

A TOUCHING AND EYE-OPENING TALE

THE TORTOISE CRIED ITS ONLY TEAR
CAROL CAMPBELL
UMUZI

BOOK REVIEWER: MARGARET VON KLEMPERER

CAROL Campbell's third fictional outing among the poorest people of the Karoo opens with the central character, Siena, running for her life.

It becomes clear that she has killed a man, and why, and she is heading for the only safe haven her life has ever offered – the Seekoegat Primary School.

We don't know who she has killed at this stage, and Campbell weaves her story back and forth between the present, with Siena struggling to escape what life has thrown at her, and the past, which has brought her to this.

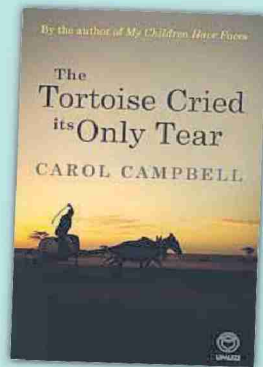
She is one of three main characters, the other two being Boetie and Kriekie.

Boetie was a neglected child and when the only family he had ever known were taken away by the police for a murder which he witnessed, he joined up with Siena's karretjiemense parents. But when the children killed a tortoise, the furious Mevrou on the farm dispatched Siena off to school, and Boetie became, to all intents, feral.

Kriekie, the third leg of the triangle, was damaged in an attack by older children and when his prostitute mother vanished, he, too, was sent off to school.

The title refers to the myth that the ancient Karoo tortoise will shed just one tear as it dies, and myth and magic play a role in the story.

Once again, as in her two previous novels, *My Children Have Faces* and *Esther's House*,



Campbell highlights the plight of people on the fringes of society, and the often unimaginable horror and poverty of their lives.

But don't be put off: there is a redemptive sense of beauty here, and kindness found in many, often unexpected places.

Siena, Boetie and Kriekie and their plight will remain with the reader long after the final page has been turned.

The novel is an eye-opener into a part of our society that we all too often wilfully fail to see.

THERE will be a launch for Carol Campbell's *The Tortoise Cried its Only Tear* on Tuesday, March 5 at Exclusive Books Gateway at 6 pm for 6.30 pm.

The author will be in conversation with Duncan Guy.

RSVP events@exclusivebooks.co.za or 011 798 0180.