



Portrait of Rosie Fitzgibbon
courtesy of Amanda Fitzgibbons

Rosie Fitzgibbon

28 January 1947–20 August 2012

Rosanne (Rosie) Fitzgibbon, who died after a valiant battle with brain cancer last year, deserves an honoured place beside Beatrice Davis in the pantheon of Australian fiction publishing.

Literary agent and former New York editor Mary Cunnane described Rosie as an outstanding publisher, with the great quality of nurturing her authors, while Literature Board chair Sophie Cunningham hailed her as one of our most respected and admired literary editors. To publisher Lisa Highton she was both 'a brilliant editor and a lovely woman'.

For sixteen years from 1989, Rosie was fiction editor at the University of Queensland Press, responsible also for literary nonfiction. In recent years she took on a wide range of freelance assignments, and conducted seminars, workshops and masterclasses for the Writers Centre, the Society of Editors and the Literature Board. She judged many literary awards and edited all the *One book many brisbanes* story anthologies.

As a publishing editor she worked on numerous story collections, beginning in 1972 with the first work of fiction published by UQP: Michael Wilding's *Aspects of the dying process*. Others included major collections by Thea Astley, Olga Masters, Lily Brett, Peter Carey, Kate Grenville, Janette Turner Hospital and Marion Halligan. In 1998, along with sister Marion, she edited *The gift of story: three decades of UQP short stories* to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of this nationally and internationally renowned publishing house.

Rosie's authors invariably welcomed her generous-spirited and constructive approach to their manuscripts. With an unwavering commitment to literary

excellence, she was always a book's most passionate advocate—from the earliest draft to the design, marketing and promotion of her titles.

Rosie served on various boards and committees, including the Queensland Writers Centre, the Brisbane Writers Festival, Australian Book Review and the National Book Council. In 1992 she was awarded the inaugural Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship to work in book publishing in New York.

Genial Frank Thompson, UQP's first general manager (1961–83), was famous for recruiting not just authors but also editors over a beer or three. Roger McDonald first met Frank at the bar of Toowong's Royal Exchange Hotel in 1965 and went to work for him a few years later as poetry editor. When Roger headed off to London for a year in 1971, Frank recruited Rosie—whom he knew from convivial occasions at the Staff Club—to look after the Press's stable of precocious if impecunious poets. For her sins, Rosie had written a brilliant honours thesis on poetry so was unfazed by the first *enfant terrible* she inherited from Roger—the prodigiously talented young Michael Dransfield.

Fast forward more than thirty years and Marion Halligan has just asked her sister Rosie to edit her Canberra crime novel *The apricot colonel*, warning Rosie, 'Don't tinker with my prose!' To which Rosie replied: 'Look Marion, I'm the editor. It's my job to tinker. You're the writer, it's your job to ignore me'.

The novel's central character Cassandra Travers is a confident, thirty-something book editor who has, intriguingly, edited the final letter from her name Traverso, just as Rosie herself deleted the final 's' from her surname.

'I look at a manuscript and see the scope, the structure,' Cassandra tells us. 'My

mind is good at structures, on all scales: sentence, paragraph, chapter, book. I'm not a writer, I'm a reader. It is other people's writing that I know about, that I can see whole and clear, laid out like an architect's plan'.

Rosie edited and published the work of so many writers—novelists like Gillian Mears, Matthew Condon, Beverley Farmer, Venero Armanno, Rosie Scott, Victor Kelleher, Liam Davison, Marian Eldridge, John Clanchy, Barbara Hanrahan, Brian Castro, Gerard Windsor and Gerard Lee.

Gerard Lee affirms the special interest she took in all her authors, something which had offered him 'a lot of space' as a writer. 'I felt I was wandering freely within a larger mind and that was very new and delightful to me. I couldn't have wished for a better story pal'.

No-one ever wrote a better or more constructive letter to an author than Rosie who effortlessly blended the personal with the professional right throughout her forty-year career. When I worked closely with her at UQP in the 1980s and 90s she was always a valued mentor and friend to her colleagues.

'Old age would have sat well on Rosie', says literary agent and former editor Margaret Kennedy regretfully. 'She would have carried her graciousness through it—along with her lovely gentle yet keen sense of humour'.

CRAIG MUNRO, UQP's Publisher from 1983 to 2000, is a biographer, book historian, and publishing editor who is currently working on a collection of profiles of book editors. He was awarded the 2010 David Scott Mitchell Fellowship at the State Library of NSW and a Literature Board grant to research a biography of AG Stephens. His memoir 'Editor at large' will be published in 2014.

