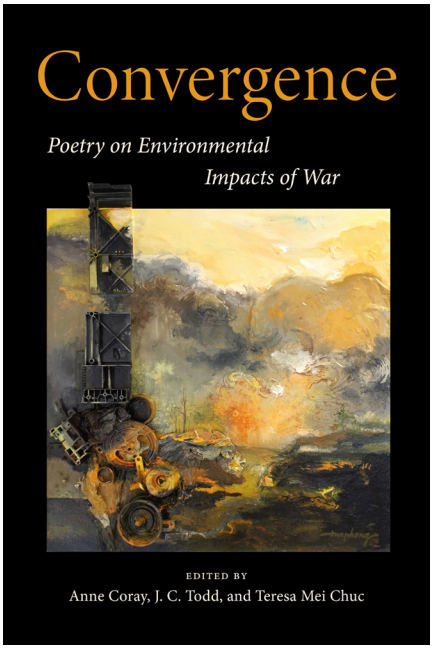
Convergence: *Poetry on Environmental Impacts of War*

Convergence is a groundbreaking collection offering a vital perspective on war's destruction of the natural world—the creatures, plants, soil, water, and atmosphere of Earth. Edited by Anne Coray, J. C. Todd, and Teresa Mei Chuc. Published by Scarlet Tanager Books (2026).



Review by Doug Rawlings

I suppose it's true that when most of us open a book, we bring with us certain expectations based on the genre. My encounter with historical fiction, for example, brings with it a host of expectations, many of which are based on life experiences. This is certainly true when I open up a collection of poems.

Fortunately for me and for many readers of poetry, expectations can be rattled and transformed by the artistry and wisdom of poets and their editors. ***Convergence*: *Poetry on Environmental Impacts of War*** (Scarlet Tanager Books, 2026) is such a collection.

For years, I have maintained that a poem that "works" has to be able to stand by itself with no prologue or epilogue necessary. Then I opened up ***Convergence.*** As I began reading the poems, I became increasingly intrigued by the poets' note attached to each one. The poems do indeed "stand by themselves," but the reflections that accompany them add significantly to the reader's understanding of the nature of war and its impact on the natural world. And so this collection justifiably stands as a valuable resource as well as a testament to the beauty of poetry.

Take, for example, Teresa Mei Chuc's poem, "Agent Blue." The powerful beauty of her language resonates throughout the poem:

> *To kill correctly*
> *takes calculation.*
>
> *Down to a science.*
> *…*
> *Because*
> *mortars,*
> *grenades*
> *and bombs*
> *can not destroy*
> *a grain.*
> *…*
> *Know what it*
> *takes to kill*
> *the seeds.*
> *…*
> *To be surrounded*
> *by love but unable*
> *to absorb it.*

In a very few words she captures the personal depth of war and its universal impact on the innocent, its ability to crush one's world forever. And then, her accompanying statement deepens our understanding:

> *"…Due to the U.S. military's spraying of chemicals such as Agent Blue during the war, high concentrations of arsenic have remained in the Mekong Delta environment for the last sixty years, continuing to contaminate the waters, sediments, and soils."*

As a former high school and university teacher, it's because of contributions like Teresa's that I would be equally comfortable recommending this book for use in a literature classroom, science classroom, or a history classroom. Imagine combining her work with John Balaban's, Bill Ehrhart's, and Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai's, to name a few, and you get my point—this is a collection of poems well worth keeping in school libraries as well as at home. As students become increasingly aware and concerned about the deteriorating nature of the environment, works like ***Convergence*** can give them a deeper understanding of how we are all complicit in the earth-shattering crisis—and provide them with yet another resource to back up their chants of "No More Wars." The power of poetry lives on! Thank you to ***Convergence*** editors for putting this collection in our hands.

Personal note: *I really started taking poetry seriously after I returned from the American war in Vietnam. Here was a medium that could accurately capture the surreal nature of that war. No need for the traditional "beginning, middle, and end" formatting for the narrative. Nope. You could jump right into the moment a mortar hit, feel its impact, look around, and jump back out again. Then on to the next poem.* —Doug

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Teresa Mei Chuc is to be a featured poet-presenter at this year's convention in Kansas City. Vietnam veteran poet **Strong Buffalo,** an enrolled member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota, is also an honored guest. **Doug Rawlings** has promised to grace us with a few words via Zoom. ***VFP POETS: Sign up for the Thursday night event ahead of time by emailing editor@veteransforpeace.org.***

W. D. Ehrhart

HOLES

Out in the boonies of Vietnam
while on patrol, night after night
you'd dig a new fighting hole,
every night in a different place,
every night another hole
like a grave, but not as deep.

On a company sweep, you're
talking two hundred fifty holes
a night. Battalion operation
a thousand holes each night.
Night after night after night.

And if you had to take a crap,
and everyone did, you dug
a little hole and shit in it.
We called them cat holes.

You also needed to dig a hole
for your garbage, mostly C-ration
cans, as if, if you buried your trash,
the Viet Cong and the NVA
wouldn't know you'd been there.

The Americans dug these holes
for seven years, more or less.
Hundreds of thousands of holes.
Night after night after night
from the DMZ to the Mekong.

That's a lot of holes,
a lot of garbage,
one hell of a lot of crap.

> **Author's Note:** *Without a doubt, the American War in Vietnam caused massive and permanent damage to the flora and fauna of Vietnam: dioxin poisoning, bomb and artillery craters, the destruction of wildlife on a massive scale. In the grand scheme of things, digging up the surface of the land as I describe it here in "Holes" may have had only a minor—and reversible—impact. But everywhere we Americans went, we changed the landscape, and not for the better.*

W. D. EHRHART is a Marine Corps veteran of both the American War in Vietnam and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War movement. He is the author of Thank You for Your Service: Collected Poems (McFarland & Co., Inc.).

James Janko

LATE-NIGHT SCRIBBLE IN MARGINS OF UNPAID BILL

one day in Củ Chi
knee-deep in paddy mush
booby trap
white flash
shards of leg
medic tying tourniquet
and hours later
REVENGE
bombs and napalm
fields and huts ablaze
no rice grass anymore
no coconut palms
no jackfruit or tamarind
no dragon fruit trees—
this is the moon
GIs on patrol days later
leave Coca-Cola
in dying village
show goodwill
win hearts and minds of ghosts
recipe for war same-same
during my time here
light the earth
shake and bake
there is a saying in SE Asia—
ants suffer when
elephants rage

> **Author's Note:** *I was drafted into the Viet Nam War. In 1970, while serving as a combat medic in an infantry battalion commanded by Colonel George Armstrong Custer III, I refused to carry a weapon. My unit operated in areas where resistance forces often disappeared into tunnels, and if we couldn't find our so-called "enemy," our commanders called in the Air Force to destroy all that might be concealing or sustaining them. Planes bombed rice paddies, forests, fields, rivers, and villages, and they defoliated huge tracts of land with Agent Orange. I soon realized we were fighting the earth—the entire Vietnamese landscape. If we couldn't find our "enemy," we could, and we did, destroy their land. "Late-Night Scribble in Margins of Unpaid Bill" describes a basic military strategy: defeat the opposition by defeating the earth.*

JAMES JANKO's novels and short stories have won numerous awards. His fourth novel, *The Wire-Walker,* was published in the fall of 2025 by Regal House, a women-owned press. Four Windows Press published Janko's debut book of poetry, *Love and Catastrophe,* in 2023.

Lynn White

A ROSE FOR GAZA

Gaza is a garden full of roses.
Stone roses.
Rock roses.
No petals to crush and bruise
to release their fragrance.
Only dust.
Dust and the stench
of death.
No green space left.
No sweet tranquility,
peace or quiet.
No escape.
No garden of Eden here.
No gateway to paradise.
Rubble and rock roses.

> **Author's Note:** *The Israeli bombing and ground invasion of Gaza has affected all aspects of the environment, and not only the built environment. Bombs being used include not just modern missiles but old, inaccurate ones supplied by the U.S., which turn wild spaces, gardens, and agricultural areas to dust and rubble, leaving no food or sanctuary for any living creature.*

LYNN WHITE lives in northern Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places, and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy, and reality.

TWO POETS featured on this page are VFP members—W. D. Ehrhart and James Janko. These three poems are just a small sample of the 90 works included in the ***Convergence*** collection. Reprinted with permission.