

ECO-NARRATIVE

Christopher Woods

I HAD NO SAY IN WHERE I WAS BORN. SOME ANCESTORS CAME FROM KENTUCKY, others from Rhode Island. Others, earlier, came from Ireland and England. But one grandmother in particular, from Providence, came South in the 1920s for Mardi Gras in New Orleans and never returned home. So things, in some ways, were set for my own beginnings.

Living all of my life in the Gulf Coast region, I think of flat brown beaches and red tides, and the never-ending fear of the Big Storm. Some fears became realities. I have smelled and breathed the petrochemical wind. I know that Indians, some of them cannibals, lived here before me and that their spirits endure in spite of skyscrapers and freeways freeways freeways. Here we are all in motion, and always, more and more people arrive to join us for this vast experiment.

But there is also art, and words, and some of us have chosen, or been condemned, to record the world that is all around us. We start small, looking around the room, but soon we also look out the window, see the world we have, for better or worse, inherited. Shrimpers and stockbrokers, roughnecks and collared priests, and on and on, all moving about, the years piling up. I grew up in a blue state and now live in a red state, but I know that I will, not long from now, live in a blue state again. There are cycles.

Any land will give up words, and history, and secrets. The South gives up many secrets and hides the rest. I am older now, but still naive enough to believe that my life is meant to gather what this land I walk on has to say, the colors and the smells, what is old and what is new; to preserve it in phrases and lines, and in images—as though there might be something worth saving. ♦

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