



Sailing to Alluvium

John Pritchard

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John Pritchard's third novel again features Junior Ray Loveblood, who "talks" his books to his editor Owen Brainsong II (aka Brainy), who transcribes the recordings. McKinney Lake is Brainy's editorial assistant; both of them work on getting Junior Ray's profanity-laden tales into print.

In *Sailing to Alluvium*, Junior Ray and his friend Voyd have decided to buddy up as "diktectives," since they worked so well together in their previous adventure, recounted in *Yazoo Blues*. This time, they're investigating a murder which former deputy Junior Ray believes is connected to two previous homicides. He also suspects all three are the work of the Aunty Belles, a Southern women's club (formed as an auxiliary to the original Ku Klux Klan) dedicated to the preservation of their version of Southern manhood.

The book's title is a reference to the poem "Sailing to Byzantium" by William Butler Yeats. Part one of the novel is the murder investigation, and part two is Brainy's pet project, The Notes of Leland Shaw. A poet, World War II veteran, and spiritual seeker, Leland Shaw's post-war ledgers make it plain that he was mentally unstable: he thinks he's being hunted by a German patrol from WWII. Shaw's philosophical and spiritual beliefs are a subtle parallel to Yeats's poem; the journey to Byzantium can be read as a spiritual experience as well as a physical one.

The amount of swearing in this novel may be offensive to some. Junior Ray's speech is built completely from his regional dialect. Junior Ray himself notes that he talks exactly like the "colored folks" he grew up with in a small town in the Mississippi Delta region; his speech patterns (sentence structure, word choice, and accents) reveal much about him and his neighbors. Moreover, Junior Ray is a storyteller, not a novelist, though he calls himself an "Rthur." His first-person viewpoint is vital to the success of the novel.

Those who enjoy dark humor, persnickety personality, and tales of human frailty should enjoy this novel. Pritchard has brought the Delta to life in the character of Junior Ray with a masterful, fluid, and experienced hand. William Faulkner would be proud.

J. G. STINSON (Winter 2014)

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