

FRANK HARDY

But the Dead are Many



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The living are few,
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An inquiring look at some things produced by Frank Hardy in his
later years.

Chester Eagle



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Few? Many? I am more inclined to think that the most important decision about numbers for anybody considering the work of Frank Hardy is the choice between one and two. Was he one writer, or two? One personality, or more? His book *The Hard Way: the story behind Power Without Glory*¹ has a 'Prologue: For the Uninitiated', which has this to say:

The Hard Way tells the story of two men, Ross Franklyn and Frank Hardy. It tells how Ross Franklyn, a battler from the bush, became a writer the hard way and published *Power Without Glory*. And it tells how Frank Hardy was arrested and fought back against the Criminal Libel charge. At the end, the two men meet and face together the 'Problems of Victory'.

In case this device should puzzle the reader, I should explain that all my writing before *Power Without Glory* was published under the pen-name of Ross Franklyn and that *Power Without Glory* carried two names, Frank Hardy (Ross Franklyn). And so, when writing *The Hard Way*, I felt that the man, Frank Hardy, who faced the Judge and Jury, was a different man to the happy-go-lucky bloke, Ross Franklyn, who'd pulled himself up by the shoestrings to write *Power Without Glory*.

So the story is told that way.

This prologue is signed Frank Hardy, Manly, N.S.W. And if we check the title page of *Power Without Glory*, we see that it is called 'a novel in three parts by Frank J. Hardy', while the next line gives, without explanation, "Ross Franklyn". This duality, if that's what it is, is continued in the last part of *The Hard Way*, called 'Epilogue: The Problems of Victory'. In this part of his book, Hardy tells of exhaustion and bewilderment following his acquittal of the charge of criminal libel. 'I could neither sleep nor relax. Serenity of mind deserted me. A nerve rash attacked my hands and feet. I was prey to fears that my personality was splitting, that I was losing my identity as an individual.' He goes on:

The bitter campaign just ended had made it impossible to become again the happy-go-lucky writer Ross Franklyn. I was torn with struggles between the Ross Franklyn of old and the new Frank Hardy which, swirling now out of the mist of the years, take the form of arguments between the two men.

The rest of this epilogue, to a book published a decade after the *Power Without Glory* case, is a dialogue between Ross and Frank, two halves, two aspects, of the one person, and it may be worth adding at this point that 'Ross Franklyn' is itself a name involving two people: Hardy himself (Frank) and his wife of many years (Rosslyn). I'll return to the epilogue a little later, but I want to interrupt myself to say that the main question in my mind after re-reading *But The Dead Are Many*², is whether its two main personalities, John and Jack, the

two voices of the fugue which is Hardy's form for the book, are two people, two separate people, or more simply, more *integratedly*, two sides, two aspects, of the one person. Is it a book about two men, or about one?

Let me now quote Hardy again³, this time responding to comments made by a John Frow in *Southern Review*:

Frow indicates some rather modern, even post-modern techniques I used in my works ... "In all the books subsequent to 'Power Without Glory' there is an internal doubling of the act of writing: Paul Whittaker writes about the process of writing about his alter ego Jim Roberts in 'The Four-Legged Lottery', 'The Hard Way' splits the author into two characters, Frank Hardy and Ross Franklyn, in an alternating narrative structure; the author F.J.Borky is seen at work in 'The Outcasts of Foolgarah' on a novel which is obviously 'The Outcasts of Foolgarah'; Jack self-consciously reconstructs the life of his double, John Morel, in 'But The Dead Are Many'; and in 'Who Shot George Kirkland?' Ross Franklyn writes about the writing of a novel, called 'Power Corrupts', and after his death is doubled by a biographer who gradually comes to identify with him."

Having, as it were, snatched Frow's weapons, or arguments, from his hand in order to wield them for himself, Hardy goes on:

Professor Frow implies that my literary method was a consequence of the ambiguities in the 'Power Without Glory' trials (1950-1951) rather than my ability to vary style and form to match the content of the work to be conquered. Trouble is, I used precisely the same method in a book

written before 'Power Without Glory' but published after, 'Legends From Benson's Valley'.

It's commonly said that if you want to tell a fib and be believed you should tell a big one. Hardy has done so here. There's no sign in *Legends From Benson's Valley* of the duality, the dualism, that's built into the later books. None at all. Hardy is not only a born spinner of yarns, he's also an innate controversialist. He loves to argue, not that he does it very subtly. He's funny when he's brash, and he enjoys making a point with all the grandiloquence he can muster. Here's a passage from *Who Shot George Kirkland?*⁴

Thinking like Franklyn's prose in its most satirical moments – not the turgid prose of the thick novels or the positive hero stories, but the magpies' nest of bawdy words and phrases he had studied when writing his lame-brained thesis on Franklyn, casually larded with all manner of verbal crudities so as to sharpen the sense of outrage and alienation with the gift for the crazy list applied with savage skill to those who manipulate the Australian working man: gentlemen, scholars, blue bloods, ladies, parasites, culture vultures, hangers-on, bureaucrats, distinguished citizens, bozforrical bludgers, statesmen, legal eagles, capitalistic exploiters, triplicate fillers-in, lurk detectors, multinational milchers, money-lenders, bankers, in a word – THEM.

Other such passages can be found in the same book, which Hardy, to my amusement, sub-titles 'A Novel about the Nature of Truth'. For 'truth' I would substitute 'obfuscation'. Any indication from Hardy that he is about to delve into the nature of truth is, for this reader, a signal that some sort of smoke-screen is going to be

unleashed. Visibility of the desired object, or idea, is about to be reduced. If we go back to the passages from *The Hard Way* quoted above, we find Hardy talking about himself as 'a battler from the bush', a 'happy-go-lucky bloke/writer' who's 'pulled himself up by the shoestrings'. This is Hardy enlisting readers' approval by the simple trick of trotting out a few clichés which we're asked to take at face value. That young man, riding home after a day's work, with *The Workers' Voice* in his pocket – you remember him from the previous essay? – simply must have contained the seeds, the germ, of what he was to become – and did. I do think, however, that the processes of being commissioned to write what became *Power Without Glory*, of researching, writing, and then the quite extraordinary things that had to happen to get the book printed and into the world, coupled with the later trial for criminal libel, with all its associated publicity, making Hardy central to the life of his state for a few days at least, and perhaps, depending on how you look at things, much longer than that, all these things combined to change Hardy, or perhaps to bring out in him things that he'd hardly known about or understood until circumstances brought him to see himself in a different way. The later Hardy is not the same man as that idealistic young fellow on his bike on the last page of *Legends From Benson's Valley*, 'head high, hair in the wind, exultant and defiant'. The later Hardy, I'm sure, knew, when he raised his head – or his voice – defiantly, that everything had a cost, that the world was by no means as simple as he liked to tell us it was, and that older people, once they've matured – if they ever do – carry inside themselves at least the potential for the decay, the decline, of things

that their younger, earlier, faith has raised like a flag in defiance of the world.

If what I've said wasn't so then *But The Dead Are Many* would never have been written. Something more exultant, more defiant, might have been there in its stead.

Or something even more sombre, more terrible, like *Darkness at Noon* (Arthur Koestler) might have been offered. Communism's dying in *But The Dead Are Many*, there's no question about that, but the focus of the book is not so much the end of the political movement as the killing of people's worldwide faith in it, and the nihilistic situation of those left without the faith they once enjoyed.

Faith secures the insecure, and that's most of us. Faith sustains us and makes life bearable. Vast crowds gather in front of Saint Peter's in Rome, or they go inside to gaze in wonder. They listen in awe when the Pope, God's master of the faithful, delivers messages to those who need them. Catholicism, you may say; why are you dragging this into an essay on Frank Hardy, probably the most outspoken communist Australia ever had? I do so because catholicism and communism were competing faiths for many years, they resembled each other in being organised to have worldwide reach, while maintaining central authority – Moscow, Rome. Ordinary mortals espousing faith had to accept the dictates – yes, *dictates* – of those at the top of the hierarchies, even though, in the case of communism at least, being anywhere near Joseph Stalin – the top of the tree – was very dangerous indeed. Communism presented itself as a movement bringing huge benefits to the masses, but the means whereby the masses were controlled and if

necessary eliminated were kept as far as possible out of sight. One method of control was to bring communist leaders in front of the masses to undergo show trials, as we see in *But The Dead Are Many* in the case of Nicolai Buratakov, who is perhaps the central figure of the novel, if a book that purports to be a fugue can have a central figure.

I would now say to the reader who has been patient enough to come with me thus far that I have laid down the guidelines for what I want to talk about in this essay. I am interested in the *form* of Hardy's novel, I am interested in its way of offering us the voices, writings, interpretations of *two* writers who are as close as can be to being *one*, and I am intrigued by the fact that it is one of the two, perhaps three, books Hardy produced in a lifetime of writing and talking which deserves to hold our attention. Hardy was a garrulous man, his books show him and/or his characters forever talking in pubs with glasses of beer before them, yet the rooms in which he did his writing appear in his own and other people's reminiscences as having been unutterably bleak, wretched, lacking in taste, decoration or comfort. It can be said that there are ways in which he never escaped the cliché of a working man who gave a certain fraction of his pay packet to his wife for housekeeping, then went to the pub to waste what was left on beer and betting.

Betting! Beer! But let us leave these dreary topics and turn to the third of his books that deserve our attention. Hardy tells us it's a fugue, with the Latin *fuga* meaning flight, but we soon discover that the word 'flight' means, for him, running away, not moving through the air on wings. Hardy's section-headings are at pains

to explain the musical terms he's using, so I shall borrow from his methods and tell the reader that his first and second subjects are John and Jack, and his underlying themes, his essential subject matter, never far from the reader's mind, are despair and death. John Morel dies by his own hand, and Jack? The last pages are as ambivalent as Hardy can make them. Jack is, at the end, lying on the bed where John died, he too has taken sleeping tablets (though not so many?), and Jack calls on the dead man to wait for him. Is he taking the same path to the same end? I am inclined to think not.

... suppose I do not die, by some miracle I remain alive, what for?

I am floating on a wave to the shore. Then I am running to the dreadful junction where all the roads meet and John is hanging there and he is speaking to me. I cried for help and you did not listen, you did not know how, too late to listen now.

And when I looked up, his legs were still, his arms lolling, his eyes bulging from their sockets, his mouth slammed shut like a trap-door.

Rat-it-a-tat: the train wheels are rattling on the rails and I am falling from the train, falling, falling, falling. It is only the falling dream; the hedge will break my fall and the lush green leaves will caress my face.

I think 'only' is the key word here; that, and the fact that the hedge has been mentioned several times before, as a place where a child waited for his parents to come home, come back, to him, but, he never remembers them coming, though they did. Reference to

this somewhat ambivalent hedge prevents the book – the fugue, let’s not forget – reaching a moment of full, indeed double, closure.

This, in my view, is important, because it brings to my mind the way in which I respond to the performance of fugal music. I am actually rather surprised that Hardy chose the fugue for the form of his novel. There is absolutely nothing in my recall of *Power Without Glory* or *Legends From Benson’s Valley* to suggest any interest on Hardy’s part in any of the music known as ‘classical’. Any number of composers have written fugues but the master is generally thought to be J.S.Bach, and his fugues, like most of his music, are deeply infused by his faith. Bach may have been a Lutheran, and a product of the Reformation, but his music rests on a rock-solid faith that the world, with all its faults and problems, was created by and remains in the hands of God. His powerful chords make one aware that although it is possible to see the world in dramatic terms, Bach’s drama is not the same drama expressed by later composers – Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven – who knew very well that they were down here (on earth) and God, though he could be found in the hearts of men, was, for most of the time, *up there*. One does not listen to a fugue by Bach as one listens to a movement by any of the composers I’ve just named. A fugue by Bach is something like a statue both conceived and carved in time. A fugue by Bach is shown to the listener, bar by bar, note by note, until it comes to an end and only when the reverberations of the last note are dying away can the listener reach an understanding of what’s been heard. The fugue is only complete when it’s been brought to its end. Fugal music is therefore not expressive in the more dramatic way

of something written in sonata form – or a subsequent allegretto, andante or allegro vivace either. Fugal music is only expressive when the fugue has been fully comprehended, and that’s only possible when it’s reached its conclusion.

You are, perhaps, wondering about Hardy? Ross Franklyn? Why are we talking about Bach? It’s because I found myself searching for the right way to read *But The Dead Are Many* on each of my first, second and third readings. I read the book when it came out in 1975, again a few years later, and again recently (2009), and each time I found my reading habits unsettled. How was I meant to be affected by this book? It was clearly a different kettle of fish from the Wren/West book: a long, long way from the simple morality – and simple *immorality*, for that matter – of Carringbush and Kew. The word ‘epoch’ occurs a number of times, a word I wouldn’t expect in a Frank Hardy book, and it gives me a certain indication of what Hardy is up to. Here we are on page 26:

So in the spirit of Party mindedness, to which their personalities were being attuned, they demanded higher vigilance of themselves and so perpetuated the vicious circle that was to strangle a whole movement, a whole epoch: the habit of vigilance seeking enemies where they did not exist and finding them to confirm the habit of vigilance.

And here we are on page 288, with the book almost over:

For too long, I had played the role of the hard-headed sceptic prepared to leave the unanswerable questions unanswered; now I must explore the limbo between fact and fiction where death found John Morel and wove the years of his life

into the tapestry of his epoch. In art and history man has a memory of events at which he was not present. So, in a sense, memory can go beyond the living, can be transmitted from and extend to the dead past. Is it possible, then, for John's memory to assist me? This question arose in my mind and I am tempted to elevate it to the level of a theory in the way that man elaborates theories to serve his needs, as the theory of the existence of heaven responds to his yearning for a better life.

The epoch which began in 1917 with the Russian Revolution (and the birth of Frank Hardy in the very same year), or perhaps in 1905 with the earlier, premonitory uprising, was ended by the time this novel appeared in 1975. How can I say this so confidently? Because the faith that early communism engendered was dead. Faith had died. Nobody believed, any more, that Russia, first, and then the world, were being made better, perhaps even perfected, by an idea. It had been a good idea, and it had brought a lot of hope, but Stalin was turning an optimistic, meliorist movement into a tyranny worse by far than the tyranny it had replaced. The transformation of something outdated into something modernly beneficial had gone appallingly wrong. The disposition of power in the new Russia was worse than the disposition of power anywhere else in the world. Hope had given way to terror. The people of Russia and the people of the world, looking on at the show trials, knew very well how they were supposed to react. The answer was abject terror. Thought crimes – and what were they, you might ask? – were almost worse than murder, and led straight to imprisonment in the cellars of the secret police, questioning, confession, followed

by a bullet in the back of the head. At the outer edges of the communist faith – Australia, for instance – it was impossible to believe any more. Those who had depended on faith had to find a new one, or learn to do without, or simply despair, and if despair was intolerable, they had to find a way out of a world that was no longer tolerable.

Hardy made this the subject of an important book. His second or his third? Third, I think, because *Legends From Benson's Valley* needs to be included as the beginning of the journey which ends with the death of John Morel and the loss of faith of Jack, the man who's doubling him.

So, back to my opening question: one writer or two? Is Jack the same man as John? Or not? Two writers or one? How many? Does it matter and if it does, why does it matter? What's the nature of the question, where do we look for an answer, how do we know if we're right?

Frank Hardy has gone to join the John and Jack he created so he's not available for questioning and I think the quotes offered at the start of this essay show how unreliable, uninformative, his answers might have been. He wasn't a very introspective, self-analytical writer, because he wasn't that sort of person. So we are left with our questions and must decide for ourselves. Two writers or one? Something happened to Hardy, mid-career. He couldn't rediscover the certainty he'd once possessed – or was it affected? Having two personae was his way of dealing with this situation. He didn't so much deepen, as double. This became his way of working. He didn't need it for his Billy Borker or other similar yarns, but he

needed it for anything serious. Is Jack the same man as John? Not quite, though they're intimately related, like a question and answer belonging together, the second having been brought into the world by the first. Does it matter? Yes, because the doubling of the writing voice may confuse or mislead us. It may throw us off the track, something which I suspect would have pleased Hardy so much that he would have told us what fools we were for not seeing what was obvious to anyone with half a brain. Obvious to anybody who wasn't one of THEM! And the nature of the question? That's one to think about. The key question, with Hardy as with most writers, is to ask whether or no we're reading according to ... not what the writer intended, but as the prose demands. Is our way of reading the best way of finding what's there for our minds to feed on? It's time, I think, to ask ourselves what faith does, because *But The Dead Are Many* is a book about faith and the loss thereof. Nicolai Buratakov, as I said earlier, is the central figure of the book, and he's doubled – followed, haunted – by Stalin, that monster with a nickname (Koda!). Stalin, though not present as a character, is fugally present because he's in chase of Buratakov, and has him trapped where he cannot escape. Buratakov, therefore, cannot act fugally, except insofar as his thoughts, his predicament, are a theme for others to pursue and to be possessed by. Buratakov can be known by his writings, his behaviour at his trial, and something of him still lives in his wife – her memories – and his daughters. Two daughters, one for each of the men who visit Russia from Australia, in search of faith (the first) and evidence of what actually happened (the second). Each of these men coming from Australia is in flight

from his own version of domesticity, and from the Australian Party's interpretation of what's happening in Moscow. Coming to Moscow, however, only makes the problem more intractable. Each of the two men loves a Buratakov daughter, and much good that does the daughters! The foreigners can do little enough for them. The foreigners go back to where they came from. Their local Party branch falls apart as Kruschev's denunciation of Stalinism takes effect. The centre has fallen apart. Faith in communism is no longer tenable. It has to be put aside, and then what?

Faith is revealed in Hardy's book as a very dangerous asylum to shelter in. It's an island full of dangers for the people in a sinking boat who take refuge there, because it creates dependency. Faith, sought by people whose world won't hold together otherwise, can't be replaced when it's been found to fail. John Morel isn't capable of discovering alternatives once his faith is broken. He isn't presented to us that way and Hardy didn't conceive of him that way. Hardy knew about the faith of communism just as he had absorbed the catholic faith in his early life. A different personality, a different man, might have searched for new foundations on which to raise up a less shonky building, but it was beyond Hardy. When communism failed him, when the left wasn't a place to be any more, he went to the aboriginal people of his country's Northern Territory, and west, and resurrected his sympathies and his grievances, attaching them to the native people's struggles. He may well have done a lot of good but the respite he found for his own soul was temporary at best. He needed to face his situation.

He did. He wrote *But The Dead Are Many*. It's about journeying from faith to despair. Despair, in the case of John Morel, leads him to find relief in death. In the case of Jack, John's alter ego, despair is accepted, if my reading of the last paragraphs is correct. As we close the book we have to think of Jack coping with the despair, the state of total disbelief, that he's now in. Do we think of Jack's after-life as we close the book? No, we don't. We're still considering that fugue, conceived and carved in time, that Hardy's written for us.

I referred earlier to the unshakeable faith of Johann Sebastian Bach. Surprised as I may be that Frank Hardy has written a fugal novel, I think it was a remarkably good choice of form to give his book. It was a way of easing the pressure gripping his mind by turning it into tension in the prose, pulling and directing the reader. The book's in motion, we're watching, fascinated, we know what has to happen, just as we know what did happen ... but we're still watching in a quasi-hypnotic state as the motions are gone through. Hardy can't spare us because he can't spare himself. He shows us the fugue in motion, and the worldwide Communist Party set it in motion in the year Hardy was born, and there is simply no escaping. The thing will crumble before our eyes, and those who were part of it will either find relief in ending their own lives or will remain alive but painfully conscious of the spiritual death which came with the ending of their faith.

Faith, as I said before, is a dangerous place to take one's refuge.

1. *The Hard Way: the story behind Power Without Glory*, Frank Hardy, T.Werner Laurie, London, 1961
2. *But The Dead Are Many*, Frank Hardy, The Bodley Head, Sydney, 1975
3. 'Frank Hardy's last blast in defence of truth', *The Age*, Melbourne, 3 February 1994
4. *Who Shot George Kirkland: A Novel about the Nature of Truth*, Frank Hardy, Edward Arnold (Australia), Port Melbourne, 1980 (but dated 1981 on the history page of the first edition)