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## READINGS BY RICHARD HALL

There is a kind of greedy love which smothers the partner. In *Mona's Gift* (Penguin \$19.95), his best novel yet, Thomas Shapcott, reconstructs his Aunt Mona's wartime passion in Sydney for Ted Francis, a doctor who goes to the Kokoda Trail and returns with the burdens that men bring back from war. For him the past can't be put together again, however much Mona wants it to be. Ted runs away back to New Guinea and Mona lives out her life remembering the passion. A simple enough and not uncommon story told with deceptive under-statement, but gripping. Shapcott, now living in Melbourne, writes deftly and successfully about sexuality, a dangerous territory, where the prose can fall into absurdity.

He also has a great capacity to write, almost sensually, about place. His evocation of the bush and the Harbour around Cremorne Point and Mosman will be hard to forget. It's a pity he's gone to live in Melbourne.

*Patent Lies* an engaging satire by Gail Morgan (Allen and Unwin \$19.95) has three dead characters who rather steal the show; Grace Heatherton, the second Australian Literature Nobel Prize winner, Captain James Cook and Sir Joseph Banks. The dead author sets a quest for five beneficiaries who must compete to find the last page of her final manuscript *The Lost Diaries of Captain Cook* from the clues within five slightly differing copies. To complicate matters there is a possibility that the manuscript is in fact the transcript of the genuine lost diaries. Heatherton, a character of legend was to the end something of a man eater, numbering H.G. Wells among her scalps. Gail Morgan has assembled a bizarre cast; a TV soap actress, a Nino-Culotta assimilated Italian, with a culturally displaced daughter and witch of a wife and an unpleasant literary editor (some pay-back here), as well as the Chicken King of

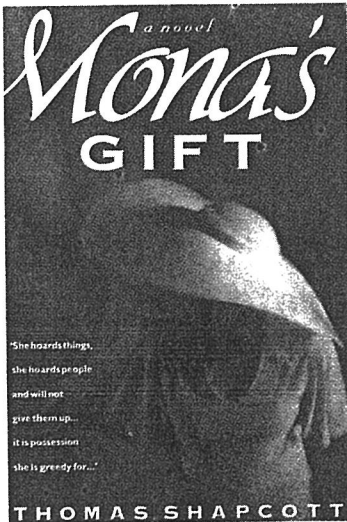
Sydney who pursues the diary with cheque-book and helicopter. Pleasantly chaotic.

It's a very Sydney book ranging from Italian Leichhardt, through Woollahra and Kurnell to a shady solicitor's office in Greek Kingsford.

At a time when the shelf-life of a volume in a book-shop can be only a couple of weeks and publisher's money men cost the space in warehouse by millimetres to justify remainders, it's brave of the publisher Dent to re-issue a number of titles in its *Everyman Classics*. The roll-call of names is impressive; Herman Melville, Scott

Fitzgerald, Dylan Thomas, Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, all in hand-some new jackets with intelligent introductions. I picked *The Best of Ring Lardner* (\$12.95), that between wars American humourist, sports journalist and short story writer. Lardner's laconic, dry sketches of American low life have worn very well. Ask your bookshop to be brave enough to stock *Everyman Classics*.

If like many people you've been looking at the 1300-page volume of the much publicised *A Suitable Boy*, by Vikram Seth and wondering when you'll ever find the time to read it, there is a less painful way into the author's work. In 1981 Seth, a post-graduate student in Beijing charmed a provincial police station into giving him a pass for forbidden Tibet and hitch-hiked home to New Delhi. The journey gave him *From Heaven Lake* which has just been re-issued (Flamingo \$16.95), a gem of a travel book and certainly the best recent work on Tibet and Sinkiang. He recreates that landscape of the high plateaux that can be both beautiful and empty. By now the Han Chinese and the native Tibetans are inextricably mingled as the Israelis and the Palestinians. Seth's talent as a listener records both sides and how unhappily wide the gap between the two cultures is.



THOMAS SHAPCOTT

## THE SYDNEY

The Sydney Weekly listings include the ratings V, S, and L for violence, sex language. These are designed to warn goers, especially parents, in cases where critic considers usage is excessive or excessive.

★★★ Recommended  
★★ Reasonable  
★ Rubbish

NEW MOVIES ARE INDICATED IN BOLD

★★★ **CONEHEADS** PG One of the wit in the Saturday Night sketches from which this is derived more from the aliens' view of America than America's view of the world. The problem with the film is the weirdness of Beldar (Dan Aykroyd) and Prymaat (Jane Curtin) is the focus, and apart from verbal foreheads, silly voices and odd habits, there is little to laugh at. There are, though, some funny moments including a black employer by the laziness of his white employee and sight gags aplenty. (Dir: Barron) • Greater Union George 8666.

★★★ **DAVE** PG Feelgood comedy which nice guy Dave Kovic (Kline) is coerced into doubling President Bill Mitchell, whose wife (Sigourney Weaver) has long estranged by his philandering and cynicism. When the prez has a stroke gets the gig full-time and becomes pawn in a sinister power play; too nice and too smart to be a patsy. Naive - or cynically manipulative of naivety - but pleasant enough. (Ivan Reitman) • Village Cinema 6701, Cremorne 908 4344.

★★★ **HOMELANDS** PG Touching political exiles Maria and attempting to come to terms with sense of loss in not being able to return to El Salvador, then, with cal reform creeping in, the possibility of giving up their lives in Australia to go home. Director Zelnarrates, explaining the motivation for his film (his parents were Polish emigres), but it's startling and articulate revelation Maria that really holds the film together. (Dir: Tom Zubry) • Valhalla Glebe 660 8050.

★★ **IN THE LINE OF FIRE** M V Horriagan (Clint Eastwood) is a Service agent who was on duty during Kennedy and Reagan were shot. Now some kook (John Malkovich) is gunning for number three. Can Horriagan stop him? Or will he let him? Not Again Horriagan? Whaddya? Despite its predictability, *In The Line of Fire* is reasonably gripping, not because Malkovich is more like a serial killer than your average Joe (did Edward Fox let De Gaulle's know what he was up to in *The Jackal*?). (Dir: Wolfgang Peter) • Hoyts City 11 680, Cremorne 908 4344.

★★★ **JURASSIC PARK** PG 1 dependent on special effects. American accent from Sam Neill, reasonable Scottish one from Ian McEwan; totally unexplained of chaos theorist Jeff Goldblum you could rattle off the problem *Jurassic Park* until the trick comes home. Spielberg's most fun yet. Monster fun. V (Dir: Spielberg) • Mosman 969 19 Centre 264 1694, Roseville 416 8

★★ **LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE** M Magical realist soap opera. Mexican in which Tita (Daniela

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