

tempts and succeeds in so many different arenas. Not only is there information on American, English, and transatlantic bookselling (covering such minutiae as the bindings that books were shipped in), but also much social history and even the beginnings of a revisionist view of Charleston's intellectual life. The evolving position of women is noted, as is the changing relationship between the once-colonial city and country with Great Britain. The rather dry title of this volume is perhaps the only thing one can fault; but then it is very difficult to do a book of such scope and accomplishment justice.—*Harlan Greene, Charleston County Public Library.*

Rota, Anthony. *Books in the Blood: Memoirs of a Fourth Generation Bookseller.* Pinner, Middlesex, Eng.: Private Libraries Association; New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Press, 2002. 313p. \$35 (ISBN 0900002964 [U.K.]; 1584560762 [U.S.]). LC 2002-405109.

Books in the Blood is the 1997–1998 presentation volume for members of the Private Libraries Association. The PLA is an “international society of book collectors, founded in 1956, its series of monographs on specialised aspects of the mania have been much appreciated by collectors at large.” Rota also has published *Apart from the Text* and numerous articles and book catalogs, and he has lectured extensively on rare books and book collecting.

As the subtitle denotes, Anthony Rota is a fourth-generation bookseller who joined his family business in 1952 and became the company president upon his father's untimely death in 1966. Rota grew the company, Bertram Rota Ltd., into one of the most successful rare book dealerships in Great Britain and has earned the respect and recognition of his peers, being elected to the presidency of both the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association (ABA) and the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (ILAB). He also strikes one as an extremely honorable and honest man and businessperson. Once, when asked to speak to a group of new antiquarian book

dealers, he reminded them that the “booksellers made the rules of book collecting and if they themselves cheated, the whole thing, not just their livelihood but their lives would be totally without meaning.”

Written in an almost chatty, but at the same time, erudite style, *Books in the Blood* can be dipped into for a pleasurable short interlude or an evening's entertainment. It sets forth the author's nearly fifty years of work with rare books, special collections, and manuscripts through a series of anecdotes and vignettes, mostly about book collectors, librarians, and other rare book dealers he has known during his career. In the prologue, Rota lists some necessary attributes for a successful bookseller; they include a good intelligence network that gives early warning of what is coming up, thorough knowledge of the market, complete confidence between client and dealer, sharp negotiating skills, networks of experts on call, and perhaps most important, “a great deal of luck.”

When Rota began his career in 1952, there were no academic or training programs for antiquarian booksellers, so he learned his trade through reading and experience. He characterizes the latter as the “sit by Nellie principle, which literally involved sitting next to someone who was doing the job, watching them very closely and then trying to feed a leather binding, catalogue a first edition, make a simple collation or whatever the job might be.” The former included reading John Carter's *ABC for Book Collectors* (1952), Percy Muir's *Book Collecting as a Hobby, in a Series of Letters to Everyman* (1945), and Ronald McKerrow's *An Introduction to Bibliography for Literary Students* (1927), as well as many other articles and books published by his fellow booksellers or rare book librarians. He also read “voraciously 19th and 20th century English and American literature in which the firm specialized.”

Among the most interesting sections of these memoirs are the stories about the customers whom the author has worked with through the years, not all of whom have been admirable or honest. The author is not shy about revealing foibles and

idiosyncrasies, and not all of his stories are complimentary. There is the customer who bought from Bertram Rota Ltd. on credit and then sold at auction for less than the asking price (finally ending up in jail when the crime was discovered). Another story tells of the client who salted his library with a couple of valuable first editions, only to remove them upon shipping. And then there was the bankrupt industrialist who demanded a quick evaluation and prompt payment; only because Rota insisted on packing and moving the collection upon payment did the firm not lose the collection to the "repo" man, who arrived for the rest of the furniture in the house as the book van was pulling away.

For Rota, however, these few rotten apples did not spoil the barrel, and his book is full of effusive stories about the wonderful people he has met and helped through the years, many of them becoming his close and personal friends. One was Robert Elwell, a New York advertis-

ing executive, who over twenty years built and then sold a collection of twentieth-century art books. Another was George Lazarus who, as a young man, walked into the shop in 1926 and said, "I have just had a row with that man Percy Muir down the road. Will you be my bookseller?" From that day until his death in 1997, Mr. Lazarus did not buy a book except from or through the firm. He was interested in first editions of many modern writers, and with the help of Rota and his associates amassed a marvelous and complete collection of D.H. Lawrence first editions and manuscripts, which eventually was bequeathed to the University of Nottingham.

Books in the Blood is a very enjoyable read, and Rota is a delightful raconteur. The research value of the volume is perhaps slight, but I am quite sure that any rare books librarian would find perusing it a valuable and rewarding endeavor.—
Larry Boyer, Appalachian State University.