



SIEBENQUELL

Mourning the Passing of a Great Canadian storyteller



During the last two weeks, my soul has been swathed in an ineffable sadness. It started when a friend wrote me an email to inform me of the death of Gordon Pinsent on Feb 25, 2023. Gordon Pinsent was a beloved actor, author, director, poet, and singer in my home and native land, Canada. He was a man of uncommon courtesy towards his fellow human beings. The stories being told him in these days of mourning and tribute speak of his unfailing kindness, his roguish good humour, his genuine unfeigned love for people of all walks of life and his deep-seated animosity to any and every form of self-aggrandizement. As a friend and colleague of his remarked: »He was the best of us«. To which I can only add »Amen.«

More than anything else, my compatriot was a storyteller. He came from that part of my homeland that produces the greatest number of storytellers in the nation: Newfoundland. After a short stint in Hollywood, he returned to Canada to tell Canadian stories. Moreover, in the process, great stories arose around him and are now told about him. I believe I know at least a part of the secret of his success.

Gordon Pinsent was an actor. As such, he had to immerse himself into the many and varied roles he depicted so as to develop an intimate knowledge of whom he was playing. The storyteller needs to know the character's reason for existence by establishing the character's motivation. To do so, Mr. Pinsent had to delve deep into the motivation of his character, and to learn to understand the inner drives, the better angels and darker demons of the role. What does this character want in this story? What is she trying to achieve?

Furthermore, he had to make sure that he captured the breadth of the character he was portraying, so as not to make the person one-dimensional, boring or a caricature. He had to know the character's strengths and flaws. He had to discover the external conflict of the character, as well the internal conflict with which he or she was grappling. When is the character static, when dynamic, and how do you move from one to the other? And what is the backstory to this character, those hidden tales that explain so much about what is happening now and what comes next?

Normally, we think of an actor as a person who pretends to be someone else. However, what if we were to bring all these skills of the actor to bear on the one role we actually have? What is we applied them to being the people God made us to be? John Shea writes, that we are the story God tells. Our very lives are the words that come from his mouth. If that is so, could we not invest in our own character development? Is it not vital, that we invest in the great story of God in which we play a leading role?

We could immerse ourselves into our own lives and develop a deeper knowledge of who we are. We could delve into our own motivations and honestly look at what is driving us, what we really want and what we are hoping to achieve. We could work hard at developing our lives in such a way, that the full gamut of our lives are lived out and we are not reduced to being one-dimensional bores. We could recapture the e breadth of our own fullness, recognizing our own strengths and flaws. We could wrestled with our external conflicts with the world around us and not neglect our struggle with the conflicts raging in our hearts. A deeper dive into our own lives, could reveal to us where we are static, unyielding and unmoving, and where we are dynamic, engaged and driven. A deep entering into the character we actually are would enable us to look at our backstory, the experiences, encounters and events that had influenced, wounded, emboldened and fashioned us.

Gordon Pinsent could do in real life what he did on stage and screen. He could write unforgettable characters in his novels and screenplays, but he could also live in such a manner that he became, from the skin to the soul, an unforgettable character in his own right. In part I am saddened by his loss, because he helped me and so many others realise a deep current of meaning in the line of Jesus: »I have come so that they might have life, to have life in fullness«. Too often we live, as John Shea put it, on the wrong side of the comma. We settle for having a life. We lack the will to risk the fullness of life. For that, we would have to delve deep.

When my friend wrote me, he added several links with tributes to Gordon Pinsent's life and work. It took me more than a week before I could open and read them. My soul was swathed in an ineffable sadness. It is a sadness that I have learned to respect and treat gently. It is born of a deep veneration for high art of the storyteller and those who wield it. In their telling, we recognise and discover ourselves, in all our messy, glorious complexity. They tell us the stories in which we can lose ourselves and find ourselves. Their stories are filled with promise and grant us support and orientation for our lives. Through them, stories come to life in us about how life could be.

When storytellers pass on, no true lover of the story wishes to face the definitiveness of it. The ultimate compliment you can give to a storyteller is: »Please, stay a little longer and tell us one more story.« This line has echoed in the ineffable sadness that swaths my heart.

Another compatriot of mine, Rex Murphy, ended his own tribute to Gordon Pinsent with these words. »So very fine a talent, so very fine a man. Good Sir, you shall be missed, and it is past all measure of speech to say how happy we are that you were here. « To which I can only add: Amen!

Erik Riechers SAC

Untermarchtal, March 09, 2023
