

Touch the Earth

A Novella of an Aftermath of the Vietnam War

Thomas Jeffrey Vasseur

Learning from a soldier who has
experienced the real horrors of combat

Based on the life and tragic death of a veteran from our country's twenty-five-year involvement in Southeast Asia, this novella explores friendship, sailing, and the Vietnam War. It's a work thematically concerned with American & global landscape and our nation's late-20th century historical & cultural identity. A Catholic from coastal Connecticut, Robert Fitzgerald is at first indifferent towards—briefly tough on—then finally a spiritual mentor to a young man from the rural South who arrives on his construction site thinking he understands the complexity of life much better than he actually does.

A combatant in the horrific siege at Dak To, Fitzgerald helps the young narrator find alternatives to various temptations of the early 1970s while navigating the Pacific Ocean between Ventura and the Channel Islands. He shows him that the real joy of our brief, often painful earthy lives centers around being awed & reverent toward the Great Chain of Being, respecting all people despite their surface differences, working hard, living healthily & naturally "like Daniel in the Old Testament." Fitzgerald teaches him the basics of a more mature manhood, open-water navigation, even the names of fish, seal, and birds this newcomer to California has never encountered. This prose-work contains many facets and angles, including a non-linear section of contemporary & 1960s social critique mimicking Kierkegaard and Wendell Berry, with satiric echoes of Swift, Voltaire—even Jimi Hendrix.

Eventually, the two friends journey to repair a millionaire's hurricane-damaged sloop off the coast of Fiji—on the small island of Malololulai—and travel a bit through French Polynesia. Before his untimely death back on American soil, Fitzgerald gives him a series of parables—as when the young man very first meets him and aggressively accuses him of stealing his yellow hammer—that open his eyes & enrich his life forever.

Thomas Jeffrey Vasseur is a native from Kentucky. He is the author of *Discovering the World: Thirteen Stories*. He graduated from Transylvania University with a degree in English and Philosophy and received a Ph.D. in contemporary literature from the University of Utah. He lives in Northern Florida & Idaho and currently teaches at Valdosta State University

Fiction

October 2005

144 pages, 5 1/2 x 8 1/2

0-86554-988-5, P347

\$15.00t, Paper



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