

## Foreword

In 2002-2003 I had the great honor of serving as the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in American Studies at Uppsala University. While in Sweden, I frequently taught and lectured on one of my special fields of interest, American environmental writing. This is how I came to know Robert Österbergh, Klara Jacobsson, and the other wonderful folks at CEMUS, who had been working so hard to create a center for environment and development studies at Uppsala. I visited CEMUS several times to give guest lectures, and I was impressed at the dedication and imagination its young co-creators manifested as they worked to design, research, and teach a range of seminars on various topics of importance to environmental awareness and transformation.

In the United States, environmental studies is a burgeoning academic discipline. There are remarkable journals, university presses that build environmental lists, Ph.D.-granting programs, interdisciplinary research centers, and so on. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, which is commonly known as ASLE, began in the United States about fifteen years ago with 25 members; it now has over 1 000 members, and there are now ASLE-affiliates in Japan, Korea, the UK, Canada, India, Australia/New Zealand, and – perhaps soon – China. But “environmental studies”, “environmental writing”, “ecoliterature”, “ecocriticism”: these are not words that have strict definitions, not concepts that have strict boundaries. That is part of what makes such work so important and so exciting. In environmental studies, everything is potentially grist for the mill – because in the largest sense, environmental studies simply is based on the fact that we humans do not exist in isolation: that always, in every way, we exist in context, we are envired. To acknowledge the more-than-human as fully as real and significant as the human, and then to explore the complex interrelations between human and more-than-human, lead endlessly into branching, fascinating, and inexpressibly urgent forms of awareness and knowledge.

The great American poet William Carlos Williams has written, “A new world / is only a new mind [...]”. As Al Gore’s brilliant documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* and countless other sources make clear, our old minds are rapidly destroying the world. The enormous importance of

environmental studies lies in its potential for paradigm transformations – for making us see, and therefore care, differently – for, in effect, creating new minds.

I celebrate this volume of ecocritical essays, the first in Sweden of its kind.

*Ann Fisher-Wirth*

Professor of English, University of Mississippi

Immediate Past President of ASLE