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Mortifications & Lies

by Chris Mansell

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Kardoorair Press

PO Box 478

Armidale NSW 2350

www.kardoorair.com.au

For more about the author, go to www.chris.mansell.name

Mortifications & Lies is a book long-awaited for those who have heard these poems read or performed. The poem 'Lies' (under its earlier name 'Yarmul') was first performed in the Queensland Art Gallery after winning the Premier's Award; '&' was first performed in Tasmania and later was runner up for the Sub Versive prize in Queensland and was later performed in venues all around the country. While 'Lies' talks about dispossession and the nature of belonging to country, '&' is an anti-war poem for our times. Both of these poems deal with imperialism - cultural and otherwise, with wars past and present, and with the nature of truth. The poem 'country' was written last (though it appears first in the collection) and talks explicitly about the conundrum of place and heritage in Australia. These three poems make up this powerful collection.

As the blurb says, 'Ambitious, outrageous, formal in overall structure, often wild and argumentative by the line, the three poems in this book talk about a person's physical and ethical place in the world: truth and country.'

Of the three poems, '&' is the most directly challenging. The long lines and the cumulative images are demanding of the reader. Everyone is examined, no one escapes in this attempt to illuminate the source of the unethical and shameful situation the world finds itself in. It's powerful, abrasive but at its heart, passionate and formal. The poem is in seven movements each with its own defining formal shape and discipline.

'country' and 'Lies' directly consider the question of country and identity. The poem 'country' introduces the voice of the book and lays out the contradictions of being human and wanting country when your heritage is mixed. 'Lies' closes the book with a long meditation as Mansell experiences the country where her father was born: the encounters she has there and the dislocation of a person who has no ground, no place, where their roots extend deep and long.

Kardoorair has existed in some form for several decades and has recently added education texts; socio/political writings; memoirs; novellas and biography to its core activity: the poetry list.

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