

Born in Goa to a Serbian mother and German father, Mary-Jane spent the first years of her life in India. She subsequently grew up in Germany and England, and now grows up in Hong Kong. With a background in linguistics, communication and cultural studies, it is her aim, always, to meet her reader elsewhere, other than where words command us: beyond and beneath their meanings. Mary-Jane is married and works as an editor.

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Man, according to Kenneth Burke, is 'the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-mis-using) animal ... separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making'. (Burke, K. (1966). *Language As Symbolic Action*. Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 16.) It is a preoccupation with this making, with the fruits of this (mis-)using and with the nature of the separation that they incur, that animates Mary-Jane Newton's first collection of poetry.

Much of the variety in *Of Symbols Misused* is touched by man's existential dilemma as a self-conscious being obliged to live his sunniest moments in the shadow of death and construct meaning in the maw of absurdity. Engaging with this dilemma, Newton shows an exultance with words and a commitment to exploring the elucidations and complications engendered by words as the primary tools of man's sometimes puny, sometimes magnificent, efforts to tell a story about himself.

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Newton's first collection is bold, eclectic and tightly crafted. She is attentive both to the delicate nuances of solitude and to the brash declarations with which we sometimes disguise ourselves. The collection echoes with a resounding delight in words: images are fresh, sometimes strikingly memorable and often powered by an edgy energy which compels the reader to do that wonderful thing: inhabit the poetry. – Martin Alexander, author of *Clearing Ground* and Poetry Editor of the *Asia Literary Review*.

Mary-Jane Newton's first collection displays boldness of spirit and a buccaneering sense of adventure in its forays with language, matched by energy, a wry sense of humour and humility in the light of the poet's responsibilities, thus making it a joy to read, at turns sensuous and arch in tones and angles. – Peter Carpenter, author of *After the Goldrush* and other published works and Chair of the Poetry Society, United Kingdom.

Mary-Jane Newton's poetry is so unexpected it often startles me. A charged, radically honest book with zest and panache; she tells it like it is, with wit and a touch of irony. Her voice is as unique as her approach to the poems. And, as always, her honesty is refreshing and uniquely personal. It is, simply, poetry you will find nowhere else.  
– Geoffrey Gatza, Editor at BlazeVOX [books] and author of numerous collections of poetry.

Mary Jane Newton's poetry is quicksilver! Its shifts are often rapid and at times deceptively breezy. But don't be deceived: the love poems of this collection (and they are all love poems) are incisive, surprising and revelatory. As a poet Newton is unflinching and honest, and her words offer insight always at the expense of safety. – Michael Holland, author of *Metaflora*

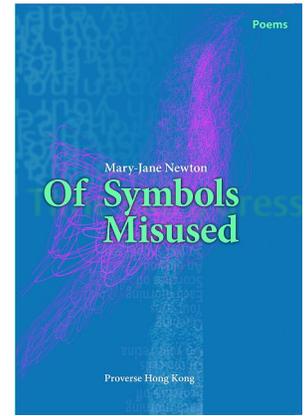
These are love poems, poems of leave-taking and of sudden illumination. The writing, always beautifully executed, emerges from a polyphonic imagination. – Eddie Tay, author of *The Mental Life of Cities* and Reviews Editor of *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*.

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"The China tree is blooming. Often  
We move at odds and yet together.  
I can feel our edges blur. We soften,  
Become snow, and fur, and leather."

-- Mary-Jane Newton, from the poem 'Touching'.





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