de données ouvertes, les mises en relation avec des domaines voisins seront facilitées, favorisant ainsi la recherche interdisciplinaire. Bien loin d'être en reste sur les « sciences dures », la recherche en sciences humaines et sociales, ainsi que dans les lettres et les arts, devrait, elle aussi, revendiquer une présence vigoureuse sur le Web et se rendre accessible au public le plus large possible. Une telle politique, si elle était adoptée par les fonds de recherche, contribuerait à augmenter la masse critique des échanges entre les chercheurs et rendrait plus prégnantes les exigences de pertinence sociale de la recherche.

Le site Érudit est en accès libre depuis plus d'un an, avec une quarantaine de revues : il faut espérer que cette expérience pilote sera considérée d'utilité publique et obtiendra les moyens de sa permanence.

CHRISTIAN VANDENDORPE
Université d'Ottawa

Anthony Rota, *Books in the Blood: Memoirs of a Fourth Generation Bookseller*. [Pinner, Middlesex]: Private Libraries Association; [Newcastle, Del.]: Oak Knoll Press, 2002. 313 pp; \$35.00 (US). ISBN:0-900002-96-4 (UK); 1-58456-076-2 (US).

Anthony Rota's great-grandfather was Bertram Dobell (1842-1914), a distinguished bookseller and literary discoverer, his great-uncle was the bookseller Percy Dobell, his father was Bertram Rota who founded the present London firm of Bertram Rota Ltd in 1923, and his son is Julian Rota, the heir-apparent. Here is a century and a half of bookselling history.

The book consists chiefly of very agreeable anecdotes of sales and almost-sales. Of course Anthony Rota sold books, but his most important sales – most important both for cultural history and for profit – were of whole collections and of archives, and the big buyers were chiefly in the United States. His field is especially nineteenth- and twentieth-century English literature, and there are chapters about, inter alia, Lawrence Durrell, Hilaire Belloc, the Sitwells, Gregynog Press, and H.G. Wells, with agreeable interchapters of short anecdotes.

Many of the names and firms in the book echo through the annals of twentieth-century book collecting and book selling, such

as Harry Ransome in Texas and T.E. Hanley with his household of two Egyptian “exotic,” i.e., belly-dancers, and almost all are dealt with affectionately and decorously. The chief exception is the egregious American bookselling buccaneer Dr Jacob Schwartz, whom Rota describes pacifically as “colourful” (44). On one occasion Schwartz tried to horn in on an important private sale, and Anthony’s father for once lost his temper: “My father turned away and started back towards his office. Jake dropped to his knees and raised his hands in supplication. Still on his knees he followed my father across the room at a truly astonishing rate. By now he appeared to be weeping. ‘Would my father ever forgive him?’ he asked.... Jake, still on his knees, making quite a spectacle of himself in the shop, said that nothing would do but that we should all three agree to be his guests at dinner ... to show that we did indeed forgive him” (45). But most of the portraits in the book are generous to a fault.

I had a small connection with the Rota firm, far too small to be mentioned in *Books in the Blood*, but it may be worth recounting as it tends to reinforce the impression of integrity and discretion manifest in the book. Twenty years after the death of the poet Edmund Blunden in 1974, his widow Clara asked Anthony Rota to help her with the sale of his library. The materials included Blunden’s manuscripts, often written on the blank pages of miscellaneous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manuscripts which he had bought at least partly because he admired the quality of the paper, a quality which made writing on them a special pleasure.

On the blank pages of one of these manuscripts, Blunden had written essays of 1921 and 1923. The manuscript had previously been used for a translation and notes from Sophocles, and on a number of pages was the signature of “William Blake” written in a plausible eighteenth-century hand. I heard of the existence of the manuscript and wrote to Anthony Rota to ask permission to see it. He agreed very readily, and not only did he make repeated access easy for me and my wife, but we became as good friends as is likely in a limited number of professional encounters.

Mr Rota never expressed dismay at my conclusion that while the translation was certainly a genuine work written by William Blake in about 1785, the “William Blake” was one of the forty or more men named William Blake in London at the time and not the author of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794) and *Illustrations to the Book of Job* (1826). Later I found that, when I first wrote to him, Mr Rota had apparently already commissioned Dr Michael Phillips to write

an opinion on the authenticity of the manuscript. Of course there is no conflict of interest here; I was not working for Anthony Rota, and it was his responsibility to his client to secure an authoritative opinion as to the perhaps sensational and lucrative authorship of the manuscript. The problem arose because the conclusions of Michael Phillips and G.E. Bentley Jr were diametrically opposed. Dr. Phillips concluded that the Sophocles manuscript was written by William Blake, the poet and painter, while I persuaded myself that the writing was the genuine (i.e., not forged) work of one of the forty or more William Blakes living in London in the poet's lifetime.¹

Both Dr Phillips and I naturally wished to publish our findings with reproductions, and of course for the reproductions we were entirely dependent upon the generosity of Anthony Rota. Often we each needed reproductions of the same page to demonstrate a different conclusion. Further, Dr Phillips was in one country, I in another, and the journal which had agreed to publish the two essays in a third. Mr Rota must have been sadly fretted by epistolary requests for photographs, information, and permissions, all dealing with a subject which was no longer of commercial promise – so far as I know the Sophocles MS has still not been sold.

Mr Rota's disinterested generosity and his equanimity were unfailing. It was easy for us to see why he was so widely trusted and respected in a profession in which trust is the bedrock on which a successful enterprise must be founded. Intelligence, energy, opportunity, and training are all important, but without trust neither owners nor buyers will risk their treasure and their resources.

Books in the Blood deals *in extenso* with trust in the book world – how it is earned, and how, occasionally, it is betrayed. The former is the stuff of success; the latter is the joy of journalism. There is enough for everyone in this little volume.

G.E. BENTLEY, JR
Toronto

1 Michael Phillips, "William Blake and the Sophocles Manuscript Notebook," *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, 31 (1997): 44-49, and G.E. Bentley, Jr, "William Blake and the Sophocles Enigma," *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, 31 (1997): 65-67 (separated by reproductions from Sophocles MS); Dr Phillips concludes that these "appear to be William Blake's early autograph signatures" in a book he owned c. 1772-79 (pp. 45, 47), and Bentley concludes that "the handwriting ... is not that of [the poet] William Blake" (70).