

The Sunday Book Club

Have you been reading anything good lately?

Want to share the experience with others?

Come and join us in a friendly and lively discussion in the relaxed ambience of the Kelvin Club on a Sunday once a month.

We not only chat about the book selected for the month (see below) but will happily chat about what you have found as an exciting read or a new discovery or an old memorable favourite (or not) in the book world or anything else – and everyone's invited.

Don't have access to a library or a quiet spot to read?



The Melbourne Athenaeum Library
Level 1
188 Collins Street
Melbourne 3000

Library Enquiries (03) 9650 3100

Library Fax (03) 9654 9776

Email - **Library** : library@melbourneathenaeum.org

Annual memberships start from \$70 (\$65 concession) – the price of a hardback or two paperbacks!

9 August Book Group

A Night At The Pink Poodle

by Matthew Condon



Icarus is a penthouse salesman on the Gold Coast. In his early thirties and at the top of his profession, he revels in the trappings of his success: the luxury apartment at Parthenon Place overlooking the endless rolling surf, the red Mustang convertible, the gorgeous beautician girlfriend. His life couldn't be more perfect. or could it? This is the story of the rise and fall and redemption of a modern-day Icarus, and is the final word on that strangely unsettling and gloriously tacky place we call the Gold Coast. Matt Condon's reputation as one of our most original and talented writers was set once and for all with the publication

of this novel.

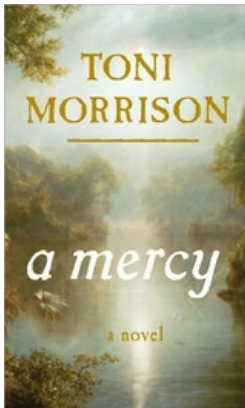
The Book Review: this is a very Australian novel. No, wait. This is a very Gold Coast novel. Not that I live there, so I can't really comment, though I feel that I might now be able to. For a place that is concerned about looking bright and glitzy, there is a lot happening just underneath that is anything but happy. Take,

for example, the shifty janitor of the building in which Icarus lives. Turns out, he beats his Vietnamese wife, because he fought in Vietnam. Or perhaps the Texan businessman looking to buy an apartment who also enjoys tormenting his wife. A lot. All of these tales (for that's what this book is, really, a collection of stories about Ick's life – novel is so hard to define these days) show that there really is a seedy side to the Gold Coast, and the people who inhabit it.

Book for 13 September Book Group

A Mercy

by Toni Morrison



A short novel, and can be appreciated best when read in one or a couple sittings. Indeed, the simple story is told in several voices, but reading these voices in succession weaves a tapestry that tells a larger story about America's history of slavery and the extermination of Native Americans. *A Mercy* is not plot or character driven -- it is about the voice of the past and what it means to be human.

The Book Review: the main character in *A Mercy* is Florens, a slave whose mother gives her away in 1690. Florens is haunted by her mother's decision. She is also driven by love for a free, African-American blacksmith. She is sent on an errand to fetch the blacksmith in hopes that he will be able to heal her mistress of smallpox. The plot of *A Mercy* is relatively simple, but each chapter contains a different voice -- Florens, the Mistress, the Native American woman in their household, another slave, some neighbouring servants. The variety of perspectives shines light on all the forces at play in the family. This family, in turn, points to how life was in America at this moment in history. I would, however, recommend it to anyone interested in historical fiction that deals with slavery in America. It is a quick, thought-provoking read.

Book and Movie for 11 October Book Group

Don't have time to read the book, watch the movie and join us in the October

Perfume

by Patrick Süskind



This is incredible story of Grenouille, a man born completely without a bodily scent. He has an astounding 'gift' in that he experiences the world mainly through his capacity to pick up various scents. In eighteenth-century France this can prove to be both a blessing and a curse; a blessing because the manufacture of perfume is a lucrative trade, a curse because perfume is so valued due to the fact that it is needed to mask the noxious odours that characterise this period - hygiene being non-existent in many people's lives. Not only can Grenouille identify everyday smells, but he can identify the scent that evokes moods such as trust, adoration and lust. His

life's work is to capture the fresh smell of innocent hope that he smelt once on a beautiful adolescent girl. This is the story of his quest.

The Book Review: the first half of the book, while Grenouille is learning the perfumists' trade, is a delight. Part of the fun comes from observing the art of perfume-making at work, as Suskind skillfully describes the intriguing and complex processes of extracting scents from everyday objects. But in the second half of the book, Suskind too often gets carried away with his prose, drowning the reader in seas of verbiage that, while evocative, also become excessive. Nevertheless, the second half of the book contains one of the funniest and most unexpected analogies I have ever read: "It was as if the man had ten thousand invisible hands and had laid a hand on the genitals of the ten thousand people surrounding him and fondled them in just the way that each of them, whether man or woman, desired in his or her most secret fantasies."

The Film

The film begins with the sentencing of Grenouille, a notorious murderer. Between the reading of the sentence and the execution, the story of his life is told in flashback,. Raised in an orphanage, Grenouille grows into a strangely detached boy with a superhuman sense of smell.

The Cast

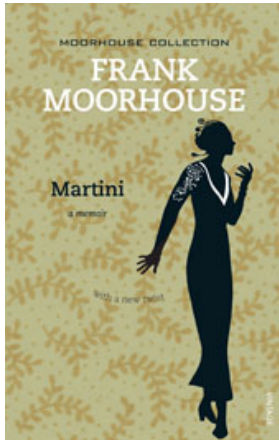
- **Ben Whishaw** as **Jean-Baptiste Grenouille**, a young man with a powerful sense of smell. He murders more than a dozen women to create the perfect scent.
- **Dustin Hoffman** as **Giuseppe Baldini**, a washed-up perfumer who first teaches Grenouille how to capture smells and create perfume.
- **Rachel Hurd-Wood** as **Laura Richis**, a beautiful lady and the subject of Grenouille's attention. Her scent, he feels, will complete his collection.
- **Alan Rickman** as **Antoine Richis**, Laura's wealthy and powerful father.
- **Corinna Harfouch** as **Madame Arnulfi**, a perfumer in Grasse who employs Grenouille at her flower garden.
- **Karoline Herfurth** as **The Plum Girl**, Grenouille's first victim. Grenouille is forever haunted by the fact that, in killing her, he lost the sublime beauty that was her scent.
- **John Hurt** as the **Narrator**

The Movie Review: the film had received mixed reviews by critics. Reuters described the movie as "visually lush, fast-moving story", stating as well that the director "has a sure sense of spectacle and, despite its faults, the movie maintains its queasy grip". "You may not savor it", "but you will not stop watching it, in horror and fascination". "A kinetic visual feast with an antihero that's impossible to feel sympathy for". The film was a financial success, especially in Europe, earning \$135 million worldwide. However, it was deemed unmarketable for American audiences and released in a very limited number of theaters in North America, taking in a modest \$2,223,293.

Book for 8 November Book Group

Martini: A Memoir

by Frank Moorhouse



At once a celebration of the most elegant, arcane and mysterious cocktail of them all - the martini - and a lyrical memoir of friendship and love won and lost, **MARTINI: A MEMOIR** is Frank Moorhouse at his melancholy and hilarious best. As he muses on the aesthetics of martini lore - olive or twist, shaken or stirred, Dorothy Parker or James Bond? - and the nature of drinking, Moorhouse reflects on the role of the martini in his own life in prose as dry and intoxicating as the martini itself. Now with revisions and a new Afterword.

The Book Review: Acclaimed author Frank Moorhouse considers the world's most elegant and mysterious cocktail whilst also reflecting on his life.

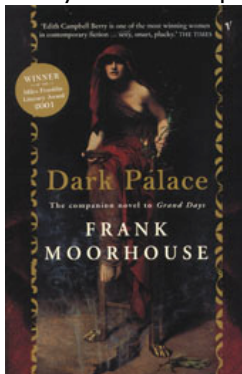
The Book selected to read over December and January

Discussion in the New Year

Dark Place

by Frank Moorhouse

Five years have passed since Edith Campbell Berry's triumphant arrival at the League of Nations in Geneva, determined to right the wrongs of the world. The idealism of those early grand days has been eroded by a sense foreboding as the world moves ever closer to another war. Edith's life too, has changed: her marriage and her work are no longer the anchors in her life – she is restless, unsure, feeling the weight of history upon her and her world.



As her certainties crumble, Edith is once again joined by Ambrose Westwood, her old friend and lover. Their reunion is joyful, and her old anxiety about their unconventional relationship is replaced by a feeling that all things are possible – at least in her private life. But World War II advances inexorably, and Edith, Ambrose and their fellow officers must come to terms with the knowledge that their best efforts – and those of the well-meaning world – are simply useless against the forces of the time.

The Book Review: Moving, wise and utterly engrossing, this is a profound and enriching novel. **GRAND DAYS** and **DARK PALACE** confirm Frank Moorhouse as one of our greatest writers – a master of tone and timing, an elegant and exuberant stylist, and an unerring chronicler of the human spirit. "Moorhouse has created a character and recreated a decade in a deeply affecting, memorable way.