

Reading Room

Compiled by Deidre Donnelly

The Cute Cure

This winter, let a book of furry photographs keep you all warm and fuzzy.

CAN ANYONE WITH a heart gaze at the baby versions of our canine friends without going all gooey inside? That adorable combination of downy fur, stubby snouts and pink paws makes even grown men turn to mush. Evolutionary scientists say we're hard-wired to find puppies cute: Just seeing them triggers the same protective feelings we have towards human babies. This may explain why US fine arts photographer Traer Scott created *Newborn Puppies: Dogs in Their First Three Weeks* (Chronicle), while she was pregnant. This isn't her first animal-centred book – she won a welfare

activism award for her 2009 book on shelter dogs – but it's likely the first coffee-table book entirely devoted to capturing the cuteness of the first 21 days of a dog's life.



A range of breeds are shown in various stages of growth, from the precious blind-and-deaf early days to the first mischievous yaps and tail-wags. Like Scott, you'll "want to nuzzle them, breathe them in and find a way to fill [yourself] with their puppy essence." Sadly, this is no scratch-and-sniff, but while you won't get that puppy smell, you will feel lighter in spirit every time you page through this book. —DEIDRE DONNELLY

Turn Up the Volume

A poetry collection pays homage to the known while helping launch the new.



ANGLES OF ASCENT:

A Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry (W.W. Norton) is irresistible – a breathtaking mix of elegies to sisters, brothers, musicians, leaders and vagabonds, and crowd-pleasers like “I Am a Black Woman,” by Mari Evans. There are verses in the service of social justice, history and the mysteries of life, and they are free from dust. Considered one of the foremost authorities on the genre, editor Charles Henry Rowell focused on voices from the 1960s to the present in selecting works by 86 poets. Besides the titans – like former US poet laureate Rita Dove and Pulitzer Prize winners Gwendolyn Brooks and Yusef Komunyakaa – you’ll discover younger poets who have taken the baton and sprinted into uncharted

territories: like Camille T. Dungy, whose sonnets caution “What to Eat, What to Drink, What to Leave for Poison.” The word *anthology* brings to mind classrooms, but this volume is “dripping with the dew of relentless entanglement” (Komunyakaa), and belongs on your kitchen table or wherever you keep the books that are best paired not with a cup of tea but with a glass of red wine.

–TAYARI JONES



TOP, FROM LEFT:
Tracy K. Smith,
Natasha Trethewey,
Tyehimba Jess
and Rita Dove.



For advice on which wordsmiths to follow, may we suggest ...

@KaraboKgoleng

The host of SAFM’s *Sunday Literature* show shares insider info on writers’ events and the best new reads.

@ZakesMda

The esteemed SA author, now based in the US, debates politics, responds to readers and charts his next projects.

@PauloCoelho

The themes in his latest book, *Manuscript Found in Accra*, were suggested by his seven million followers, when he asked them to share their fears online.

@JenniferWeiner

The *Fly Away Home* author is known for her entertaining comments on fiction and popular culture.

@DanielPink

His retweets alone deliver links to hours of stimulating non-fiction reading, from neuropsychology to sports.

RAVE REVIEW

“Maggie O’Farrell is an author whose depth and insight hover just below the surface of an apparently effortless lightness ... There is a deliciousness to her novel, *Instructions for a Heatwave* (Headline), a warmth and readability that render it unputdownable and will surely make it a hit.”

–JOANNE BRISCOE,
THE GUARDIAN

Letter in a Bottle

Two women who never meet prove it’s a small world, after all.

“A time being is someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was, or ever will be,” writes 16-year-old Nao Yasutani in Tokyo. To escape bullying from her schoolmates, Nao has decided to end her life, but not before recording the teachings of her great-grandmother, a Zen Buddhist nun. On the other side of the Pacific, writer Ruth discovers a lunch box containing Nao’s journal, a watch and a sheaf of letters. Thus begins Ruth Ozeki’s masterful novel, *A Tale for the Time Being* (Canongate), wherein two distant characters are locked together through present and past. Ozeki, a Buddhist priest herself, alternates between the voices of the two women to produce a spellbinding tale.

–ABBE WRIGHT



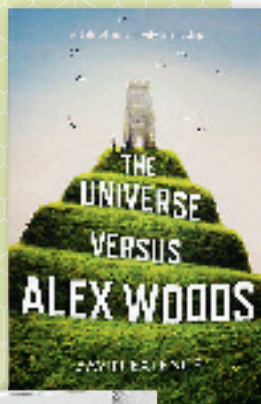
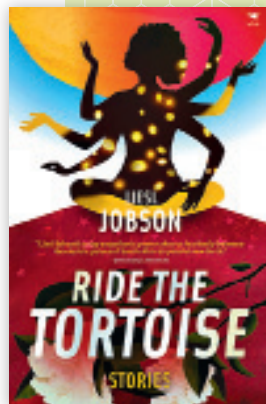
A Pick for Every Mood

What to read if you feel like ...

... SOME LITERARY SHORTS

*Ride the Tortoise (Jacana),
by Liesl Jobson*

She's a poet, photographer, contrabassoon player, rower and (phew!) a mother. Thankfully, Jobson is also a writer of short stories that scratch beneath the skin of South African culture. The blurb says this collection is "like dark chocolate and bitter orange," and that it is. You'll pause to chew over its themes – body issues, maternal pressures, the trickiness of intimacy – as you track her photographer's eye through story montages and point-of-view switches. (*Signs from the Kitchen* features seven characters, each in an individual scene). This is the work of a thinker who collects snapshots from everyday life, and reveals the unexpected. **–D.D.**



... SOMETHING QUIRKY

*The Universe Versus Alex Woods
(Hodder & Stoughton),
by Gavin Extence*

If you liked Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, you'll be hooked by this story, which follows the journey of a very special boy, Alex Woods. Now 17, he shares his past: Being struck by a meteorite fragment at age 10 made him different from anyone else his age – he had to deal with bullying, and epilepsy brought on by the trauma of the accident.

He learnt to control his seizures with meditation in a year off school, and spent time fuelling his obsessions with maths, astronomy and author Kurt

Vonnegut. He also befriended Mr. Peterson, a grumpy recluse, who mentors him. Their adventure is darkly funny (I laughed my way through the book) and deeply touching.

–ODETTE HOWELL



... REAL-LIFE INSPIRATION

*The Power Within Companion
(Spirit Sister Productions)*

You may remember the SABC 3 series *The Power Within*, which shared stories of everyday women who overcame obstacles in remarkable ways. The series may not currently be on screen, but this guide brings 34 of those true-life stories directly to you. These women will certainly move you: There's Mynie Brits, who hasn't let being paralysed from the shoulders down stop her from becoming an artist. Tina Botha founded the Sunflower Fund after losing her son to leukaemia. And Rosie Mashale, founder of the non-profit Baphumelele, has opened her home to unwanted children for over 23 years. As O's editor, Samantha Page, says in the foreword, "Nobody plans to get divorced, retrenched, paralysed or diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. What sets these women apart is how they decided to deal with adversity." To read an excerpt, visit oprahmag.co.za/books **–D.D.**

... A GRIPPING THRILLER

*Touch & Go (Headline),
by Lisa Gardner*

Imagine being locked up in a high-security prison when you haven't committed a crime. Now imagine your whole family is held captive there by three smart criminals, whose reasons for kidnapping you aren't clear. That's what happens to Libby Denbe, mom to Ashlyn, 16, and wife to wealthy businessman Justin. When private investigator Tessa Leoni (from Gardner's *Love You More*) is asked to crack the case alongside the police, she keeps running into her own back story as she tries to find the missing Denbes. As the good guys attempt to establish the kidnappers' location, the family imprisoned by the bad guys must confront just how far apart they've drifted, and work together. Fans of suspense won't be disappointed by this gripping page-turner. **–D.D.**

... UPLIFTING NON-FICTION

*A Good African
Story (Random House Struik),
by Andrew Rugasira*

This is the true account of one man's quest to turn a social enterprise, aimed at empowering poor farmers in Uganda, into a profitable, global coffee brand. Rugasira writes frankly about the many challenges his small company, Good African Coffee, has faced since its inception in 2003 – like the logistics of developing a network of over 14,000 small-scale growers. Today, Rugasira's brand is a viable competitor in the global coffee market, and the lessons she has learnt are eye-opening. But what's most heart-warming in this success story is how the company has improved the socioeconomic situations of the farmers involved. **–KIRSTY CARDEN** **O**