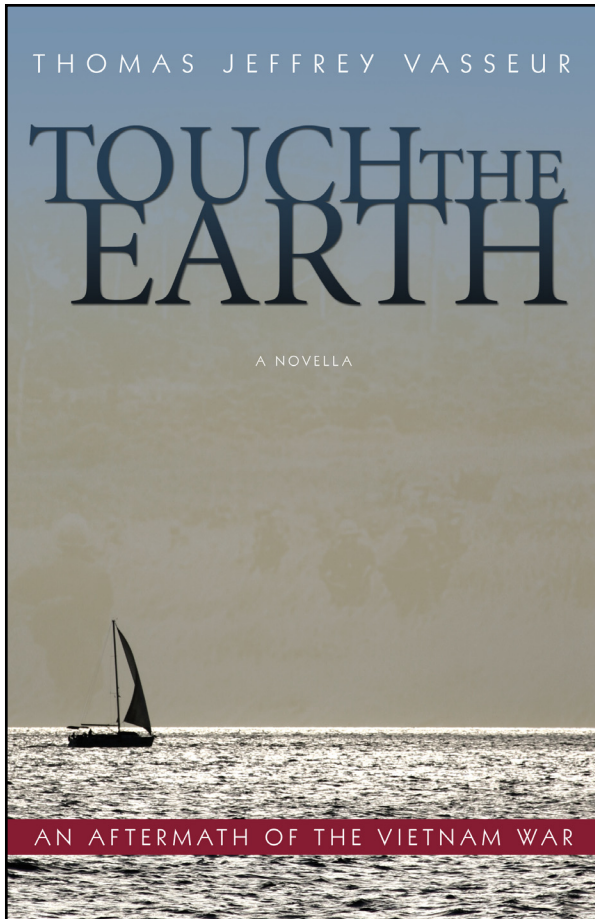


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Touch the Earth

An Aftermath of the Vietnam War

Thomas Jeffrey Vasseur



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A novella about learning from a soldier who experienced the horror 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 concerned with the American and global landscape and our nation's late twentieth-century historical and cultural identity. A Catholic from coastal Connecticut, Robert Fitzgerald is at first indifferent towards but finally a spiritual mentor to a young man from the rural South who arrives on his construction site thinking he understands 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 the young man that the real joy of our brief life centers around being awed and reverent toward the Great Chain of Being, respecting all people despite their surface differences, working hard, living healthily and 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 prose-work contains many facets and angles, including a non-linear section of contemporary and 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 Malololailai-and travel a bit through French Polynesia. Before his untimely death back on American soil, Fitzgerald gives the young man a series of parables-as when the young man first meets him and accuses him of stealing his yellow hammer- that opens his eyes and enriches his life forever.

Thomas Jeffrey Vasseur is a native of 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 and Idaho and currently teaches at Valdosta State University.

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