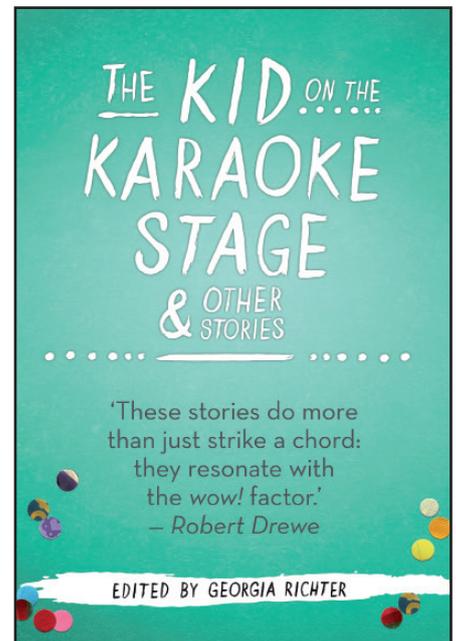


The Kid on the Karaoke Stage & Other Stories Edited by Georgia Richter



About the Book

There are twenty-eight distinctive narrative voices in this anthology of new writing from Australia's west. Combining short pieces of fiction with creative non-fiction, *The Kid on the Karaoke Stage & Other Stories* is a quirky and memorable collection that will resonate long after you close its covers.

Contributors include: Amanda Curtin (Winner, University of Canberra National Short Story Competition), Jon Doust (Longlist, 2010 Miles Franklin Literary Award), Goldie Goldbloom (Winner, 2008 AWP Novel Award, Jerusalem Post short fiction prize), Pat Jacobs (Winner, WA Premier's Book Awards), Alice Nelson (Winner, 2009 Sydney Morning Herald Best Young Novelist) and many more.

Acclaimed author Robert Drewe says 'These stories do more than just strike a chord: they resonate with the wow! factor'. Brenda Walker says 'This whole collection is brimming with original and vibrant writing' while Bookseller+Publisher suggests you 'Pick up this book if you appreciate home-grown literature, and marvel at the talent that resides in the West'.

About the Editor

Georgia Richter is publisher of adult fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry at Fremantle Press. She is also an award-winning author of short fiction whose work has appeared in literary journals across Australia.

Discussion Questions

1. Some of the works in the book are fictional short stories, while others are creative non-fiction pieces. What is the difference between short stories and creative non-fiction? What elements do the genres share?
2. On page 8, Richter notes, 'Sometimes it is hard to tell which is which, and I have left this deliberately so.' Why do you think the editor made this choice? Does it matter if a reader knows whether they are reading fiction or creative non-fiction?
3. What are some of the themes in this anthology? How are these themes reflected in the order of the stories in the collection?

4. In Sj Finch's title story, the narrator is caught between his friends' expectations and being true to himself. By the end of the story he decides he 'will never speak like one of these boys again' and chooses to drink water instead of beer. Yet he also writes, 'Don't stay true ... make believe' and performs again on stage (but sober) without inhibition. Why do you think the writer chose to end the story this way?
5. What does the collection's title mean in the context of the title story?
6. In typical Absurdist style, Jon Doust's story 'The Man with the Moustache' reads as an illogical, dream-like chain of events. The writer constructs a world where cause is not connected to effect in a realist way, and actions become meaningless. How does Doust's 'Absurd Hero' respond to these events? Is he aware of their absurdity? Can he ever escape his situation? What are the philosophical implications of this?
7. 'The Road to Katherine' has a distinct Australian flavour. Is this story about Australia as you know it? If not, do we accept this story, nonetheless, as authentically Australian?
8. In Pat Jacobs' 'The Chrysoprase Plain' the physical environment becomes a place of struggle for identity and power. What is the protagonist's relationship with this environment? What does the chrysoprase plain represent on a symbolic level?
9. The protagonists in 'Chomsky and the Kultigator' (Paul) and 'The Exhibition' (Beatrix) witness a range of attitudes to culture and art. What are some of the attitudes encountered by each protagonist (for Paul – in the context of book publishing; for Beatrix – in visual arts)?
10. 'My Scallywag Suit', 'Little-big Sister' and 'Saltwater Memories' each choose the first person point of view to convey experiences of family dynamics. What do you think would happen if those stories were told in the third person? Or from the point of view of another family member? Do you think each of these stories is a work of fiction or creative non-fiction?
11. What do you think are the challenges associated with the genre of memoir (which is a sub-genre of creative non-fiction)? What are the risks a writer might encounter in writing about things that are true?
12. War is a powerful subject of both fiction and non-fiction writing. How is the theme of war represented in 'I Sit Here – We Sat There', 'Caterpillar Men' and 'Deeper Water'? Which historical war does each story deal with? Whose experience of the war is depicted in each and why? Which of these stories do you think are fiction and which are non-fiction?
13. 'Some aspects of culture are so deep they can't be measured or counted, and can't be eradicated simply by being forced into new religions,' writes Peter Docker in 'Funeral Song' (p. 193). What does the narrator mean by this? In what ways is this statement true for the Irish congregation inside the church? For the Aboriginal mourners outside? What are the points of cultural overlap for these two groups?
14. What kind of Australia is Docker depicting? How does it sit against the Australias of Goldbloom, Jacobs, Doust and Carmody?
15. Brotherhood is an important theme in the stories of Docker, Carmody, Russell, Doust, George, Hutchison and Sj Finch. Many of them are to do with a coming of age, or a getting of wisdom. What points of understanding (or indeed, of no return) do their protagonists reach? Is this shift in consciousness the main point of each particular story?
16. 'The Pearl Divers' draws on the real history of Broome, Western Australia, as the world's pearling capital in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In what

ways is the narrator's life similar to that of Yaie, who lives in a tin shed in her garden, and in what ways is it different? Who is happier? Why do you think the writer chooses the private story of a couple's marriage to examine public issues like exploitation and injustice? Why does the narrator's marriage collapse as her understanding increases?

17. What do the stories of Ortega and Curtin have in common? The editor Georgia Richter notes that these stories 'share an interiority that takes them out of suburbia and fully inside houses and selves' (p. 9). What kind of interiority is represented in the stories by Ortega, Curtin, Amram and Rossiter?
18. In John Stubley's 'The Light of Home', the narrator explores the way light shapes his experience of place, language and people. How does Stubley's extensive use of imagery work to reflect the experience of light as more than just visual?
19. In what ways is 'The Light of Home' a piece about Australia? Compare this story to other stories set in whole, or in part, abroad – by Relph, Gallagher, Nowland, Rock and George. What is the function of Barcelona in Williams' story? How do other places help us understand who we are?
20. The final story in the anthology, 'The Island', is written in the form of a parable. Typically for this genre, the story ends with a moral lesson. What is the allegorical significance of the island in this story? Why do you think this story was chosen to end the collection?
21. Consider the journey made by the protagonist in 'The Underground River'. What metaphors are at play here?
22. Consider the way water is used in a variety of stories, including those by Carmody, Ellis, Hunting, Whalley and Rock. What is its metaphorical impact in each?
23. Which stories are open-ended and which ones have closed endings? How does the absence of a resolution in a story affect the reader? Why do you think a writer would choose to do this?
24. A number of these stories are about, or directly include a, death. How do Lester, Polain and Curtin use the fact of death to create tension in each of their stories? Why is death a common theme in literature?