

Carolyn Merchant

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Congrats to Carolyn Merchant, winner of ASEH's Distinguished Scholar Award

We are happy as clams—and horses and chickens and goats and all creatures, really—to announce that today, at the [American Society for Environmental History](#)'s annual meeting in Portland, our author [Carolyn Merchant](#), receives the Distinguished Scholar Award for her significant contribution to environmental history scholarship. Professor Merchant has focused, throughout her career, on human interactions with the natural environment—how we are changed by our environment, and how, conversely, it changes us.

This award comes in the year we re-issue her 1989 landmark book, [Ecological Revolutions](#). In this classic and much-loved study, Merchant shows how social changes have reshaped the land as she analyzes two major transformations in the New England environment between 1600 and 1860. The first was the arrival of European explorers and settlers during the seventeenth century, when Native American ways of life and the environment itself underwent radical alterations as human relationships to the land and ways of thinking about nature all changed. This colonial ecological revolution held sway until the nineteenth century, when New England's industrial production brought on the second—a capitalist revolution that again remade the ecology, economy, and conceptions of nature in the region.

In the telling, Merchant explores how ideas about nature are socially constructed and argues that major cultural and economic changes not only result in changes to the landscape but also to the basic fabric of how people conceive of and relate to the natural world. As she writes, “an ecological transformation in the deepest sense entails changes in ecology, production, reproduction, and forms of consciousness.” Changing the way we think about our relationship to the environment comes first, and understanding how we have related to it, over the course of history, is the precursor to this shift. And what has been occurring in the field—and in the minds of Americans—in the twenty years since this book first appeared, is just such a shift in thinking.

And so, Professor Merchant's book becomes increasingly relevant as the issues she explores continue influence our environment. The new edition will address ideas about narrating

environmental change based on gender and the dialectics of transformation, as well as a new epilogue situating New England in the context of twenty-first-century globalization and climate change. Merchant argues that past ways of relating to the land could become an inspiration for renewing resources and achieving sustainability in the future.

So today we send a big congrats over the ether to Professor Merchant for all the work she's done to help students, scholars—and all us creatures—more fully understand how our predecessors interacted with and shaped the world in which we live, as well as how we continue to do just that.

Hip hip hooray!

—beth