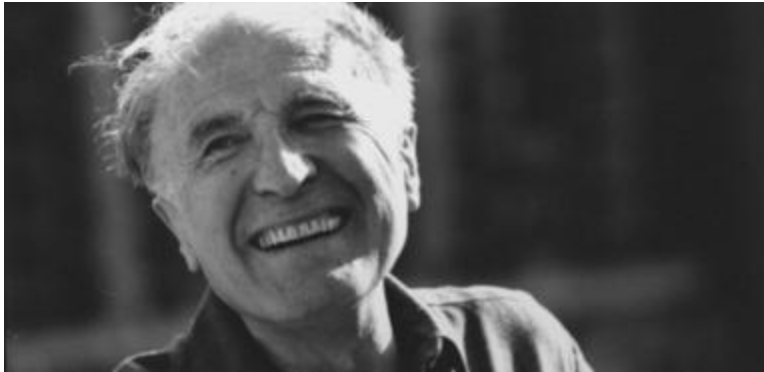


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Barry Morse

Veteran theatre and television actor on both sides of the Atlantic who won fame in *The Fugitive*



Barry Morse

From 1963 to 1967 as the implacable Lieutenant Gerard, Barry Morse relentlessly pursued David Janssen in *The Fugitive*, in an American television series that kept viewers on tenterhooks worldwide (he finally got his man.)

Behind that television success lay training at RADA, where he had held the Leverhulme Scholarship, 1935-36; 200 roles from 1937 to 1941 in repertory companies at Croydon, Leeds, Bradford, Coventry, York, Sunderland, Newcastle and Harrogate; leading roles including Hamlet and Hippolytus on the radio; appearances in films including *Thunder Rock* (1942), *When We Are Married* (1943) and *Mrs Fitzherbert* (1947), and a variety of parts in the West End and on tour, including Ninian Fraser with Marie Tempest and A. E. Matthews in St John Ervine's *The First Mrs Fraser*; Andrey in *War and Peace*; Lord Henry Wootton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; and Mephistopheles in *Faust*.

He had also appeared in television productions at Alexandra Palace, an aberration for which A. E. Matthews had castigated him, saying that the box was a rich man's toy: "It'll be forgotten by Christmas."

In 1951 Morse moved to Canada, where his wife, the actress Sydney Sturgess, had family. Arriving in Montreal with a letter of introduction from Val Gielgud, head of BBC drama, he was soon in demand at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; and when CBC embraced television, Morse found himself playing a wide range of roles. In

Macbeth he insisted on being paid one dollar more than CBC's previous top television salary of \$1,000, thus establishing actors' right to negotiate with a corporation whose payment to artists was regulated by Parliament.

Morse was also among the earliest students on CBC's training course for television directors and mounted a television production of Louis MacNeice's radio play Christopher Columbus with the actors reading from autocues, a device which, as an actor, he would increasingly use as often as he was allowed when working in television. His television directing was later limited to such episodes of *The Fugitive* in which he was not overburdened as Lieutenant Gerard.

In the summer of 1959, billed as "Canada's leading actor", he gave a Benedick of immense vitality to the Beatrice of Rosemary Harris in *Much Ado About Nothing* at the open air theatre at Wellesley College. Two seasons at Wellesley had included *Man and Superman*, edited by Morse and the play's director, Jerome Kilty, to within three hours. Seven years later, when invited to take over the fledgling Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake, he revived the enterprise, this time directing as well as giving his Jack Tanner. With the theatre filled beyond capacity, and with Morse and other leading Canadian actors accepting no more than a flat \$150 per week, Morse was able, in five weeks, to pay off the deficit which, after two seasons, had nearly put paid to the festival. It now fills three theatres for most of the year.

Since that season came in a break between episodes of *The Fugitive*, the modest salary represented no hardship for Morse. Yet, as his later barnstorming tours for charity showed, there can be no doubt about his zest for pioneering and, theatrically, living rough.

Nor can there be any doubt about his devotion to Shaw. After his return in 1976 to part-domicile in London, he became vice-president of the Shaw Society and, on the death of Ellen Pollock 20 years later, was elected the society's president. He gave as much consideration to preparing his inaugural presidential address as he did to any of the film and television jobs for which he continued to be well paid in his late seventies. In 2000, to mark the 50th anniversary of Shaw's death, Morse played Shaw in a BBC radio dramatisation of correspondence between Shaw and the boxer Gene Tunney. Two years later came a play based on the correspondence between Shaw and Lord Alfred Douglas — Shaw's paternal posture in the relationship gaining force from the casting of Morse's son, Hayward, as Douglas.

Morse appeared in a variety of British television series, including *The Golden Bowl*, but he continued to do most of his work in North America. He directed both *Salad Days* and *Staircase for Broadway*, where he also played the title role in *Hadrian VII*, then going with the play to Australia. For much of 1980 he was involved in a project to build a Shakespeare Globe Theatre on Vancouver Island, without success. Perhaps it was to the good: his wit and intelligence made him a natural Shavian; but, to judge by the Oedipus which he gave alongside the Benedick and Jack Tanner in 1959, a certain impatience —

which may have masked fear of his own darker forces — prevented him from seeking within himself the poetic and emotional depths that the great Shakespeare roles demand.

Morse raised money for the Performing Arts Lodge, an actors' and musicians' retirement home in Toronto, touring his one man show, *Merely Players* in one-night stands through Canada in 1983 and 1987-88. In 1997 two performances of the show raised \$50,000 for the Parkinson Foundation, to which he devoted much energy after his wife developed the disease. His last performance of *Merely Players* was in 2003. If, at 85, he lacked the panache of earlier years, his playing of an Irish peasant woman's reminiscence was an object lesson in the interpreter's self-effacement in service to his text; and it made a moving farewell.

His wife died in 1999 and his daughter in 2005. He is survived by his son.

Barry Morse, actor, was born on June 10, 1918. He died on February 2, 2008, aged 89