

Barry Morse

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by Peter Elson

BEFORE soap operas dominated British television drama, there were the big thriller series and none came bigger than *The Fugitive*. Made between 1964 and 1967, the international hit series gripped viewers as British actor Barry Morse, playing policeman Lt Philip Gerard, chased David Janssen, as Dr Richard Kimble, back and forth across the US.

In the story, Dr Kimble was wrongly convicted of killing his wife, and escaped from a train crash while being taken to death row under Lt Gerard's supervision. While trying to find the true killer, Kimble adopts many guises and jobs, with Gerard always on his tail. The top cop's looming, scary presence was emphasised by always being in the opening credits. Surprisingly, Morse only acted in 38 of the total 120 episodes.

Morse, who has died, aged 89, started acting thanks to a Leverhulme scholarship set up by the Wirral soap baron. Winning this prize at his RADA audition in 1935, he spent four years from 1937 acting in northern repertory companies, playing over 200 roles. During this time, he met actress Sydney Sturgess and their marriage lasted 60 years until her death in 1999. Unable to join the Navy because of suffering from TB, he made his West End debut in 1942, and was directed by Sir John Gielgud. That year, Morse and Peter Ustinov supported comedian Will Hay in the film *The Goose Steps Out*.

While visiting his wife's relatives in Canada, he found its national TV drama was rapidly expanding and he moved his family there. He won Canada's best TV actor award five times and his colleagues included Patrick Macnee, William Shatner and Sydney Newman, who revolutionised British television drama.

Soon he was in US dramas and unlike most "gentleman officer" British character actors, he played East European drug smugglers, drunken Irish writers and dodgy American politicians. Then came *The Fugitive*.

Back in Britain for ATV, his US experience was ideal for exported adventures like *The Saint* with Roger Moore, *The Adventurer*, *The Zoo Gang* with Sir John Mills, and *Space 1999*. His BBC work included Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*. In the 1982 satire *Whoops! Apocalypse* he played Johnny Cyclops, alongside John Cleese, Rik Mayall and Alexei Sayle. Final roles were in *Waking the Dead* and *Doctors*.

Barry Morse, actor; born, June 10, 1918, died, February 2, 2008