

## **The New York Play of the Crucifixion**

### **Introduction (adopted from a blogpost I wrote in 2019):**

Before my piece in [@voxdotcom](#), the most likely time for me to really speak about my roofing experience and medieval culture was in reference to the York Play of the Crucifixion, my favorite of the so-called cycle plays. Particularly appropriate for Good Friday.

The cycle plays were collections of dramatic retellings of biblical stories from later medieval England. On the feast of Corpus Christi in June the guilds-people of a town would put on these plays on pageant wagons pulled through the city. Each guild would have a short play telling all of Christian time from Creation until the Last Judgement. These plays were creative & interpretive taking sometimes single sentences from the Bible and fleshing them out into mini dramas with multiple speaking parts.

One of the fullest collections of these plays survives from the city of York. Of the 47 plays the largest number not surprising have to do with the life of Jesus and most of them deal with the events of Holy Week. One entire play is devoted to the logistics of the crucifixion & it's this play that makes me think about my roofing days. Because this play about literally attaching Jesus to the cross and raising it up is told entirely from the point of view of four surly workers who have a very shitty job to do. They sound just like the guys I used to work with. Not only do they complain about the work, they make all kinds of inappropriate crude jokes while performing the work. The work of nailing Jesus to the cross and raising it up. All of which would have been performed on stage with another actor portraying Jesus.

90% of the dialogue in this play is what my dad would have called "bitching & moaning" or "belly aching." The kind of crude banter that takes place on a job site especially when the boss is not around. The tone of dialogue reminds me of the conversations of Roofers on a hot roof. In her recent edition for [@broadviewpress Tina Fitzgerald](#) calls it "cringe-worthy". Definitely. It's dark dark humor with an aggressive edge. It's performative "humor" that does not cause joy. The Roofers I worked with constantly "joked" but rarely laughed. It's vicious humor. A way to cope with the extreme often inhumane conditions on a roof.

I remember telling my dad once that it's funny that medieval people imagined Hell as a place of extreme heat, endless labor noxious fumes and boiling tar &

pitch. It's a fucking roof. It's what I studied during the year & did during the summers.

And that's the other thing, if you've never been there you cannot imagine how crude the language on a roof can be. "Fuck" serves as every part of speech as well as punctuation. I had no idea my dad could talk this way until I got on my first roof. Everybody talks that way. You have to talk that way. So when I first read and taught the York Play of the Crucifixion I was like "i know these guys; I've worked with these guys" But most of my students have never had the particular experience of working brutal physical labor on a crew. So I endeavored to translate the York Play to what it would have sounded like if the guild performing it was Long Island Roofers. I never finished it, but here's my opening of my draft of the New York Play of the Crucifixion. [The Middle English can be found here](#)

WARNING the language in what follows is extremely crude and offensive.

CONTENT WARNING: CRUDE BLASPHEMOUS LANGUAGE

(I have actually edited it to make it less in your face offensive. All the F-word have been replaced with "eff")

### **Roofer 1**

Yo, Roofas! Heads up, get ova here!  
Effing gotta make this sh-t happen.  
Effin you know effin  
Boss says this dipsh-t's gotta die.  
Decisions been made. It's happening

### **Roofer 2**

Eff yeah we effing know.  
We're here, aint we?  
Let's do this thing. Every effing body

### **Roofer 3**

Eff yeah

**Roofer 4**

Well, tell us what to do, and we'll do it.

**Roofer 1**

Dude, you wanna get paid let's get the effin lead outta ya boots

**Roofer 2**

Dead by noon? That's the plan?

**Roofer 3**

We'll, let's effin get going.

**Roofer 4**

We effing smack this dude around, we don't gotta listen to his sh-t no more.

**Roofer 1**

Yeah, effin sucks for him and his family when he's hangin on a effin cross. This'll teach him something.

**Roofer 2**

Worst way to die, he's effing dying for sin.

**Roofer 3**

This'll teach him to *cross* us, eh? Eh? Haha

**Roofer 4**

Yeah. Let's effin go.

**Roofer 1**

Let's effin do this right if we're gonna do it.

**Roofer 2**

You don gotta tell me that mista. Let's get him dangling.

**Roofer 3**

[running in]

I got ya tools here.

Take your hammers, and look at these big ass effin nails.

[holds one nail on crotch]

**Roofer 4**

Ready to go! Effin terrorist is gonna die.

**Roofer 1**

Yeah, we'll see how many efferers pull sh-t like this after they see this piece of sh-t.

**Roofer 2**

You don gotta tell me to put sh-threads like this in their place.

**Roofer 3**

You effin ready? All this sh-t ready? Let's effin do this.

**Roofer 4**

This cross is good; saves us time, getting it already with the effin holes in it. Looks alright.

**Roofer 1**

Lay this b\*\*\*\* out; he's about to get nailed.

**Roofer 2**

He's about to feel some serious pain for all that bullsh-t; you're gonna like this.

**Roofer 3**

Come on, b\*\*\*\*, you aint gonna be so happy for long.

**Roofer 4**

Effing about to get paid, b\*\*\*\*.

**Roofer 1**

He we effin go.

**JESUS:**

Oh God, my almighty father on high, generous Lord,

Remember me.

You commanded me to obey you and to suffer for the sin of Adam.

I willing submit to death, to save all people from sin.  
I ask of you, O Lord,  
that they find grace, through this my death.  
Protect them from evil; keep their could safe in joy everlasting.  
This is all I ask.

**Roofer 1**

Jesus-effin-Christ. Listen to this effin guy.  
Boo-hoo-hoo in for others. Jesus.

**Roofer 2**

Effin raghead aint doing so well.  
He must have sand in his ears, he aint even effin scared.

**Roofer 3**

Woulda helped if he kept his effin mouth shut.  
You gotta know, you don't go sayin sh-t like that.

**Roofer 4**

Yeah, b\*\*\*\*, you happy about that sh-t now?  
Thinkin about what you went aroun sayin.

**Roofer 1**

Shoulda effin used his right to remain silent.  
He's gonna be effin regretting now.

**Roofer 2**

Eff anybody that feels bad for this b\*\*\*\* untils he's dead.

**Roofer 3**

Get to it, b\*\*\*\*; on the ground.  
Get ya ass on the effing wood.

**Roofer 4**

Look at this sh-t! He's effin making himself all comfortable.

**Roofer 1**

Tie up this effin terrorist, all three of ya.

Effin Gitmo style.

Dude like to dress fancy enough, we'll effin hang him up like a prince.

**Roofer2**

[ties his hand to cross]

Righty-tighty

**Roofer 3**

[ties his hand to cross]

Sorry b\*\*\*\*, it's lefty-tighty too.

**Roofer 4**

I got his feet. Stretch this terrorist like a big boy till you get in the hole.

**Roofer 1:**

[puts rope around Jesus' neck]

I've got his effin head.

Sting this effer up.

**Roofer 2:**

Well you know we aint effin going nowhere till we're effin done

Not even getting paid

So let's effing finish up

**Roofer 3:**

You think I don't effing know?

We're effin ready

**Roofer 4:**

Little b\*\*\*\* here's about to get paid in full

**Roofer 1:**

[trying to sort out the process of what they are doing; confused. Everybody has been working on their own limb]

Hold on. The eff. Is this how it's supposed to effin go?

**Roofer 2:**

You see the effing hole?  
You see his effing hand?  
You see this effing nail?  
Pretty straight forward.

**Roofer 1:**

Hammer away Moe!

**Roofer 2:**

[drives nail into wood, seeming through right hand]

That nail aint going nowhere.  
Tight as eff. Nail's good; I felt it catch effer's bone and muscle.  
One hundred effin percent.

**Roofer 1:**

[Turns to Roofer 3]:

How's it going over here?  
It almost beer o'clock

**Roofer 3:**

Look at this effing sh-t.  
Effer's too small to reach the hole.  
He's all effing shriveled like he went swimming on a cold day

**Roofer 4:**

Who the eff measured this?

**Roofer 2:**

It's going effing hurt to make this work

**Roofer 3:**

[looking at the distance between Jesus's hand the hole]:

Yeah this is all effed up. I don't think this is doable.  
Measure twice drill once.

**Roofer 1:**

Lotta effing hands-on-hips not a lotta effing working right now.  
Effing stretch him.  
We aint gonna stop now.

**Roofer 3:**

Jesus Eff who put you in charge?  
Get the eff over here and help ya sonabitch

**Roofer 1:**

Watch how fast I effin hustle  
Joe poke's on the job eff

**Roofer 3:**

I got it I got it. Nailed tight, both hands.  
He aint goin nowhere now.

**Roofer 4:**

Then let's stop effin wasting time, everyone get to his feet every-effin-one

**Roofer 2:**

His pain is our gain. This is gettin fun.

[All four gather around the foot of the cross]

**Roofer 4:**

What the HELL? Who drilled this sh-t?  
This aint gonna work at all.  
The holes are too far down

**Roofer 1:**

Calm the eff down Jesus.  
Let's not stand around scratching our asses.  
Get an effing rope and we'll make him fit, even if we have to rip the eff

**Roofer 2:**

Gimme that rope! I don't wanna see no effin mess you'd make out of it.  
I know how to actually make knots.  
I'll keep our boy here in place.

**Roofer 1:**

The eff do I care?  
Do it. And I don't give an eff it if hurts him.

**Roofer 2:**

Come one you girls, pull, keep going

**Roofer 3:**

Yo I'm on it.

**Roofer 4:**

Hammer's ready. Gonna nail this b

**Roofer 2:**



Now pull!

**Roofer 4:**

Yo yo chill good, far enough!

**Roofer 1:**

Okay okay, then nail him.

**Roofer 4:**

Tight as you know what. Eff. These nails would hold a bull downn.

**Roofer 1:**

Damn these ropes done messed this guy up, look at him squirm.

**Roofer 2:**

Yeah, damn he's ripped apart, bones and veins and eff.

**Roofer 3:**

Yeah well maybe he'll finally shut the eff up. All his blabbing got him here.

**Roofer 4:**

Well I'll go tell the boss we're done with this sh-t. God, what a pain.

**Roofer 1:**

No, no, no, gentlemen, we aint done.

Boss said we gotta set him up high you know, like a flagpole, so everyone can see him.

**Roofer 2:**

Are you effing kidding me? My back eff.

**Roofer 1:**

Quit your bellyaching, this thug has to be hung up, right over here.

**Roofer 2:**

Yeah, they got this hole over there to drop this whole rig in.

**Roofer 3:**

Well let's go, all hands on deck.

**Roofer 4:**

What the eff? Just the four of us?

And we gotta get it up that hill?

Eff we'll be here all effin day.

**Roofer 1:**

Listen to this effin guy. What you only pick up light things?

**Roofer 2:**

No, but eff, we gonna need more men to get this sh-t up there.

**Roofer 3:**

No we aint need no more if you effs would stop being p's. We can do it let's effin go.

1 SOLDIER:

It must be done by us, indeed.  
No more; let's do this speedily.  
I'll lift this part and take the lead;  
On ground he must no longer be.  
Therefore to work we bend,  
And bear him to that hill.

4 SOLDIER:

Well, I'll bear up this end,  
And attend his toes un-till.

2 SOLDIER:

We two shall see to either side,  
Or else this work will go all wrong.

3 SOLDIER:

We are ready.

4 SOLDIER:

Sirs, abide,  
And let me get a grip that's strong.

2 SOLDIER:

Why spend your time on talk this tide?

1 SOLDIER:

Lift up!

4 SOLDIER:

Let see!

2 SOLDIER:

Oh! Lift along!

3 SOLDIER:

From all this harm he'd surely hide  
If he were God.

4 SOLDIER:

The devil him hang!

1 SOLDIER:  
My shoulder's out of joint;  
My pain is far too great.

2 SOLDIER:  
Well, I am nearly spent  
With bearing up this weight.

3 SOLDIER:  
This cross and I must separate  
Or else my back will splinter soon.

4 SOLDIER:  
Stop the din; put down the freight.  
This deed by us can not be done.

1 SOLDIER:  
Let's see if we may now abate  
Our work by thinking, everyone.  
For sturdy men should honour get,  
Not waste the day with jests alone.

2 SOLDIER:  
Well, sturdier men than we  
I think you will not find.

3 SOLDIER:  
This work is not for me;  
I have no second wind.

4 SOLDIER:  
At such a loss we never were.  
I guess this churl some spells has cast.

2 SOLDIER:  
My burden made me very sore;  
Upon that hill? I shall not last!

1 SOLDIER:  
Lift up, and soon we'll get him there.  
So, clamp on your fingers, fast.

3 SOLDIER:  
And, lift!

1 SOLDIER:  
                  Good, ho!

4 SOLDIER:  
                  A little more.

2 SOLDIER:  
And stop!

1 SOLDIER:  
                  And now?

2 SOLDIER:

The worst is past.

3 SOLDIER:

He weighs a wicked weight.

2 SOLDIER:

So did we all four say  
Ere he was heaved on height  
And raised in this array.

4 SOLDIER:

He made us slow as any stones,  
So awkward was he for to bear.

1 SOLDIER:

Let's raise him nimbly, and at once,  
And set him in this mortice here,  
And let him fall in all at once.  
For surely, that pain has no peer!

3 SOLDIER:

Heave up!

4 SOLDIER:

And drop! And all his bones  
Have shattered into pieces here.

1 SOLDIER:

This falling felt more ill  
Than all the hurts he had.  
Now every man can tell  
The least bone in this lad.

3 SOLDIER:

I think this cross will not abide  
Nor stand still in this mortice yet.

4 SOLDIER:

The mortice-hole is over-wide;  
That makes it wave instead of set.

1 SOLDIER:

It must be fixed on either side  
So that it shall no further flit.  
Let's take these wedges for this tide  
And fix the base; then all is fit.

2 SOLDIER:

Here are wedges arrayed  
For that, both great and small.

3 SOLDIER:

Where are our hammers laid  
That we should work withal?

4 SOLDIER:

We have them even here, at hand.

2 SOLDIER:  
Give me this wedge; I'll hammer it.

4 SOLDIER:  
Here is another ready, then.

2 SOLDIER:  
Bring it here; I'll make this fit.

1 SOLDIER:  
Lay on then, hard.

2 SOLDIER; I know that, man!  
I'll drive both with one sturdy hit.  
Now, this cross will stably stand.  
Although he squirm, they will not split.

1 SOLDIER:  
Well, sir, how like you now  
This work that we have wrought?

4 SOLDIER:  
We pray you, tell us how  
You feel. Or faint you ought?

JESUS:  
All men that walk by path or street,  
My sufferings take heed unto.  
Behold my head, my hands, my feet,  
And fully feel, before you go,  
If any mourning may be fit,  
Or torment, equal this unto.  
My father that all pain may quit,  
Forgive these men who these things do.  
What they do, know they not.  
Therefore, father, I crave  
Their sins be punished naught.  
But see their souls to save.

1 SOLDIER:  
Well, hark! He chatters like a jay.

2 SOLDIER:  
I think he patters like a pie.

3 SOLDIER:  
Well, he's been doing this all day,  
Discussing mercy; who knows why?

4 SOLDIER:  
Is this the same that did us say  
That he was son of God on high?

1 SOLDIER:  
He was; that's why this price he'll pay;

That's why he's ordered thus to die.

2 SOLDIER:

Va, qui destruis templum!

3 SOLDIER:

His words were thus, certain.

4 SOLDIER:

And, sirs, he said to some  
He might raise it again.

1 SOLDIER:

To manage that he has no might,  
For all the spells that he could cast.  
For though he thought his words were bright,  
Despite his cunning, he's nailed fast.  
What Pilate judged is done this night,  
Therefore I think that we should rest.

2 SOLDIER:

This thing must be reported right  
Throughout the world, both east and west.

3 SOLDIER:

Let him hang there still  
And make moues at the moon.

4 SOLDIER:

Then we can go at will.

1 SOLDIER:

No, good sirs, not so soon.

For here's another thing to note:  
This garment would I from you crave.

2 SOLDIER:

No, no, sir, we will cast by lot  
To see which man this thing shall have.

3 SOLDIER:

Then let's draw straws to win this coat.  
Come, gather round--all sides to save.

4 SOLDIER:

The short straw wins, just as it ought,  
Whether it fall to knight or knave.

1 SOLDIER:

Fellows, you must not fight;  
This mantle here is mine.

2 SOLDIER:

Let's go then, and good night.  
This is a waste of time!

