
THE BUSINESS OF BODIES,
OR, AN ACCOUNT OF A TRIAL OF A MAN INVOLVED IN THE
DIABOLICAL TRADE IN DEAD BODIES,
IN THE CITY OF LIVERPOOL, 1828

~: THE CAST :~

An accused Grave Robber – Mr. Frank Goya (aka ‘Spanish Frank’)
A Night Watchman – Mr. John Ball.
A Mysterious Gothic Lady (a Chiroptologist) - Miss. Dora Shelley.
A Housekeeper – Mrs. Mary McCaloney.
A Doctor – Dr. Jeremy Wakeley.
A Judge – Justice Baron Hullock.
A Prosecution Barrister – Mr. Archibald Percival.
A Defence Barrister – Mr. Henry Warburton.
A Court Usher



~: THE FILM:~

A jagged and ambiguous eye-witness view of an event in a graveyard at night. The only fact that can be sustained is that a body has been disinterred from a grave and removed.
The question is by Whom, and more importantly Why?

~: THE SCENE:~

A Court Room in the City of Liverpool, September 1828.

~: THE PLAY :~

Members of the Court and witnesses enter and are seated. A Judge bangs his gavel to call order.

Judge: Order! This Court is now in session. (*Indicates to Goya*) The prisoner stands charged of the following criminal offence; that he, Francisco Goya did remove the body of one Margaret Acton from her grave, on the night of the 4th day of September 1828. This crime is in contravention of an Act of 1604 that prohibits the disinterment of the dead and the removal of possessions from the grave.

Can you confirm your name and address?

Goya: (*he is wounded with a bloodied bandage around his head*) Mr. Frank Goya of 22 Clay Street, Liverpool? (*mutters*) Usted es un tonto.

Judge: Are you aware that you are charged with the crime of ‘Disinterment’ – that is to say the removal of a dead body from its grave in the grounds of St. John’s Church, Waterloo – on the said night.

Goya: Yes. (*mutters in Spanish*)

Judge: How do you plead?

Goya: (*Gruffly*), Not Guilty! (*mutters in spanish*) Yo le tengo en desprecio!

Goya remains seated in the dock.

Judge: Mr. Archibald Percival, on behalf of the King, can you call the first witness.

Percival: Yes, I call Mr. John Ball.

Usher: Mr. John Ball! (*Ball takes the stand, put hand on bible*). Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Ball: (*excitedly and proudly*) I certainly do!

Percival: Mr. John Ball what is your profession?

Ball: I am a night watchman in the Graveyard of St. John's, Waterloo. I have a very important job, sir. I am paid to watch over the freshly buried bodies of the dead to protect their souls from demons, dark spirits, fairies and latterly, the thieving hands of the degraded 'body snatchers'.

Percival: These gentle folk of the jury may not be familiar with the term 'body snatching'. Can you explain the nature of this evil?

Ball: Well, if I didn't do my job, what would happen is this: Mrs. Acton dies, gets buried, with all family standing around crying. Then the 'cloak twitchers' come in the night and next morning – Dash! - she's been snatched from her grave. She's been dug-up, and taken off.

Percival: Can you tell us what you saw on the night of the 4th of September?

Ball: (*N.B. his story contradicts the events in the film – it is to emphasise the subjective nature of truth-evidence*) I went to grave yard at sunset like I do every night. I knew there was going to trouble because there were four new graves that day. Their poor families gave me twenty shillings to look after those sorry souls.

Anyway, it's all quiet and there was full moon everything was bright and all looked well. Then about midnight, I saw them... a shadowy gang, creeping through the bushes. I hid behind a tombstone and when I saw them digging I jumped out and put the fear of god into them! I managed to wrestle their leader to the ground and the others, fearing me, ran for their lives.

Percival: Can you point this man out to the court?

Ball: Yes! There is the devilish leader of the gang! You can tell by looking at him that he is a criminal!

Percival: Did he have any of the tools of this infernal trade?

Ball: Yes. He had a shovel, a pick-axe, a lantern, a club... If I was a more feeble man I could never have brought this brute to the ground.

Percival: Indeed you are a modern Hercules. Are you absolutely sure this is the leader of the gang?

Ball: Yes, he is!

Percival: (*smugly*) Mr. Warburton, your witness. (*He sits down*)

Warburton rises

Warburton: Mr. Ball, how long have you been doing this job?

Ball: Only two weeks.

Warburton: (*sarcastically*) Mr. Ball. Is it right that on the night of your extreme example of bravery you apprehended another vicious villain?

Ball: Well, yes sir.

Warburton: (*consulting notes*) Did it not turn out that this vicious villain was in fact a young woman?

Ball: She was his evil accomplice.

Warburton: And is this 'evil accomplice' in the court today?

Ball: Yes, it's her! (*He points to the mysterious gothic bat woman*)

Warburton: No more questions - for now. (*He sits down, smiling, with a sense of litigious intent*)

Judge: Mr. Percival?

Percival: (*shakes his head*)

Judge: Thank you Mr. Ball. Whose witness is next?

Usher: Miss. Dora Shelley (*aka Mysterious Gothic Bat Woman*), for the defence.

Dora Shelley takes the witness stand and is sworn in (sotto voce).

Warburton: (*rises*) It has been suggested by the last witness that you were apprehended, on that night in question, along with the accused. Is this true?

Shelley: Yes I was.

Warburton: It is also suggested that you are a member of a diabolical body-snatching gang. Are you?

Shelley: No I am not. The very idea..

Warburton: But why would such a gentle-woman be lurking *alone* in a graveyard at night?

Shelley: (*she removes the gothic hood from her head*) For the purposes of *chiroptology*, sir.

Warburton: *Chiroptology*? Can you explain to our jury what *chiroptology* is?

Shelley: (*dreamily*) It is the *scientific* study of Bats. I have spent the last five months observing these most beautiful animals in the grave yard. Every time the moon is bright I go there and I watch them fly about their business, catching insects as they go. Some people think that you can understand the wonders of nature by reading a *book*. The truth is that only by *seeing for yourself* can you fully understand the wonders of creation. (*Gesturing excitedly to the jury*) If you could see them too...

Warburton: (*cuts her off*) If I may stop you there for just one moment Miss Shelley. Did you see the accused in the grave yard on the night of the 4th?

Shelley: Yes.

Warburton: And was he the leader of a *heinous gang of body snatchers* as the previous witness has said?

Shelley: No. I've seen his *gang*, but it is the first time I've seen *him*. And he certainly is not the leader. When the others fled he just stood there holding a lantern – that's when the watchman tried to grab him. If the prisoner had not tripped over the watchman would never have taken him to the magistrates.

Warburton: Members of the Jury. I trust you see how it is impossible to trust the testimony of the previous witness, the Watchman. Miss. Shelley, here, has shown that the man is not the hero of the

night. He has not caught the leader of this band of body-snatchers - merely some sorry wretch who had been duped into *holding a lantern*.

Warburton sits down, grinning at his apparent success in discrediting the prosecution witness.

Judge: Mr. Percival?

Percival rises slowly, looking despondent.

Percival: Members of the Jury. Can you really trust the evidence of a woman who stalks the world at night? What kind of sinister intent must she have? She shows herself to be of bad character, walking out at night without a chaperone when good folk are safe in their beds. If she is not involved in some nefarious business herself, it is possible she is of *unsound mind* – she claims to be a *naturalist*! A Woman! Who has ever heard of a woman of science? Whatever next? A woman politician?

Judge: *(for once showing interest in the case)* Mr Percival, do you have any other witnesses?

Percival: *(with a confident smile)* Yes indeed, my lord. The prosecution calls Mrs Mary McCaloney.

Usher: Mrs. McCaloney!

Mary McCaloney, nervous and shifty rises and is sworn in.

Percival: Mrs McCaloney can you tell the Court the name of your employer, and the address of his business.

McCaloney: Dr Jeremy Wakeley of 44 Dixon St

Percival: A Doctor eh? So he makes his living treating patients at this address?

McCaloney: Oh no. He teaches medical students at his rooms.

Percival: *Teaches?* What does he teach them Mrs. McCaloney?

McCaloney: 'natomy.

Percival: *(in a patronising manner)* Do you know what *anatomy* is?

McCaloney: Yes sir. They look at the insides of people. *Dead* people.

Percival: *(pointing to Goya)* Do you recognise this man, Mrs. McCaloney?

McCaloney: *(rather dolefully)* Yes. It is Spanish Frank.

Percival: Where have you seen him?

McCaloney: He and the others come to the back door late at night.

Percival: And what do they bring?

McCaloney: Sacks. Big ones. Heavy ones. For the Doctor. And then I have to give them the money.

Percival: What is in the sacks?

McCaloney: I don't know sir, I don't know. I never look inside. I just do what I am told sir. They put the sack in the doctor's 'natomy room and then they go away.

Percival: I'll tell you what is in the sacks. Bodies taken from the graveyard and used by the doctor for the despicable purpose of dissection!

McCaloney: *(clearly now terrified/defensive)* I.. I.. could not say, sir.

Percival: *(triumphant – turning to jury)* It seems to me to be beyond any doubt that this evil man, Goya, is snatching the dead from their graves and selling them at the back door of the rooms of this doctor. This criminal Goya must know full well the dreadful fate that awaits those poor souls in those rooms. *(In a hushed tone)* It is in this butchers' rooms that the bodies of the dead are cut apart merely to satisfy the curiosity of the medical profession.
Your witness Mr Warburton.

Percival sits and Warburton rises.

Warburton: This man that you claim has come to the back door of the doctor's rooms. How many times have you seen him?

McCaloney: Twice.

Warburton: Only twice. But how many sacks have you received?

McCaloney: Too many to recall, sir.

Warburton: Thank you. One last question. How much money do you give these men?

McCaloney: 15 guineas.

Warburton sits and gestures towards Percival.

Percival: I call Dr Wakeley.

Usher: Dr. Wakeley!

Wakeley rises. He affects a nonchalant air.

Percival: Doctor, do you know why you are here?

Wakeley: *(superciliously)* I do not.

Percival: Do you know this man?

Wakeley: I most certainly do not! A man of my professional standing and status would never associate with a man of his sort.

Percival: No it seems that you pay Mrs McCaloney to carry out that *dirty work*.

Judge: *(sharply)* Mr Percival. That's enough!

Percival nods to the judge.

Percival: How do you make your living doctor? It seems you do not treat any patients.

Wakeley: I am a teacher of anatomy. I am in fact the leading exponent of this great science in the whole of Liverpool. My students never fail an exam – unlike my rival Mr. Gill. There is many a great surgeon who owes his skill to the tuition he received from me.

Percival: For which they paid you good money of course.

Doctor: Yes, of course! The superior teaching I offer does not come cheap.

Percival: And how does one teach anatomy, doctor?

Wakeley: A student must make a thorough study of the body. Its internal *structures* must be seen with the naked eye. A student learns then the location of the liver, the position of the kidneys, the exact relationship between the aorta and the vena cava.....

Percival cuts him off.

Percival: (*rhetorically*) Something that any Christian would find it easy to look up in a book?

Doctor: Yes, but... ..

Percival: But you doctor, you prefer the human corpse for your studies. Do you not worry that you disrupt the passage of the deceased soul on its way to the other world?

Wakely: Well it... ..

Percival: Tell me doctor, how does a man whose vocation is the cure of human ills find it within him to go about cutting up the body for his own curiosity?

Doctor: It is not curiosity. My work is to serve *humanity and progress*. The great Doctor William Harvey dissected his father and sister after their deaths, and the great surgeon William Hunter says that anatomists require “a kind of necessary inhumanity”. This means that one must not let ones feelings interfere with the need for medical knowledge. It is for the greater good.

Lets be clear. Tthe *law* allows *me* to have the bodies of executed murderers to be dissected in *my* anatomy room.

Percival: (*shouting and slamming down his fist*) But that is not the only source of bodies for you is it doctor! For the miserable murderer who has been hanged for his evil deeds, dissection on your table is the final humiliation. But what of the *bodies of the innocent!* These bodies who are brought to the back door of your rooms and taken in by this handmaiden of death McCaloney. They do not deserve the awful fate they suffer at the hands of you and your students.

You are as guilty as this scoundrel (*points to Goya*)!

Judge: (*interjects*) Mr Percival!! It is not the good doctor who is on trial today.

Percival: (*scowling*) No further questions.

Judge: Mr. Warburton?

Warburton rises.

Warburton: Indeed you are not on trial today. I am interested in your remarks and I believe this court should hear you out. Please bear with us for we are not members of the medical profession, but could you explain why, in your view and the views of many eminent surgeons, that the study of the corpse is essential?

Wakeley: I will try to put it simply. Let us consider *the Art of surgery*. Let us imagine that you must have a procedure to have a gall bladder removed. It will not be a pleasant business for you. The surgeon will have you tied to the table so your struggling does not interfere with his work, but of course you will struggle because the pain will be immense and brandy will be your only relief – if you are lucky you may faint from agony. There is a good chance that once the awful business is finally over you will not survive. The pain and trauma and the blood that is lost will render you exhausted and weak.

The truth is, a *good* surgeon is a *quick* surgeon. It is the knowledge and practise that comes from dissecting the bodies of the dead that makes a good surgeon. Look at France and the advances made there – many of our finest students are going to Paris to learn their trade.

Warburton: I understand doctor. Our medical students should be educated by British men. But what of the charge that the anatomy that you teach is making a criminal out of you.

Wakeley: It is the current state of the *law* that makes me a criminal. The law does not provide enough bodies for us anatomists. I say we need a change in the laws of this land so that we can provide more bodies for the student doctors. It would be a law for '*progress*'.

Percival: (*leaps to his feet and exclaims*) This is ridiculous! We are not here to debate the law! The man in the dock has broken the law as it stands – he must be punished or the law will mean nothing...

Judge: Thank you Mr. Percival. Now, have you finished Mr Warburton?

Warburton: Yes.

Judge: Gentlemen, do we have any more witnesses?

Percival and Warburton shake their heads.

Judge: Then let us turn to the accused. Mr. Percival?

Percival: Mr Goya, I ask you what sort of man resorts to this most horrible of crimes?

Goya: Oh what do you know of people like me. After today you will go home to your large house, your servants, your fine dinner with meat and wine. I can find no work. I go out everyday and walk the streets and look for work of any sort. I have no money. I have a wife and five children and one of them is sick and we live in one room. And you dare to sneer at me! I am a man who will not let his family starve. I am a good man! I am a hero of your war against Napoleon!

Percival: Mr Goya, the evidence is clear. You are the leader of a gang of body snatchers and I put it to you that you are nothing more than a common criminal. Many a poor man has struggled to feed his family but only a man lacking in human feeling would be involved in such an evil business.

At this moment a Railway is being built between Liverpool and Manchester. Why do not do as other men do and seek honest work there?

Goya: (*curses in Spanish*).

Percival: You are not worthy of our mercy. I have no questions for you.

Goya: (*mutters in Spanish, contemptuously*).

Judge: Mr. Warburton?

Warburton: (*rises*) Mr Goya, tell us how you met the gang observed in the graveyard that night.

Goya: The gang came to me one evening when I was drinking in the inn. They had heard that I was once a war hero - I carried stretchers on the battlefield in Spain. I am *not* scared of the bodies of the dead – I have seen too many of them... They cannot do us any harm.

Warburton: What did this gang ask you to do exactly?

Goya: To hold a lantern whilst they dug. (*Mimes digging*)

Warburton: So you are not leader of this gang?

Goya: (*gives a short laugh*) No. No. I am not the leader! 15 guineas! 15 guineas she said she gave them. So why did I get only pennies? No, I am just your scapegoat!

Warburton: No more questions.

Judge: (*turns to jury*) Mr Percival for the prosecution will now sum up the case against Mr Goya.

Percival: (*rises*) Members of the jury, the facts in this case are irrefutable. The witnesses called today have all told us that this man, Francisco Goya, is without a shadow of doubt the leader of a gang of grave robbers. His crime is this, he and his gang remove the dead from their graves at night, disturbing both their eternal peace and the peace of their families. This is a horrible deed and this man is nothing more than a monster.

What was his motive? That is something that will strike a chill in any decent heart. He and his gang sell the bodies that they steal for profit. Who buys these bodies? A doctor. A man whose vocation is the preservation of life - and yet who in reality degrades the bodies of the dead by dissecting them in his anatomy rooms.

The doctor is not on trial today; but I feel I must warn you to pay no heed to his attempts to try and persuade that his work is good. He claims that anatomy is necessary for the good of science and surgery. I ask you to think on this? How can something be necessary for progress if it takes away our humanity. God did not give us an understanding of Nature to violate and destroy it, but to live within it in harmony.

Do not heed the pleas of poverty of the accused. He is not a hard-working man. He is a member of the *criminal class* who do the devils work to destroy the very fabric of our society.

Mr. Goya broke the law - Your verdict must be GUILTY! (*He sits down*)

Judge: Mr. Warburton?

Warburton: (*rises*) Members of the Jury, Mr Percival is wrong. Mr Percival has attempted to smear the character of a good man - A war hero who served his country against our enemy.

Yes witnesses have today told you that Mr. Goya was in the graveyard that night and has been at Dr Wakeley's rooms. But his role in this is small indeed. He is not the ring leader of a gang of grave-robbers. He has not profited from this act. He held a lantern, for which he was paid in pennies. Only a man who truly fears that his family may starve agrees to such terms. His poverty means that he is easily exploited. The real criminals, who have made good money from the sale of the dead, fled the scene. They are not on trial today. He is indeed a scapegoat.

As for the comments made about the work of the doctor, who is indeed not on trial today. I ask you to reflect on this – only by the study of the body can medicine advance. This progress that so offends Mr Percival does not mean that we are losing our way as a civilised society. It means that we are moving ever forward towards greater perfection. By studying the body our surgeons become modern practitioners, able to help the sick with the most advanced methods available, curing disease and extending the time they may have with their families.

Mr Goya is not the real criminal here. He is in fact the victim of an unreasonable law, forced into this *business of bodies* by his desperate circumstances.

For this reason your verdict must be that this man is INNOCENT!

Judge: Members of the Jury. I ask you to adjourn now to determine if you find this man Francisco Goya guilty or innocent.

Judge asks the Jury to retire, etc,etc... ...