
By Charles Monaghan

The Road to China

HAVING JUST returned from a trip to China, I was intrigued to see that Dodd Mead has just published a volume of poems built around a China visit. It is called *China: Shockwaves* and the author is Nancy-Gay Rotstein, a 43-year-old Canadian. In 1980, Rotstein was granted a special writer's visa from the Chinese government that allowed her to travel throughout the country - much of which was closed at the time to foreigners. The poems she has produced are sharp little commentaries on what she encountered.

Each morning in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, thousands of Chinese wait on line to see the glass-enclosed body of Mao Zedong, which lies in front of a giant mural. The mile-long line divides in two before the coffin. In Rotstein's description, the crowd includes:

*thick-rimmed middle schoolboys
pigtail classmates
cotton shoes click on stone rectangles;
demanded hat removal, ordered parting
before
solemnity Mao superfigure
imposed upon flowing mountain
abstract
the obligated speed walk, side glance
at reposed red-draped founder
stilled in rubberized death . . .*

Rotstein actually had her first poem published in the national Canadian women's magazine *Chatelaine* at the age of 12 - her grandmother sent it in - and has been writing poems ever since. *China: Shockwaves* is her third published collection. She graduated from the University of Toronto and took a master's degree in history there; many of her poems in history there; many of her poems reflect her historical research. As if her poetry were not accomplishment enough, Rotstein has recently finished a law degree and been appointed to the national arts body, the Canada Council.