

While the reception to this book was muted at first, it received a massive boost when Robert Drewe devoted his fortnightly column in *The Age* to sing its praises, describing it as 'the country's finest work of literature so far this century'. Soon afterwards it was shortlisted for *The Age* 'Book of the Year' and other awards. I was sceptical, but won over. If I have a criticism, it is that the book lacks a certain moral authority that characterises the very finest books. Hooper seems ultimately aghast at her subject — she admits to being unable to stand Hurley's gaze in court, and to 'blubbing' in the women's toilets after the verdict.

Of course, she wants to present herself like this. Hers is the stance of the novelist, not the lawyer or human rights activist — and it works, powerfully, with this material. She deserves whatever prizes she gets — but that such a story should be transmuted into literary prizes is a cause for wonder in itself.

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DISGRACE

Directed by Steve Jacobs; adapted for the screen by Anna Maria Monticelli; starring John Malkovich and Jessica Haines; 2008; 118 mins.

Perhaps it's only when we lose everything, when we are completely defeated, that we can begin to have compassion for others; through suffering comes grace. Once a respected university professor, now middle-aged, divorced and living alone, David Lurie teaches romantic poetry to disinterested students at a Cape Town university. Sexual escapades with young women are his main diversion. After sleeping with a student, however, he is forced to resign — but refuses to apologise. Lurie lives by the dubious wisdom of the poetry he teaches: that a beautiful woman is a rose to be plucked, that women are obliged to share their beauty with men.

The focus of the film, and the Booker Prize-winning novel by J M Coetzee, is the complex relationship between Lurie and his daughter Lucy. Lucy runs a small farm

and market garden, to which Lurie retreats after his impulsive affair.

Lurie is confronted by the people who make up his daughter's life: Bev Shaw, a plump woman with 'no neck' who runs a free veterinary clinic; Petrus, Lucy's neighbour, an African man with two wives. After initial resistance, Lurie agrees to help Bev at the clinic, which includes assisting her to euthanise unwanted animals. Lurie also learns to respect Petrus and his place in Lucy's life.

Lurie and Lucy are savagely attacked at the farm but she refuses to prosecute the offenders. He sees this as a sign of weakness, possibly exposing her to further attacks in the future. She insists on managing her life as she sees fit.

Lurie is forced to face his attitudes to women, sex and power. Ultimately, he apologises to the parents of the student he seduced. The film has a strong South African feel, in which the main character 'recognis[es] the injustices of [the] past' (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* 1996, Preamble), and seeks to remedy those wrongs. The novel's author was born in South Africa and lived through the difficult transition from apartheid to democracy. 'Disgrace' follows a line of South African films, such as 'Tsotsi' and 'Cry, The Beloved Country', which emphasise forgiveness and healing.

Lurie's transformation from a self-absorbed chauvinist to a caring and compassionate father and human being is played superbly by John Malkovich. On the way to the tip with a load of dead dogs to be burnt, he pulls over on a quiet stretch of road. He crumples over the steering wheel, chest heaving. In a private moment, a rare show of emotion.

The final scene sees Lurie returning to Lucy's farm. He comes to respect her pragmatic and forgiving attitude, realising that she is no longer simply his daughter, but a capable and wise woman from whom he could learn a great deal.

BILL SWANNIE is a Melbourne solicitor interested in human rights.

ROADSINGER

Yusuf; Island/Universal; \$21.95

Three decades after embracing Islam, changing his name and renouncing pop music, Yusuf Islam resurfaced with the tepid 'An Other Cup'. Like many, I thought that album meant he'd lost the old spark. Wrong. It may have taken another three years, but 'Roadsinger (To Warm You through the Night)' signals a triumphant return to the musical flair that once made Cat Stevens an archetypal singer-songwriter and global pop icon with 60 million album sales. His new CD is credited simply to 'Yusuf', suggesting a desire to avoid controversy. The cover photos depict a modern-day troubadour, guitar slung over his back and Kombi van nearby featuring a white dove of peace; I guess a peace van's more realistic than a whole train. However there's still a charming 70s hippie naivety about the lyrics with their spiritual overtones. This happy, uplifting album may not be quite in the 'Tea for the Tillerman' league, but its tasteful textures, resonant acoustic guitars and hook-laden melodies prompt highly-favourable comparisons. Forget his imitators, Yusuf's the real thing. As the opening song — one of the CD's highlights — says, 'Welcome Home'.

MIKE DALY is a journalist and music reviewer.