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The Herald, Scotland, Review

April 29, 2011

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Trouble under the Rainbow Nation

James Clelland may be fairly described as a man of letters.

He began his career by delivering them as a postman in Ayr, then turned his hand to writing an award-winning novel. In between he emigrated to South Africa and became a citizen of that country while observing at first hand the collapse of apartheid.

The emotional and psychological effects of the transition to black majority rule on a white ex-soldier are the shifting sands on which his novel *Deeper Than Colour* is constructed. It is a solid work, however, which won the 2010 European Union literary award for a first, unpublished work of fiction by a South African writer.

The central character is Angus Smith, a gifted architect traumatised by service in South Africa's clandestine war on the Namibia-Angola border. This was a dirty, secret war with no heroes, and in the end it was futile.

Angus finds everything hard in the new South Africa – family, work, race relations and the casual, frightening violence of Johannesburg. It becomes apparent he is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and his descent into paranoia and despair is tautly drawn by a succession of voices, including his uncaring wife, an anxious lover and hostile colleagues.

His own voice gives vent to the frustrations and fears of whites in the post-Mandela era, fuelled by corruption and incompetence in government and a black economic empowerment programme seen as apartheid in reverse. Angus's views are far from being politically correct, but in reality they are widely shared.

Clelland's novel is a slow burner. It begins quietly with domestic strife and gathers pace with insights into Angus's progressive mental breakdown until a climax that is foreseen but deftly staged in an authentic Johannesburg scenario.

South African readers will find much that is familiar in Angus's rants against white supremacists who sent him to war for a lost cause, and black fat cats who ultimately replaced them. Others will gain some understanding of the complexities and dilemmas of this multi-racial society as it heads towards an uncertain future.

Trouble under the rainbow nation