

An all-round master of arts: working with Ronnie Mulryne

Ian Brown

Initial encounters

I first met Ronnie when I was an undergraduate at Edinburgh University. There, I studied English Literature and Language from 1963 to 1967, a particularly fruitful time in the department's history. In 1963, the Regius Professor was John Butt, who was sadly to die prematurely in 1965. An expert on Augustan literature, Butt also had an acute eye for rising talent and a nurturing personality. When he arrived in 1959, his department included established figures like the medievalist John MacQueen, the modernist Ian Gregor and Andrew Rutherford, later Regius Professor at Aberdeen and Vice-Chancellor of London University, all of whom became professors of the highest distinction, all encouraged by Butt's mentoring skills. Butt was also committed to developing the work of younger academics, sustaining the early work of such later professorial luminaries as Mark Kinkead-Weekes, Stephen Fender and John Sutherland. Some of those, like Kinkead-Weekes, were already at Edinburgh when Butt arrived; others were Butt recruits like Ronnie. Although the terminology was beyond my ken at the time, when I came across Ronnie Mulryne for the first time, he was, in modern terminology, an early career researcher. Having graduated with his doctorate from Cambridge in 1960 and spent two years as a Fellow at the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford, he took up a Junior Lecturer post at Edinburgh University in 1962. Little did I know my luck when I arrived in the Edinburgh department in the next year to be taught by the team in which Ronnie was soon making his mark.

It is a token of Ronnie's distinction and its early recognition that, even in this context of rich and high-achieving talent, he stood out. Within two years of his arrival, still only in his late twenties, he was assigned to lead the second year English Literature course. In the Scottish system this is a crucial year. It represents the concluding course of students taking a three-year Ordinary degree and the rigorous preparation for those who will go on to undertake the two subsequent years for an Honours degree. For the course to be entrusted to someone just achieving promotion from the grade of Junior Lecturer was a mark of considerable esteem. Colleagues of Ronnie's have since observed to me that not only was his appointment to this role evidence of the respect in which he was already held, it reflected an element of self-doubt felt by more established colleagues faced by the challenges of leading such a critically important course. Ronnie grasped the challenges, made a success of the course and, for me and I know for many of my fellow-students, provided an educational experience that has enriched a lifetime.

The second-year lecture course was focused on dramatic texts, a key interest of Ronnie's, both as a scholar and as, later, an important figure in professional theatre development, although at the time he was also developing a reputation as a Yeats expert. The course he led focused – it might seem naturally for him – on Shakespeare and his contemporaries, but began with study of classical drama and concluded with a modern drama section. Ronnie allocated plays to individuals with a special interest, while himself doing the heavy lifting of delivering the more routine lectures over the year. Ronnie's perceptive 'casting' of colleagues brought about a phenomenon I've never since experienced. At

the end of 'guest' lecture after 'guest' lecture those delivering them were applauded by four hundred students. This was particularly remarkable: the lectures took place at noon and those students were desperate to rush for a place near the front of various refectory lunch queues. When the moment came for Ronnie's own 'feature' slot – my memory may be playing tricks, but I think there were two lectures on *King Lear* – he raised the roof, yet again holding back the stampede for pie and chips. Reflecting on this course earlier this year, an old colleague of Ronnie's, Roger Savage, remarked that in some weeks students were being asked to study three substantial plays in depth; we both recognised that such was the zest of the course and its teaching most buckled to and got down intensively to reading, thinking and exploring ideas. In many ways, this was a course designed by a young man: it was very demanding where an older course leader might have allowed more time for study of each play by reducing the number engaged with. Ronnie could certainly set challenges, but that course remains one of the highlights of my learning life.

Closer encounters

In my third year I had the fortune to have Ronnie as my year tutor. From being to me the more remote figure of a course leader, he became someone who had a responsibility for me as part of his small tutorial group. This was the beginning of his mentoring of me – and our life-long friendship. He was inspirational, supportive of a gauche laddie from a housing scheme peripheral to a small central Scotland town. The two Honours years at Edinburgh in those days were structured chronologically. The Junior Honours – third – year was concerned with medieval and renaissance literature, a course that played very much to Ronnie's strengths. Early in the course key texts to be studied included the work of the great early modern Scots makars, James I, Robert Henryson and William Dunbar. During preliminary reading over the summer I had fallen in love with James's *Kingis Quair*, the language, the brilliancy of the imagery, the way, as I can now see, it pushed the envelope of dream allegory structure. I volunteered to present a paper on the poem, which Ronnie commended. He was

so positive about it he asked me later to let him pass it on to John MacQueen, the great scholar of early modern literature. MacQueen invited me to meet him before the new academic year and, after giving me a typically rigorous cross-examination on the piece, advised me to do some redrafting and submit it to *Studies in Scottish Literature*, then just being established as the prominent journal in the field it now is. I don't know if Ronnie had this outcome in mind. The opportunity to ask him never quite arose, but the article was peer-reviewed and accepted and, so, my undergraduate paper for Ronnie became, when it appeared, revised, in late 1967, my first scholarly article. For reasons we will come to, this was a very important breakthrough for me.

In my final year, Ronnie ran a year-long module on contemporary drama. This opened our, and, later he would say, his, eyes to the then still rather new work of such playwrights as Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov and Pinter. The course went smoothly, except for one day when we turned up for class to find a note on the door explaining the class was cancelled at short notice: Eithne had just had their second child, Kevin, following their daughter Grania. During the course, Ronnie was rather dubious of my high claims in a paper for Harold Pinter's dramatic importance. Later, he would smile ruefully when, after Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize, I teased him with this. One of the joys for me of Ronnie was his gift of the rueful smile whether at others' over-enthusiasm (often mine) or his own – rare – misjudgement. I found him more than indulgent of my enthusiasms. My term paper on Pinter stretched well beyond a reasonable length, amounting to 20,000 words or so. Instead of flinging the paper back and suggesting I note the length restriction everyone else observed, he made a point of coming in to his office on a Sunday to read the paper before the class at which it would be discussed. What is more, he engaged with my deep interest in Bernard Shaw's plays, even allowing me to present a paper on Shaw as part of this course. Shaw was never, in fact, part of the module prospectus and, rather than disrupt the peace of mind of the other students, Ronnie called a tutorial on my paper at his own house on a Saturday morning comprising him, me and one of his earliest and most brilliant PhD students, Linda Jo Bartholomew, to discuss the paper. Further, he ensured that in the module's

finals paper, there was a question on Shaw. Ronnie demanded much – of himself and his students – but, when his intellectual interest was piqued, he gave much. He was without side, genuine, giving.

A third kind of encounter

His generosity was extended to me in more personal ways. After my juvenile efforts, I had begun by the middle years of my undergraduate time at Edinburgh to try to write plays. Beyond the call of duty, Ronnie agreed to read some of what I was writing. He supported me in producing and directing two short plays of mine in a double bill in 1967 in what is now Edinburgh University's Bedlam Theatre. Afterwards, he invited me to keep him up to date with my attempts at playwriting. He also supported me through a difficult conclusion to my undergraduate career. By accident, I saw before the final examination board that I was being awarded a first-class grade for my paper on his module. Overall, however, I failed to achieve the degree award anticipated, obtaining a 2:2. Given expectations, it was hard to identify what had gone astray, although a fellow member of my final year tutorial who, like me, was to become a full professor with a wide range of publications, also failed to achieve in a similar way and only in that tutorial was such a failure rate found. Ronnie had arranged for me to be interviewed for a place on the MA in Drama at Birmingham University and I had been offered a place. My degree result meant that place was lost. In response to this personal debacle, Ronnie wrote a letter I still cherish. In this, he encouraged me to move on, reassured me of his faith in my ability, but suggested that perhaps an academic life was not for me. Perhaps that particular prediction was a little off-beam, later cause for one of his rueful, positive smiles. The acceptance of my article by *Studies in Scottish Literature* was at that time a particular reassurance to me of future possibilities.

In my graduation summer I returned to a summer job I had had previously, working in the Stores department of the Coal Board HQ in my home town, Alloa. During that summer, when I got back from work, I started writing a play, as many Scottish playwrights feel compelled to do, about *Mary, Queen of Scots*. In that September, I went to London to teach. I kept contact with Ronnie and he

visited me once in my little two-room-kitchen-and-loo flat in Highbury on the top floor of a Victorian house, which, in an unusual arrangement, had the bath in the kitchen. Ronnie later told me he had thought it was a 'garret'. I suppose that was a fair assessment – and makes it sound more romantic than it actually was – but it was my first place away from home that wasn't digs. I was very proud of it. Ronnie, though, however diplomatically, liked to call things as they were, though he did so in this case tactfully later...

Returning to Edinburgh

Towards the end of my time in London, or, rather, bringing it to a close around Easter of my second year down south, was my mother's succumbing to severe illness. We made family arrangements, my sister looking after matters back home till I could complete my notice and return to Scotland to help out. I found a place on a PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate of Education) at Moray House in Edinburgh, found a flat in the New Town and got to know Ronnie and Eithne better than had been possible as simply one of Ronnie's undergraduates. Meantime, I had sent Ronnie *Mary, Queen of Scots*. This was impossibly romantic, Lawrentian, in blank verse and Scots language. On my return, I discovered Ronnie had sent it to Alan Brown, then Literary Manager of the Royal Lyceum Theatre. He had liked it, but been unable to contact me about it because, in my naivety, I hadn't thought of including my contact details on the script. Ronnie put us in touch when it emerged that Alan wanted to meet me to discuss the play. He, while positive, thought it too sexually explicit and generally raunchy for the Lyceum at that time. After we had met, he sent it to Max Stafford-Clark, then Artistic Director of the Traverse Theatre. Max liked it, but didn't think it was for him, though he encouraged me to keep on writing for the stage. That summer, 1969, I wrote a version of *Antigone*, whose production by Strathclyde Theatre Group in that autumn, Ronnie and Max took the trouble to travel over to Glasgow to see. Max was then negotiating his departure from the Traverse as Director in order to establish the Traverse Workshop Company, launched in 1970, when it pioneered the methods later associated with its successor company, Joint Stock. Max invited me to participate in the company's

first project, contributing to the devising of and helping write the company's first play *Mother Earth*. It must be clear from this concatenation of events that Ronnie was key to my introduction to and acceptance in professional theatre circles.

Meantime, Ronnie's contribution to the work of his department above and beyond any simple job description continued. In 1968 he helped direct and in 1969 directed the Scottish Universities International Summer School, demonstrating administrative and persuasive powers in replacing its hitherto peripatetic nature by permanent settlement in Edinburgh around Festival time. His skills meant the reservations of other universities that might have been envious of this settlement were amicably overcome. Ronnie used the Festival timing creatively to link the SUISS to the enriching opportunities the Festival offered participants, something he continued to encourage over the years. Very soon after, Ronnie became Chair of the Royal Lyceum Theatregoers Club, which he revitalised into a key part of what now we would call the audience engagement of Edinburgh's main producing house.

Wider encounters

In the autumn of my year at Moray House, I became involved, in common with nationwide activity, in organising anti-apartheid protests against the Springboks rugby tour. With colleagues at the university, we organised a series of protests. I, for example, organised a petition signed by the artistic community and – somewhat to my own surprise – a pray-in at New College, Edinburgh's theological college, which was picked up by television news. The more radical members of the organising group thought these matters were trivial, but I reasoned that every means of legitimate protest contributed to the cause. As part of the protests I also organised with an Edinburgh colleague, Aileen Christianson, a then-popular combination of protest with intellectual inquiry: a day-long teach-in in one of Edinburgh's major lecture halls. I asked Ronnie to chair the final evening session. This he did with grace and authority. Teach-ins were certainly passionate, but they were designed to be, and this one, under Ronnie's chairing, was rational and constructive. He wasn't involved in the Murrayfield demonstration on

the day of the Scotland international, when there was considerable police violence against demonstrators. Policemen who had removed their identity numbers grabbed demonstrators, often by the hair, and threw them out of the ground, usually with a booted kick. (I had to take one young woman to hospital afterwards.) My role that day was to work with a team based at Heriot-Watt Students Union co-ordinating legal support to those arrested.

Out of this tumultuous day two consequences arose. One was that of those twenty or so demonstrators actually formally arrested, all but one (a university lecturer who turned up with a car aerial as a weapon!) was found not guilty of public order offences, as collusive police evidence collapsed in the face of defence cases for which we were able to raise funds. The second was that the more radical wing of the organisers decided to occupy university buildings, particularly the careers office. They organised a public meeting in the enormous entrance hall of Edinburgh University's Appleton Building. I wasn't involved in this phase of the protest which, in truth, had nothing to do with the anti-apartheid events, but I had cause to call in to see Ronnie on the morning the Appleton Tower meeting. He asked me if I was planning to go. I said I wasn't. He explained he'd been asked by the university principal, Michaël Swann, to observe what was happening and report back. I asked Ronnie why him? He said, in effect, that he thought he was thought young enough looking to not to stand out. I think I, who was then very hairy, helped the process of blending in. The meeting involved a lot of rhetoric, but the emphasis had changed from the South African situation to generalised protest at the world's iniquities. The meeting's atmosphere was generally lively, but not aggressive, though not helped by the presence of a clique from the university Conservative club, led by its then-president Malcom Rifkind, which sneered at proceedings from a balcony. Ronnie told me afterwards of the debriefing process in the principal's office, where Swann was calm, trying to understand what issues were being raised and how they might be resolved, while the University Secretary, Charles Stewart, stomped up and down, expostulating. As Ronnie told it, Stewart added comic spice to a rather matter-of-fact discussion.

Supervision

When I'd completed my studies at Moray House, I was appointed to teach at Craigroyston High School in north Edinburgh. The housing areas it mainly serves are Pilton and Muirhouse, still severely deprived areas, part of whose claim to fame is that these were where the leading characters in *Trainspotting* would have grown up. During the year, I talked to Ronnie about returning to my interest in Shaw. He encouraged me to think about doing a postgraduate research degree and what my research question would be. Once that was clear in our minds, he arranged for me to meet Kenneth Fielding, then head of department, who told me, in effect, that, although my first degree did not suggest I was an appropriate candidate to undertake a research degree, Ronnie had recommended I be admitted. And, so, I was. In my work, financial and domestic circumstances, I could only think of doing the two-year Masters part-time and it turned out Ronnie who I anticipated would supervise my research was due to go on an exchange year at the University of California, San Diego at La Jolla in 1971-72. Nonetheless, he arranged that my first year of research would be supervised jointly by Roger Savage with his drama expertise and John Sutherland with his period knowledge. In any case, in those days, in the first year one was designated a supervised postgraduate student. Admission to the Masters itself would be confirmed only after that first year of research was satisfactorily completed. When Ronnie returned with a new wardrobe of striking American clothes, I had successfully completed that year and he took over from John, while Roger, who has become another lifelong friend, remained my joint supervisor. Some team. Their rigorous, warm and witty support saw me through on schedule to graduation in 1975.

During that supervision period, I remember going in for a consultation to find Ronnie in an atypical fluster. I asked what the problem was. He held out a piece of paper he'd just taken out of an envelope addressed to him and asked me to look at it. It was a poem, or at least an attempt at one, apparently written by two anonymous female students. It began:

Dear Doctor Mulryne
We think you're divine.

It continued in similar vein. I smiled and asked him what the problem was. After all, it was a rather gentle compliment and the rest of the poem to my memory remained gently admiring rather than lustfully outspoken about his charms. Ronnie protested that, when he lectured, he wanted to think students were taking what he said seriously, not sizing him up. I did suggest that he should count his blessings, when most of lecturers were considered much too old by their students to be fanciable. I got the sense he thought I was being frivolous.

Support

Before that episode, just as Ronnie was planning his visit to the States, I had applied for my first HE post, at Dunfermline College, now part of Edinburgh University. There, the appointment would involve setting up the first drama courses within a pioneering Dance and Related Arts department. Ronnie was one of my referees. The day of my interview, I had confirmation that Prospect Theatre Company was buying the rights to my first original play, *Carnegie*. Along with Ronnie's reference, that news did me no harm in the interview. Whatever setback my finals had caused was now quite expunged, while my engagement with professional theatre was by now deeper than I suspect it would have been had I proceeded in 1967 straight from undergraduate study to the MA.

Through the 1970s, although Ronnie had less directly to do with my playwriting, he was always supportive of it as I had work performed by companies like Prospect, the Royal Lyceum, the Edinburgh Festival, Scottish Ballet, Gay Sweatshop, the Traverse, the Bush and Borderline Theatre and became a client of the legendary play agent, Peggy Ramsay. I even wrote the words for a choral work by the composer John Maxwell Geddes, a colleague in the remarkable staff at Dunfermline College. As he was leaving for Warwick in 1977, a version with a shortened title of *Mary*, much-revised and in a form which I believe made it the first play about its subject to be deliberately a comedy, was about to be performed by the Royal Lyceum as part of their Edinburgh Festival programme. There, it would sell out. Ronnie's schedule meant he couldn't see the play in performance. Against some

resistance from the director, Stephen MacDonald, I smuggled Ronnie into the rehearsal room to see a late run. He had, after all, sent its earliest draft to the Royal Lyceum and supported its development. I dedicated the play to him.

Career changes

By this time, I had, again with Ronnie's support, made an important career change. Wanting to broaden my perspectives I had been appointed in 1976 to the British Council. I hoped to see the world. Initial hopes dashed, my first appointment was back to Edinburgh as Assistant Representative, Scotland. In that position I was able to brief Drama department in London of Ronnie's having been elected Chair of the Drama and Theatre in Education Council (DATEC), which in time merged with the British Theatre Institute. Meanwhile, for my growing family, the posting back to Edinburgh worked: my second child, a boy this time, was born in February 1977. Being in Edinburgh was also helpful to the production of *Mary*. As that run closed, we moved to Turkey where I became Assistant Regional Director, Istanbul. Ronnie and I kept up a regular correspondence while I was there. Soon, it was clear that, while the position was working for me, it was not so positive for my family, particularly my first wife. And I should have foreseen there might professionally be other problems. I had one of my plays, *Runners*, produced by the Bush Theatre and, in the event, there was no issue in my having leave in May 1978 to return to Britain for the first week of rehearsals. Nonetheless, as that time approached, it was clear working abroad would present longer-term difficulties. I wrote to Ronnie that, although we were having many richly satisfying personal experiences, I was beginning to doubt I had made the right decision. He replied straight away.

As well as his role with DATEC, Ronnie had been appointed Chair of the Drama and Theatre Committee of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), responsible for the rigorous nurturing of new drama degrees in the polytechnic sector. Many of the best and most innovative degrees in our current university sector had their first inklings under Ronnie's knowledgeable eye. He wrote that Crewe and Alsager College, one of

the livelier of the non-university HE institutions, had been looking for a new Head of Drama. In his CNAA role, he was part of the interview process. Twice they had failed to appoint and they were about to interview again. He said there was a strong field, but the panel might again decide it was not prepared to appoint. The College had a notoriously strong-minded director. She would only appoint if she was satisfied she had absolutely the right candidate. In fact, they didn't appoint and I was interviewed in the fourth round in May 1978. Although the British Council required of London-appointed staff serving overseas six months' notice, I found the college prepared to wait as they appointed me with effect from the 1 December 1978, soon to be promoted to Head of Performance Arts. That department, in dance alone, contained two future professors, Stephanie Jordan and Tess Buckland, and a future head of the London Contemporary Dance School at the Place, Veronica Lewis.

Council for National Academic Awards

One of the objectives set me on appointment, apart from restoring morale in a talented department that had been through a long frustrating process of finding a new leader, was to extend degree-level drama provision. While Ronnie was full of wise counsel, and on his committee such distinguished figures as Jean Benedetti were supportive, this was no easy path. Especially given our long-term relationship, there could be no question of there appearing to be favourable treatment. After initiating planning in the spring of 1979, the major new drama degree at Alsager was validated in the late winter of 1981-2, allowing the first cohort entry for 1982-3. By then, Ronnie had stood down and the chair was Jan MacDonald of Glasgow University. An appropriate distance stood between Ronnie and me in terms of the CNAA by the time validation was achieved, but his tough-minded input to our earlier discussions was indispensable.

Although in the early 1980s we maintained friendly contact and even collaborated in offering a visiting fellowship based at Alsager to Ernest Schier, long-time theatre critic of the *Philadelphia Bulletin* and Director of the US National Critics Institute, it was another adjustment in my own

career that inaugurated what is surely the closest of our several working relationships.

The Arts Council

When I was appointed ACGB (Arts Council of Great Britain) Drama Director in 1986, Ronnie was kind enough to make it clear he would be willing to help out in some role. The moment was critical. My predecessor had had to resign after a vote of no-confidence by an assembly of theatre directors. The work of the ACGB Drama department was to assess the theatre companies it funds artistically, financially and managerially. Sometimes tough decisions have to be made for positive effect or faced by negative situations. In those days, constitutionally, the role of the panel had come to be strictly advisory, while recommendations to Council, which were vanishingly rarely overturned by it, were formally the responsibility of officers, chiefly the relevant director. My view was that, given the prestige and expertise of panel members it would be foolish to ignore or contradict panel advice. This I never did in my eight years of office, while only once did Council resist a panel decision and then only to delay it by a year. Even when Council tried in 1993 to carry out a smash-and-grab raid on the drama budget, it was obliged in short order to reverse in its tracks. So, at least in my time, service on the panel carried great responsibility for the health of English theatre. By definition, one could not satisfy everyone. It was critical, therefore, that the systems and people in place were as credible and rigorous as possible.

One of the first things I did was work with colleagues and the newly-appointed Chair, Brian Rix, to break the old-pals act by which Drama Panel members had been being appointed. Rix is often remembered as a famous farceur and consummate low comedian, when it is forgotten he was a formidable theatre manager and campaigning cultural politician with an outstanding record on disability rights. We set up a system of seeking nominations from wider constituencies to ensure a properly wide spread of expertise and a balance of gender, theatrical interest and regional representation. It was, therefore, a pleasure to see Ronnie become a Panel member in 1987 through that more consultative process. Very quickly, he was recognised by officers and his fellow panel

members as a knowledgeable and shrewd voice of reason, seen not only as an academic, but someone who had a deep understanding of professional theatre, worth listening to. When, in less than a year of his appointment, a new Chair of the crucially important Projects Committee was needed, the question arose whether the new Chair should be a practitioner in the Committee's innovative field.

Drama projects

Project meetings in those days often dragged on from lunchtime until well into evening, as tempers frayed and tired judgments might become flawed. There could easily be 130 applications while the number of available grants was usually between twenty and thirty. The work of the committee was critical to the future health of theatre. It was through this committee's support of companies like Shared Experience, Joint Stock or Tara Arts when they were starting out that they developed to the point at which they could move to regular funding. Without the projects phase of their development, they would never have been able to make the important long-term contributions to theatre they have. The committee was busy and the pace of discussion often hectic. Those discussions needed insight, but there was a danger of overload in its business so that judgements might be made by fractious members. After departmental discussions we formed the view that there was plenty of specialist expertise among the Committee membership and what was needed was a reliable Chair who could allow that expertise full effect by steering discussion more effectively. The Projects Officer of the time was the brilliant Jenny Waldman, who later became Public Programmes Consultant to Somerset House (1999-2011), Creative Producer of the London 2012 Festival – the finale of the Cultural Olympiad for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games – Director of 14-18 NOW, the UK's official arts programme for the First World War Centenary and now Director of the Art Fund. Jenny was not quite convinced that we didn't need a practitioner as chair to ensure the credibility of decisions. After Ronnie's first meeting as chair, where he [arrived fully prepared, having clearly digested the essence of that pile of applications, reduced the issues to clear choices and managed the business – to the

satisfaction of Committee members and officers – in under three hours, Jenny came to my room, full of Ronnie's praise. In step with this ACGB role, Ronnie was key in helping then-underfunded companies like *Complicité*, *Cheek by Jowl* and *Tara Arts* to a sound working footing.

As a panel member Ronnie was regularly asked to form part of appraisal teams. In the late 1980s and early 1990s. These were teams of panel members, advisers and officers who on a five-year cycle visited regularly funded companies to assess their operation in detail and offer advice to both company and Council as to future policy, management and funding. These were demanding exercises professionally, intellectually and in time and Ronnie gave unstintingly. I remember being a member with him of a particularly complex appraisal: *South West Theatre Consortium*, a creative alliance of a very large theatre, both producing and receiving, *Plymouth Theatre Royal*, a regional rep, *Exeter Northcott*, a rural touring company, *Orchard*, and an experimental children's company, *Kneehigh*, which has now developed into one of Britain's most exciting companies. We wouldn't just visit a company; we'd see it in action, something which in this case involved rendezvousing at *Exeter St David's* railway station to take the train across rural Devon to attend an *Orchard* show in the now-replaced *Pavilion Theatre*, *Ilfracombe*, before staying overnight in a less-than-glamorous bed and breakfast establishment. That team included other luminaries like *Genista McIntosh*, then *RSC* Associate Producer and, if I recall correctly, *Roger Chapman*, long-time *National Theatre Touring* Director.

Board memberships

Ronnie's fixed term of office as an ACGB panel member concluded in 1991, the year I completed my PhD after six years of part-time study still inspired by him. Such was the acuity of Ronnie's contribution to the *Drama Panel's* work that I recommended to the *British Council Drama and Dance Director*, an observer at ACGB panels, that he at once invite Ronnie to join his *Drama and Dance Advisory Committee* as a member. I too was a member of that committee and can confirm Ronnie was again highly effective,

becoming its chair from 1993 to 1997. As with the ACGB *Drama Panel*, the work of the *British Council Committee* was highly influential. Not to put too fine a point on it, Ronnie's leadership of that committee was central during his term of office to the promotion of UK theatre and dance worldwide, and, so, to the country's international cultural reputation. His wisdom, enhanced by the experience gained from such public service roles, led to his being appointed a *Governor of the RSC* and a *Board member of Birmingham Rep*. His deep knowledge of theatre and its practice allowed him to form with *Margaret Shewring* a firm which produced beautiful studies, written by them, of important theatres including the *Swan at Stratford* and the *Globe on London's South Bank*. He always considered that drama and theatre study should be interdisciplinary and international and engage with live performance in all its aspects.

More career change

After I returned to Scotland in 1994 to be professor and head of drama at *Queen Margaret*, we remained in regular contact and Ronnie and Eithne were often welcoming hosts on my visits to their area. And, indirectly, he had one final crucial impact on my career. In early 2010, I received an email from *Margaret Shewring* saying, in summary, not to tell Ronnie, but at a major conference held in the *University of Warwick's Venice palazzo*, the dinner would, unbeknownst to Ronnie, be a delayed farewell retiral dinner in his honour. I and many of his colleagues who would not be attending the conference were invited to attend the black-tie dinner, preceded by a concert of renaissance music. My wife and I duly turned up at the palazzo, I having travelled from our flat in a vaporetto in formal *Highland* dress, standing in the bow as *Italian passengers* pretended not to be staring at this kilted figure. Ronnie was more sophisticated. As it happened, we were standing at the head of the stair when he arrived. He didn't turn a hair, greeted us warmly and engaged with the company.

We had made a weekend of our trip to honour Ronnie, but when we arrived at the airport on the Monday, we found our flight was cancelled. There was a four-hour lightning strike of ground

crew, designed to cause maximum disruption with minimum salary loss. Our airline could not get us back via Gatwick as planned for at least three days, while we had both to be back earlier. So, we booked a flight the next day via Stansted, which involved a much longer than planned stopover. Stuck in the café at Stansted, to pass the time we bought a *Guardian*. Having read everything that interested me and much that did not, and still having time to pass, I turned to the education advertisements. There, Kingston University was advertising five professorships, one in Drama. In 2002, Queen Margaret, where by then I was Dean of Arts and, in effect, Pro-Vice Chancellor with responsibility for Registry, Accommodation and Hospitality, restructured and I had taken the opportunity to leave and set up my own academic and cultural consultancy which had prospered. Though I had continued peer-reviewed publication, I had not thought of returning to academic work. I knew, however, and respected the drama staff at Kingston and thought that perhaps I might re-engage with the sector for one last time. Somehow, I was appointed and spent four happy years there before becoming emeritus in 2014.

Last encounters

Not only did the chance of Ronnie's celebratory dinner lead to my finding this post, but finding that position led to the last of my external examinations, apart from doctorates. This was from 2011 to 2015 for the University of Warwick MA in Theatre Consultancy, led by Margaret Shewring. After examiners' meetings Ronnie would join us for lunch and we would continue that lifelong conversation, which through this final appointment had achieved a positive circularity. After the end of my term as examiner, I spoke to Ronnie frequently on the phone, learning of his final diagnosis, and met him several times in Stratford. I also had more cause to be grateful to him. In 2018, Glasgow University awarded me a DLitt on the basis of my study *History as Theatrical Metaphor*. Prominent among the many to whom I acknowledged a debt was Ronnie. The last time I spoke to him was in December 2018, a month before he died. He was proud of my achieving a DLitt and I was more than touched when he spoke warmly of 'what we had achieved together 'over

the years', not least because I know, however much we shared projects over the last half-century and more, I remain his debtor.

Roger Savage, our old mutual friend, remembers one last-night SUISS celebration party when that year's special subject had been 'The Eighteenth Century', on which Rachel Trickett had recently published *The Honest Muse*. Among the speeches of thanks one bright US student rose and read aloud another student poem about Ronnie. It included the unforgettable couplet:

Now, as we turn our thoughts to things sublime,
Rise, Honest Muse, and sing of Dr Mulryne.

Ronnie was many things: energetic, tireless, distinguished. One could run out of adjectives. He loved theatre, music, poetry, architecture and history. He contributed to academic teaching, research and publication; to the theatre community; to developing resources and an interdisciplinary framework for scholarly study of European Renaissance culture and Shakespeare's and his contemporaries' plays in performance, both in their time and now. But however much he achieved in research, management and public life, I will always remember his gifts – sometimes under-rated in our REF age – as a great teacher, dear friend and generous collaborator. He would demur at that American student's 'sublime' as he did at the adolescent Edinburgh women's 'divine'. Let us settle, even if the rhymes are lost, for calling this outstanding all-rounder, unpretentious, inspirational and masterly.