



American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam

Dr Philip D Beidler PH.D.

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American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam is a perceptive and evocative book that is both a comprehensive discussion of the literature of the war and a study of literature and literary consciousness considered in relation to the larger process of cultural myth-making.

In his exploration of the ways in which writers have tried to make sense of the Vietnam experience, Philip Beidler brings to light a whole literature that in its moments of fullest achievement quite literally “creates” a Vietnam more real than reality. In his discussion of the literature of the war he turns his attention to a wide variety of literary texts: novels, plays, poems, memoirs, oral histories, and works of documentary and reportage.

Beidler begins with an analysis of the peculiar difficulties involved in writing about an experience like Vietnam. He moves from the early attempts to deal with the experience (including Norman Mailer’s *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and Arthur Kopit’s *Indians*) to more recent works as diverse as Robert Stone’s *Dog Soldiers*, Tim O’Brien’s *Going after Cacciato*, Phillip Caputo’s *A Rumor of War*, Michael Herr’s *Dispatches*, the plays of David Rabe, the poems of John Balaban and Bruce Weigl, and recently published experiments in oral history such as Al Santoli’s *Everything We Had* and Mark Baker’s *Nam*.

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