**Historia Económica 1 Written Assignment**

**Buried Intentions**

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My dearest friend,

I am a man of honour and trickery won’t sit well with me; you of all know that well. The truth must always be laid up front. And Britain will never have one so honest and loyal as myself. Have you met a soldier, even an englishman, who has so valiantly fought out Napoleon? … and being a Scot![[1]](#footnote-2) And I know already what you will say, that if it were so, I would have stayed in the regiments, like you did …yet it was not I who set the high price of a commission![[2]](#footnote-3) I still do deserve due respect for all I did for this country even though, many are not keen for our types, today.[[3]](#footnote-4)

As for my daily occupation, I must say, no man of medicine roams the streets of Edinboro who the people trust more than me. And I know already what you will say, that the title does not suit me and I sell fake stuffs and am but a quack, so I repeat my defence, I say naught but the truth of the things I sell, and the buyers are freely and happily taking them. And why shouldn’t they? This opium works miracles![[4]](#footnote-5) As Doctor White still didn’t find out me stealing from the University when I took him the night collection.

And speaking of my excursions for that night-trade we knew so well, things have been working out over here. Oh, this lucrative business… we were so young when we begun and now with 38 years I can hardly pick up a shovel. Since that labouring stint in Glasgow after skipping that mess of Waterloo my spine shoots at every turn but I do remain well built. Now I had them take off my tooth and nails but it is hard for me to move.[[5]](#footnote-6) Worst of all, with the wage there when I left I was buying less than when I had come there![[6]](#footnote-7)

At least I don’t need to move much for the business now-a-days, so you know. I now send my avid minons out to get it. They are a bunch of drunken idiots that could’t string a word together for the life of them. They look very torn for their the age, the one I think they have, ‘cause not even that are they capable of saying certainly.[[7]](#footnote-8) They believe everything I tell them and obey! I don’t mean that I am much of a cultured man of letters myself but among them I feel as with the englishmen I knew in the troops. True, they were poor folk down on their luck over and I am still the run-away son of an educated man.[[8]](#footnote-9) And those, too, were barely standing every night after many bottles. [[9]](#footnote-10) I myself no longer lose it for a daily dram, so to keep my mind as sharp as this knife and also for a purer soul and whatever the priest says[[10]](#footnote-11)…

Yet I did go out, to Gaythorn, a few weeks ago, and got one of the recently buried at the parish.[[11]](#footnote-12) I’d known the poor wretch; he was much spit on for his Irish importation,[[12]](#footnote-13) but I was quite keen on him. He was a lazy one too, was laying bricks no more than 8 hours a time so got no more than a pouch of oatmeal a week[[13]](#footnote-14). Thin as a stick, so I doubted he’d sell well. We sent him to Manchester for a good 6 guineas.

White, that small ugly bastard, from him we get 15 guineas, usually, for interesting cadavers, after we refused the usual 9 we were getting.[[14]](#footnote-15) After we found he was getting it from other resurrectionists I made sure those outsiders knew their place and got them down and bailed. [[15]](#footnote-16)We broke into the dissection rooms and tore up the bodies and the animals too. White came on and I cut out a finger off his hand.[[16]](#footnote-17)

This August,[[17]](#footnote-18) in the year-of-our-Lord 1819, has been particularly difficult. Two of our men were stoned by a an angry mob of poor folks mad at their taking some relatives in the morn[[18]](#footnote-19). Yesterday I was out carring a vile for some lady when one of those bloody bobbies busted in to bother my busy day, again. This time it was a particularly strange encounter, though. He apparently though me a schooled medic and insisted I carry out a consult for justice[[19]](#footnote-20) Grey, the very one giving us pains and getting our men, never took much to bribes. And Grey knew not, I made sure, that I was behind the body-snatching operations so I went alright.

Grey was a gigantic specimen, his body towered over and he had a deformed arm which caused him profound pain. He would allow to be treated only by Dr White but on this day he was out on a congress and sent for the first medic. So said the speaker.

As I walked inside, a minute lady, his wife, said “I told you already, you needn’t have brought any doctor for we have medicine here already”[[20]](#footnote-21) I heard the man’s squalor and it came to me this would be a nice catch for sale. Might even send over to France.[[21]](#footnote-22) But in that moment, Doctor White came out from the next room and showed his ugly countenance, still marked by the smallpox he’d endured as a child,[[22]](#footnote-23) saying, in a most annoying tone “Well, hello *doctor* Campbell, is it now?” That’s when the constable had me arrested and sent to the jail. They had colluded against me for my place! White found out my medical business and sold my position in exchange for his role in our trades staying undisclosed![[23]](#footnote-24)

So, after this terrible offence committed against me, I admit the reason I’m writing you after so long is this, I’ll need your help out of this prison. I know you still have your friends in high places, don’t you?

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1. Cookson (1999) and Spiers (2012) chronicle the participation and crucial role of Scottish troops in the British army during the Napoleonic wars and note the Scottish “[represented] 13.6 per cent of the army in 1830, when Scotland contained 10 per cent of the United Kingdom’s population.” (Spiers, p. 417). This is also noted in Nenadic (2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Allen (1998) proposes the system of purchased ranks within the British military was a second-best institution with one of its advantages being self-selection: “The purchase of commissions acts in the same manner as the purchase of any business, with soldier entrepreneurs self-selecting what type of fighting they were best suited for. Those who were correct in their personal assessments were rewarded by large residuals and continued to purchase higher positions, which in turn led to larger shares of booty. Those who were incorrect”, such as our character, “were likely to exit the industry—permanently and horizontally.” (p. 53). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Brown (2010) Churchill (2014) Storch (1976) and Smith (1988) point out that popular attitude towards the police and the military (unlike the navy), was generally unfavorable, and would be especially so after the Peterloo massacre that happened as our character writes. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Leeson, P., King, M. and Fegley, T. (2020); Church (2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. According to Allan and Wadell (1989), back pain was common among labourers, especially railroad workers, and it was not believed to be caused by trauma but instead by rheumatism, so sceptic foci like teeth and toenails were removed in belief that they caused arthritis. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Gourvish (1972) shows real wages for Glasgow labourers went down about 10% from 1815 to 1819. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Baten et. al. (2014) show numeracy rates in England were highest before during the first decade of the 19th century and decreased thereafter. They indicate a negative correlation between levels of poor relief and numeracy. Scotland’s poor relief laws were quite different form England’s in that fewer people were eligible (Paterson, 1976). If what Baten et al. predicted were true, then actually Scotland would have had higher numeracy rates than the british average, but no similar study has been conducted for Scotland censuses yet. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Following Smith (1987), literacy in the army was low until the 1850’s, when there began systematic attempts to “educate the soldier” although, in general, they tended to be more educated than was common for the general population. Smith also notes that in the early nineteenth century, the main cause for joining the army was unemployment or trouble with the law, while Nenadic (2006) argues that, for the Scottish, about half the forces were members of the gentry who joined as for the ‘respectability’ and social status. Though she focuses mainly on the late 18th century, military men remained on the lower grades of the gentry. Meanwhile, Anderson (1983) and Houston (1985) say Scotland was ahead, compared with Britain, in terms of education but witnessed a decline during the early 19th century. In actuality, illiterates like the ones said to be employed by our character where not the most common, seen but at the very margins of society, as is the case. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Wald (2012) records that drunkenness in the military was common. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Alcohol drinking was extremely common in Scotland, so that most of the alcohol consumed was obtained illegally, skiping government’s regulation, while also in early ninettenth century Scotland, the first temperance ideas spread around religious communities (Ash, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Bodysnatching, the practice of robbing recently dead bodies, mostly those of the poor, was common during the period, when competition among medical schools was ripe and the supply was heavily restricted. (Bailey, 2010; Ross and Ross, 1979; Kaufman, 2004; Knott, 1985; Fleetwood, 1988; Frank, 1976; Lauqueur, 1983; House of Commons, 1828) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Williamson (1986) shows Irish immigration picked up in the 1810’s (though still being quite modest), but it did not crowd out the labour market in industrial cities like Edinburgh. This was unlike what was perceived to be the case (Davis, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Meredith and Oxley (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. A bit above the average of prices paid for bodies before 1832, which stood around 13 guineas. (House of Commons, 1828; Bailey, 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. “Gang members regarded body-snatching as a profession and accordingly operated with a high level of organization. One facet of the organization involved controlling free-lance operators by denouncing their activities to the policy authorities. Bribes were paid for their release with the understanding that they would join the gang” (Ross and Ross, 1979, p. 113) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. The resurrection men worked in gangs and loosely tried to maintain an organized monopoly with threats and violence, even though trust was unusual rival gangs emerged and fought. (Frank, 1976; Bailey, 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Medical schools were on recess (Bailey, 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Stolen bodies often belonged to the poorest people who had not the resources to procure more that a parish funeral and could’t protect the graves with iron casts or bars the way richer people did. (Bailey, 2010) Missing a proper funeral was a cultural indignity and often mobs rioted against the practices of descecrating their relatives’ graves in courhouses and anatomy schools, such as in Dublin in 1830. (Fleetwood, 1988; Evans, 2010; Knott, 1985). This situation could plausibly be interpreted as a less-than-ideal allocation and we can think of people’s relatives desecration as a negative externality of the corpse trade. Ideally, there would be bargaining between the parties causing the externality and those negatively affected. (Coase, 1960) One problem arises with the quantification of the negative externality generated, since in early-nineteenth century british culture, "no matter what other indignities the labouring population suffered during their lives, what they apparently feared most was to be denied a proper funeral and to be buried 'like a dog'" (Knott, 1985). Considering, more generally, the relatives of the dead, we can think they were demanding dead bodies, too, to get them a proper burial, while anatomists demanded bodies to be ultimately dissected. Property rights were fairly clearly defined, at least in the illegality of the stealing of bodies but transaction costs were too high to procure perfect enfocement. The utility for the relatives is going to be highest when all their dead bodies are buried properly, while the most utility for the anatomists would be got if all dead bodies were made available for dissection. Most efficiently, enough bodies would be supplied to anatomists so as to carry out their necessary investigations and no more, but criminals and suicides didn’t produce enough bodies. It would have to come down to the preferences of relatives since it is plausible not all of them placed the same importance on burials and could accept a fairer price from anatomists. The problem, ultimately, lay somewhere else: it was in the private university system, which we can think of as an inefficient institution, that existed during this period which had schools competing for alumni and did so by having the best dissection showings, for example Doctor Knox’s at the University of Edinburgh. (Bailey, 2010; Kaufman, 2004; Ross and Ross, 1979) Therefore, it would be fair to say more bodies were being supplied than was strictly needed for the “advancement of medicine” since these were being used theatrically and in the hope of attracting new students (Ross and Ross, 1979; Frank, 1976). If schools weren’t needing to attract students by having the most corpses to sustain themselves (and, especially, their prestige) the demand for bodies would decrease and weighing the risks of bodysnatching against the profits would reduce the desecration of tombs. After the 1832 Anatomy Act, relatives had even less participation to solve their externality problem since now the force of the state was behind the provision of bodies who died at workhouses or hospitals, apart from criminals. In the previous allocation they could all join forces and attack schools and body-snatchers, while also defending each other in the courts, who were usually favourable to the relatives (Bailey, 2010). And also, according to Knott (1985), the anatomists didn’t even get that much of an improvement in the number supplied to their schools after 1832 and were still relying on previous methods years afterwards (Kaufmann, 2004). There were two inefficient institutions: private anatomy schools and body-snatching providing for corpses. Solving the second one could have just made the whole situation worse so I conclude the situation pre-1832 was a second-best institutional allocation, although further research is warranted. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Koyama (2014) says there wasn’t a fully fledged public police system in England until the middle of the 19th century, until which moment “magistrates, Justices of the peace and involved themselves in assisting victims in pursuing and apprehending criminals.” By the 1850’s there also arose the need for such systems since, as Koyama is able to show, the number of commitals (the best and of the few datasets on crimes available) rose very sharply between 1810 and 1838. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Leeson, et al (2020) propose a rent-seeking model in which “the less that health professionals understand about sickness and therapeutics, the less difference it makes to the sick whether professionals treat them, or they treat themselves.” (p. 276) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Inter-city trade of bodies was common, esoecially between Edinburgh, Dublin and London. Paris was a great hub of anatomy at the time, on par with Edinbrugh, but had a more regulated market for bodies than Britain before 1832 (Knott, 1985; Ross and Ross 1979). This was particularly common in the sending of bodies from Dublin to Edinburgh, were the price was much higher, leaving Dublin medical schools under-supplied. (Bailey, 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Voth and Leunig (1996) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Doctors who participated in the illegal procurement of corpses would have their reputations tarnished (Bailey, 2010; Ross and Ross, 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)