me levitates,
a grand golden gnarl,
on His troth of love.

Joseph Bathanti, former Poet Laureate of North Carolina (2012-14) and recipient of the North Carolina Award in Literature, is author of seventeen books. Bathanti is the McFarlane Family Distinguished Professor of Interdisciplinary Education at Appalachian State University. A new volume of poems, *Light at the Seam*, is forthcoming from LSU Press in 2022.