

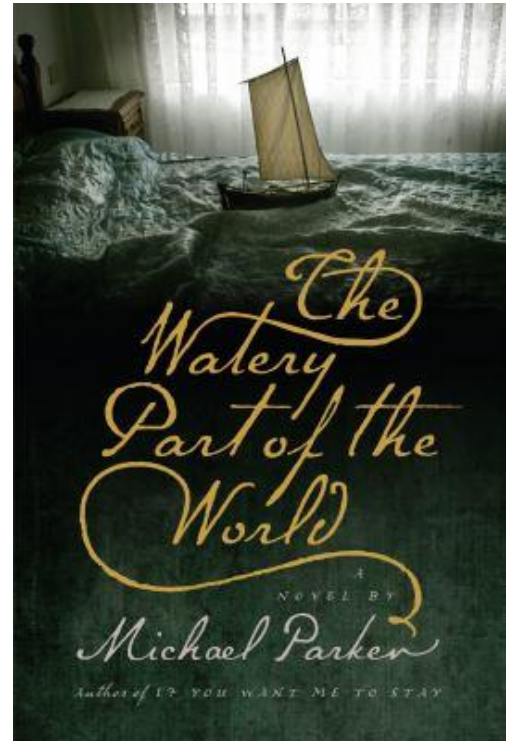
**“The Watery Part of the World” by Michael Parker.
Algonquin Books, 2011. \$23.95, 272 pages.**

In the last days of 1812 Theodosia Burr Alston, daughter of former Vice President Aaron Burr and wife of South Carolina Governor Joseph Alston, boarded a schooner bound for New York and was never heard from again.

In the early 1970’s, two elderly women, the last remaining residents of Portsmouth Village, a small town on a barrier island off the coast of North Carolina, reluctantly moved from their island home to the mainland, leaving behind a ghost town.

Michael Parker has taken these two facts, Theodosia’s disappearance and the desertion of a once thriving village, and woven a story so engrossing and believable that it’s hard to imagine it isn’t true.

When her schooner is attacked by pirates and everyone on board has been killed, Theodosia is spared by a momentary act of feigning insanity. Believing that she has been touched by God, the brutal pirate is too superstitious to take her life and instead deposits her on a barrier island to live out her days as a captive under his cautious protection. Taken in by another exile, Theodosia learns that all of her education is of no use on this island where the way of life is a hardscrabble existence and any hope of her survival depends on the whim of a vicious pirate and her ability to make him believe she is thoroughly mad.



More than a century and a half later and a few islands away, the last two remaining descendants of Theodosia make up two thirds of the population of Yaopon Island, a tiny barrier island battered into obscurity by the years of hurricanes and the changing world around it. The elderly sisters, Maggie and Whaley, are dependent on the only other resident of the island for much of their food and information. Woodrow Thornton, an elderly black man descended from the freed slave who worked for Theodosia is torn between resenting the sisters and caring for them at the same time. The loss of his wife Sarah during a hurricane and whatever hand the sisters might have had in her fate has brought Woodrow to a crossroads in his life.

“The Watery Part of the World” is a beautifully written, richly imagined tale that weaves together the lives and circumstances of inhabitants of the long distant past with the present day lives of their descendants. It is a story of relationships and how our past shapes our present and what happens when you never allow change into your life. Parker’s prose is gorgeous, lush and descriptive and full of evocative turns of phrases. “The Watery Part of the World” is a novel to be enjoyed slowly, savoring the narrative as it spins its tale from the past to the present and back again.

Michael Parker will be at May Memorial Library on Sunday, September 18 at 3:00 to discuss his book “The Watery Part of the World.” For more information call 336-229-3588.

Rebekah Scott is a reference librarian at May Memorial Public Library. Visit us on the web at www.alamancelibraries.org.