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adult life, Richards explores the plight of one woman, linking her development with that of the nation.

It is October 1989 and Kate is examining her role in the 'new South Africa'. Despite the fervour and optimism, her prognosis for the country remains bleak. She is especially watching of the white liberals, the 'self-conscious, nouveau ANC T-shirt wearers', who have jumped on the celebratory bandwagon.

However, her condemnation of the chameleonry socialism is a symptom of her despair, not the root of it. This can be traced to her belief in the inherent evil of human nature, which she is convinced will lead South Africa into a downward spiral of bloody chaos.

Kate remembers how, as a child, her outlook was different. Her Afrikaans/English liberal upbringing in Port Elizabeth had shielded her from the horrors of apartheid, lulled her into a sense of security, of faith in the world, its inhabitants and God. She especially enjoyed the holidays on her grandparents' farm, and she fondly recalls the childish rituals of the magical world she inhabited.

When a new neighbour buys some of the family land, and rumours of exploitation and cruelty to the workers reach the homestead, signs of division appear in her world of unity. The family rifts caused by political differences are exposed, and her illusions of happiness shattered. The holiday becomes an experience of tragedy and horror, culminating in an atrocity which strips Kate of her innocence, and marks her life forever. She withdraws into herself, never to speak of it again and, as protection from the latent evil which she now believes to pervade humanity, she retreats into emotional solitude.

Anger and bitterness follow Kate into her adult life, affecting all those around her. Her marriage to Joe, an idealistic and hopeful lawyer, is a constant battle. However, during his involvement in a bloody strike he loses his idealistic illusions. As the mobility of his cause is lost in the necklacing of seats and underground deals with the management, he admits to Kate that her pessimism is well-founded, suggesting that neither their marriage, nor their country, holds any future for him. This serves as a catalyst for Kate's realisation that she needs his optimism as he needed her pessimism. She sees that they are both the products of damaged childhoods: his allowed too much hope; hers too little. She resolves to reveal her hidden past, and hopes that in so doing they will be able to understand their relationships, and face the future together.

The Innocence of Roast Chicken exposes the psyche of a damaged nation. Richards's confessional tone mirrors the current political climate in South Africa, where a nation is having to examine its past, in order that it may look forward to the future. More importantly though, Richards's first novel is a personal narrative, which absorbs the reader into her drama, and the tragedies which unfold.

ANNA WORTHINGTON

A DAMAGED NATION

THE INNOCENCE OF ROAST CHICKEN

By Jo Anne Richards
(Headline 224pp £16.99)

ANY NOVEL ATTEMPTING to address the complexities of contemporary South Africa is in danger of being overwhelmed by its subject. The problems which have plagued the country for generations have no clear end, and a lesser novelist could easily get lost in them. Jo Anne Richards, however, has produced a political novel which at the same time is intensely personal. Through the juxtaposition of childhood memoir and a diary of