

EVENTS

June 28: Ainslie Stewart will launch *The Entangling* at the Economy Shoe Shop, Argyle Street, Halifax, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

June 30: Tanya Davis will launch *At First, Lonely* at 2053 Gottingen St., Halifax, at 7 p.m. All are welcome.

July 5: Richard Starr, former journalist and political staffer, will discuss his new book *Power Failure*, which details the interplay between energy and politics in Nova Scotia's history. Formac Publishing Company will host the event at the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia offices, 1113 Marginal Rd., Halifax, 7 p.m.

July 20: Kathy Chisholm will read from and sign copies of *Urban Tigers: Tales of a Cat Vet*, at the Keshen Goodman Public Library, Halifax, 7 p.m. She promises to bring "purr-fectly" delicious cat cookies.

Teacher files suit against author of Three Cups of Tea

CHICAGO (AP) — Efforts to start a class-action lawsuit against *Three Cups of Tea* author Greg Mortenson in Montana now include Illinois.

Former teacher Deborah Netter of Lake County filed suit this month in Illinois federal court against Mortenson, his co-author and publisher seeking damages and class action status.

The lawsuits in Illinois and Montana cite media reports from 60 Minutes and author Jon Krakauer alleging Mortenson lied in the book about how he became involved in building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The book claims he became lost in 1993 while mountain climbing in rural Pakistan and stumbling upon the village of Korphe, where the residents helped him recuperate and he promised to build a school. Released in 2006, it sold more than three million copies.

According to the lawsuit, Netter wants compensation "for herself and all other individuals or entities, who purchased *Three Cups of Tea* and did not get what they paid for.

Mortenson has previously denied any wrongdoing, though he has admitted some of the events in his book were compressed in time.

Lost Gospels borders on sacred

Lost Gospels (Brick, \$19) is Lorri Neilsen Glenn's fourth collection of poetry. An award-winning ethnographer and essayist, the Prairie-raised, Halifax-based writer was Poet Laureate for Halifax for 2005-2009.

The new work spelunks into memory — childhood and genealogy, as well as into the wider caverns of history and biography, especially in lyrics wherein Glenn addresses the spirit of the Jewish-French philosopher Simone Weil, whose Christianity mixed Plato with Marx — and a healthy lashing of paganism too. (Given that the late Halifax Christian philosopher George Grant adored Weil, she should be viewed as the patron saint of Haligonian intellectuals. I confess that I also like her.)

The title poem's two-line stanzas remind one of ghazals but are actually narratives about alternative scriptures, such as "the one about Mahalia, rebuked and scorned, or a man named Willie Johnson / blinded at seven, and they sang, oh yes, they raised light from dark water." Biblical is every instance of love, striving, and death: "Pinned carefully . . . under the blade of the wiper // against the glass are two brown speckled wings. You see under the feathers / the shield is cracked."

This first section of *Lost Gospels*, moving between private memory and political critique, recalls, in style and imagery, the work of Dionne Brand. But the terminal haikus attain the power of aphorism: "When you avoid dark, / you miss the beauty / of chiaroscuro."

The second section, *Verge*, seems to owe its structure to a sequence in M. NourbeSe Philip's 1989 collection, *She Tries Her Tongue, the Silence Softly Breaks*.

Perhaps Glenn's seeming response to African-Canadian women poets is for her an acknowledgement of the "African" foremother of us all, namely, Lucy, who is the subject of the poem that opens the book's third section.

A strong lyric here is also simple. "When they are old": "days weigh like dust / thick on the leaves // of a roadside bloom. / Then: her fingertips, // his skin, the rain's / soft and trusting tongue."

The *Songs for Simone* sequence is good. Yet, the choice to address Weil mainly through prose poetry is ques-



Lorri Neilsen Glenn's new book of poetry is *Lost Gospels*.

(Courtesy Brick Books)



GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE

tionable. True: This approach shows off Weil's quoted lyricism but it dulls Glenn's lyricism in comparison.

Arguably, the fourth and fifth sections of *Lost Gospels* are the finest. A prime lyric is *Winter Kill*: "The snow sharpens its cold notes on their needles. / To love is to pity: this is the beginning / and the end of all there is // to know. The field is scalloped in drifts, and the deer taken / down by their throats; their ribs, cleaned by claw / and tooth, curve around the weight // of absence. Here is where we teach the spirit / to move into sorrow."

Here is also where Glenn is most beatific, most spiritual, and most scriptural. Here is the heart of *Lost Gospels*, which is art that borders on the sacred.

Salima Valiani's first collection of poetry, **Letter Out: Letter In** (Innana, \$19), also worries the personal and the political.

Born in Calgary, Alta., and now based in Toronto, the poet seems to

have a South African background. Her verse addresses the politics of race in a context of official non-racism, in South Africa, yes, but also in Canada.

So, a meal in an upscale, Cape Town restaurant occasions this reflection: "The wine is fine / The pizza: gorgonzola in Africa / But I can't understand why there isn't barbed wire / Around the table where I'm sitting."

Closer to home, the poem, *Black History Tour of Halifax*, 2008, points out that "Saint George's Round Church . . . / Included a special gallery for the slaves / Complete with shackles to secure them / during the service."

That was then, but even now, "When you hear of strife / In Sierra Leone today / It is in part conflict / Dating back to late 18th century Halifax."

Valiani's muse is editorial and didactic, but her sentiments stab and jab. She is Emily Dickinson with a razor at the ready, but she also recalls Maxine Tynes.

Valiani does address love but its sensuality is not divorced from global issues: "green leaves / almost yellow / from sun // body / moist / with grassy heat // ant-kissed skin. // De-toxing / in climate change rays."

Letter Out: Letter In is also a red-letter book.

George Elliott Clarke teaches literature at University of Toronto.