

Books in review

Best-selling poet is back with delightful collection

TAKING OFF, by Nancy-Gay Rotstein (Longman, 87 pages, \$3.95)
Reviewed by Bob Blakey.

Best-selling poets are as scarce as wealthy economists, but Ontario's Nancy-Gay Rotstein is out to top her successful debut book of poems with this new collection.

Taking Off is a delightful three-part reflection on images of travel, noted with her ever-ready pen during departure, distant journeys and the return home.

Rotstein's raw material consists of feelings that countless people have sensed but left unexpressed. Gazing through the plexiglass window of a speeding jet, she spies "Monopoly homes" and "Fisher-Price people" between little cars on skinny streets before they fade below wispy clouds.

Observations of Crete, the Golan Heights, the Caribbean and other exotic locations follow.

But there's a warm spot in Rotstein's heart for her homeland, frozen north and all:

*"The cold crystalline lake
chants its icy clear call
as it catpaws past me.
Tree handmaidens,*

*summer leaves bulging
like swollen green balloons.
wave their farewell
as pixy sun-clouds
pluck their cloak from
lime to evergreen. . .*

Rotstein's previous book of poetry, *Through the Eyes of a Woman*, sold 6,000 copies — double the figure which defines a Canadian best-seller in poetry.

Formerly a high school teacher who kept her scribbled verses to herself, Rotstein was pushed out of the literary closet by her husband, who rigged a pep talk from poet Irving Layton on why the woman should get her work published.

Layton became a mentor, inspiring Rotstein to mature as a writer and become a self-described "evangelist for poetry," a medium which she says no longer chains poets to rhyming couplets and iambic pentameter.

"Poets have been freed from that," she said in an interview during a promotion trip to Calgary.

Despite her success, there is still no big money in poetry, she said.

"You publish poetry for love."

★ ★ ★

(Blakey is a Herald staff writer.)
