

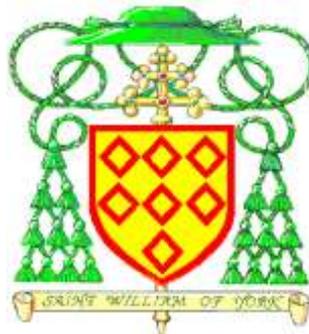


# **“I am William”**

“A Play about St William of York - for Voices”

By

Alexandra I. Lejeune



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*St William of York Catholic Parish*  
*York House*  
*4, Brockley Park*  
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## **CHARACTERS**

MATT - TEENAGE MALE

SARAH - TEENAGE FEMALE

Ms FOSTER - SCHOOL LIBRARIAN

CHRISTOPHER - HISTORIAN

ANNE - SAXON VILLAGER

HONORIOUS III - POPE

WILLIAM FITZHERBERT - ARCHBISHOP OF YORK

## Notes for performance

To add depth, any current youth interest musical score can be used as intro to fade out, e.g. Hip Hop, Rock, Pop music etc – for identification with the main teenage characters; conversely a medieval musical score using harpsichord or flute can be used at the end of the drama, to signal more depth of understanding of William and his era.

It will be more credible if the Characters have dialects, e.g. Matt and Sarah have current London accents, Christopher has a Home Counties accent; Anne has a broad Yorkshire accent. Pope Honourius has an Italian accent and William has a mild French accent.

The play can be performed live on stage but will require special effects or direction on positioning of the actors - to indicate the disembodied voices.

**Setting: A Secondary School Library.**

Matt

Go on then partner, read it then!

Sarah

What?

Matt

Our project? For R.E? You are holding the paper?

Sarah

Oh yeah, right, (giggles nervously).

Matt

I can't believe I have to work with you!

Sarah

Charming, I didn't exactly want to work with you either!

Ms Foster

Er, settle down, I need some concentration and focus when you come into the Library.

Matt/Sarah

Yes, Miss.

Matt

Well?

Sarah

Okay, Okay, you're so pushy... (*Sighs and reads*).

"Research the life of St William of York, Archbishop in medieval Britain; what can you find out about him?"

Matt  
Who?

Sarah  
Read it yourself you Muppet

Matt  
Ooooooh! (*Mutters under his breath*), "...St William of York"  
Never heard of him, sounds boring.

Sarah  
Yeah, we go to his Church as well... don't know anything about  
him though.

Matt  
Really? I go to St Thomas `a Becket. Now *he* is well famous!

Sarah  
Hah! True...wish we had *him* as a project!

Matt  
Let's ask the Ms Foster for some help – must be some crusty  
old books here somewhere.

Sarah  
Please miss, we are researching St William of York – do you  
have anything on him?

Ms Foster  
Yes, of course, right where you are sitting – look, up, up...  
that's it! Now excuse me I must go on my break, if you need  
me I'll be in the staff room. I am leaving you both in charge.

Matt

*(Butter wouldn't melt)*. Thanks Miss, I'll look after the Library.

Sarah

*(Laughing)*, Yeah right – what a Prefect you are! *(Pause)*, oh yeah, I see them...Okay, let's pull all these books out.

Matt

Yeah, you do that; I am going to sleep.

Sarah

Don't you dare! I am not looking at these books alone.

Christopher

You don't have to...

Sarah/Matt

*(Gasps)* What!!

Sarah

Did you hear that?

Matt

Yeah! Did you?

Sarah

I don't like it.

Matt

Come on, who's playing a joke?

Christopher

Listen, Matt and Sarah, we can help you.

Matt  
Huh? Who are you?

Christopher  
I am Christopher, I am an Historian

Anne  
I be Anne, oh what miracles, I must tell you of!

Sarah  
(*Whispers*), there's more of them!

Honorious  
I am Pope Honorius the Third...I beatified William after  
examining his case.

William  
I am William Fitzherbert, twice Archbishop of York.

Matt  
Oh - My - God!!

Sarah  
Are your voices coming from these books, I mean, can you help  
us?

Christopher/Anne/Honorious/William  
Yes, we want to help.

Matt  
Cool! Talking books! Yes, Finally!

Sarah  
Yeah, as long as this aint' some sort of joke. Where are the  
Camera's?

Christopher  
It's no joke, young lady.

*(Pause)*

Matt  
Okay then, and I'm not saying I ain't freaked, tell us!

Christopher  
William was born of high birth in 12<sup>th</sup> Century England to Herbert and his wife Emma; who both had high connections in French and English courts. William was a second cousin to King Stephen who was the grandson of the Norman invader, William the Conqueror.

Matt  
Oh, easy life eh? Silver Spoon? The English hate the French, well, still do! Remember Hastings?

Sarah  
Shut up! I am trying to listen...

William  
It is fine, young maiden, tis not the first time I have received this jibe.

Sarah  
Look what you've done now....

Christopher  
To add to Williams's rumoured life of undeserved wealth and standing – his Father had a penchant for acquiring property and was rumoured to have done this in one instance by taking advantage of poor clergy, as well as being treasurer to the King's estate.

Matt

Oh yeah, this is really making me feel sorry for him.

Honorious

Are babes not innocent?

Matt

What?

Honorious

Are babes not born innocent of their Father's folly and vanity?

Should we blight the children with past sin? Did Jesus not break down the gates of hell, that we should be free of the original sin created by Adam and Eve? William was born into this family by God's grace and his life may not have been comfortable because of it...

William

Yes, it is true, it was an uncomfortable childhood and I felt...well, snubbed.

Matt

Oooh, snubbed!

Sarah

Come on Matt, have you never had anyone leave you out? This sounds like a kind of racism to me. You know "we hate these people coming into our country taking all our wealth" kind of thing.

Matt

Yeah, but all that money has got to make it better for *him*, so, who cares... and by the way... I know this bit of history...William the Conqueror's army killed 100,000 people, so *everyone* knew *someone* who had been killed, so why would

.../anyone like someone who is part of William's family *and* he was called William too...come on!!

William

I really did care young Matt. I did not want to be part of the *pretender to the throne* hatred. I love England and I think of myself as English with French roots.

Sarah

I think that's fair enough...Matt?

Matt

Okay, I get it...

Anne

That right, beggin' your pardon, I jus wanted to say that we loved him e'n though he be a Norman.

Matt

Oh yeah, why's that then?

Anne

Cos his 'eart be good and full of the works of the lord. Lord William always had time for us folk...

William

Thank you, good lady...

Matt

Give me strength, if people didn't like you why didn't you use your soldiers and have them put to death? You are part of the conquerors' gang; don't forget...you've got access to knights and lances and swords and stuff!

William  
Young man, I am a Man of God and Love is greater than Hate.  
Hate is a poison

Honourous  
Well said.

Matt (*Whispers to Sarah*)  
I can't stand him. Pious or what!

Sarah  
Shhhh! William, did you never hate anybody?

William  
No, I was hated.

Christopher  
Rivalry is the cause of all conflict in Williams' history.

Matt  
I've got a feeling this is going to be good!

Christopher  
Aware of William's goodness and popularity with the people,  
King Stephen put him forward as his nomination for the vacant  
role of Archbishop of York. This role commanded fame and  
standing similar to any king or president.

Matt  
What, just like that?

Christopher  
(*Exasperated*) Do you quarrel with History?

Matt

Yes, actually, choose an English person and make the peace?  
Simple! See, proper politics...not the *keep it in the family*  
rubbish!

Sarah

Come on, Matt, who ever Stephen picks will be hated.

Honourous

Looking back on this case it seemed to me that William was  
suitable, many candidates were examined; and I felt it did not  
matter that he was, well, unpopular. Remember our Lord  
Jesus in front of Pilate? In front of the angry mob?

Matt

What! Ah! You're just making me sound bad now...

Honourous

I don't want to make you feel bad young man, I just want you  
to realise that there was nothing wrong with William as a  
person.

Christopher

In many ways, young Matt, I believe William was ultimately  
removed as Bishop, in order to try to create the very peace you  
speak of.

Matt

No way, removed from being Bishop? Wow, that's harsh. Sorry  
man, I didn't wish that on you.

William

There was so much arguing and fighting and terror on my  
behalf. I was always talking, always trying to convince

.../everyone I was the right person, that there was no need to worry...I was accused of many things, things that I am too upset to speak of...I had followers, men of high birth who came back from the crusades, who spoke with their swords. Fountains Monastery was burned to the ground because of my removal and my rival who was then my successor came from within their walls. I was so ashamed...I did not ask for their anger...I felt so bad I couldn't do anything...I would have given anything to not be Bishop, nothing more then just me...

Matt

Yeah but, William, this is what happens when you are famous mate, didn't anyone ever tell you this?

Christopher

Was William's inner anguish indicated by the fact that he had not gone to Rome and received the Pallium, a symbol of being part of the Holy See? When William was removed from holy office he was mortified but also welcomed it.

William

I spent so much time apologising, for things I hadn't done. It was tiring but in the end I felt I had to say sorry to God.  
I had to say sorry, for everything.

Matt

Why bother...look I am not being funny, but no one remembers what you have done and you didn't do much really, did you? You didn't ask those men to be such idiots.

William

(Sigh) Sometimes, I think it is better to say what is in your heart and find the peace, there is a peace in talking with our God, which you might do well to experience, my young friend.

Matt  
What do you mean?

William  
I found *strength* in prayer, which was as tangible as, as...

Matt  
Big muscles? Hah! You did want to fight then...?

William  
No Matt, I wanted peace between Norman and Saxon...peace  
between the clergy.

Anne  
Oh yes, we folks knew all about this, listen, do...  
Our aim's to show by Sainted William's life,  
How God rewards the patient hidden strife  
To conquer self, by gift of peace of mind,  
Surpassing, yea and leaving far behind,  
The empty honours of a worldly fame,  
Such as a proud man bestows upon a name.  
Twas not a Battlefield that William fought,  
Nor in a princely court that he was taught;  
But far away from all the world call great,  
He craved admittance at a Cloister gate.  
In lowly deeds, his soul was cleansed from dross,  
In prayer he learned the wisdom of the cross.  
And when ambition he had flung away,  
Bending his will to suffer and obey,  
'Twas then God shower'd his graces from above;  
And filled his heart with deep absorbing love;  
Taught him that it is noble to forgive,  
And that when dead to self, 'tis then we live.  
Thus chastened, William went once more to Rome;<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "St William of York: A Drama". By Anonymous. Pub. R. Washbourne: London 1876

Sarah  
Was it all praying then?

Anne  
Sometimes there were great happenings young Lady!!

Sarah  
Oh Yeah?

Anne  
Many years later, our lord William was made Bishop again...all charges were dropped; you should have seen the crowds of folk come out to see our blessed William back again! The whole town and neighbouring villages...

Christopher  
Yet, this is a real moment of tragedy, the weight of the people was such, that the stone bridge over the River Ouse collapsed - with men, women and children and babes in arms falling into the deep cold water...(*sounds of screaming in the background*).

Anne  
Oh, my good Lord of York! Pray, send up  
Thy pray'rs to Heaven. The multitudinous throng  
Hath pressed in such array across the bridge  
That many are cast in and like to drown,  
And little children throw their arms about  
And wait upon the rushing waters.<sup>2</sup>

William  
Oh, my Lord God! All powerful and great!  
Save thy people, nor permit that one  
That's come this day to give me kindly greeting,  
Should perish in these waters.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "St William of York: A Drama". By Anonymous. Pub. R. Washbourne: London 1876

Anne

(Gasps!) Thy prayer hath reached the throne of Grace,  
And all are saved, oh wonderful!<sup>4</sup>

Sarah

Wow, cool ...that was a miracle!

Anne

...if you be so kind to listen young maiden, I can tell you of 33  
*more* miracles at our William's Tomb...where illness and loss of  
limb was recovered of, because of his grace...

William

You are too kind...

Sarah

Yeah?! 33 miracles?

Anne

Well....his body was uncorrupted in death and precious oil did  
flow from his tomb and all that prayed there beheld such  
miracles that take your breath away...

Matt

Tomb, come again, what Tomb?

Christopher

Some say that William was poisoned after he was reinstated in  
office. Some say it was a fever of a body wracked with strain.

Honourous

With such a life of prayer, could William feel "strain"? Does  
prayer not have a protective power, a mantle of Gods' grace?

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<sup>3</sup> "St William of York: A Drama". By Anonymous. Pub. R. Washbourne: London 1876

<sup>4</sup> "St William of York: A Drama". By Anonymous. Pub. R. Washbourne: London 1876

.../William's life of prayer for peace was something that people talked about and never forgot. Peace between Saxon's and Norman's came finally. I approve that William's example brought them together.

Sarah

Is that what prayer does? I didn't know that?

Matt

Look let's not forget the Murder eh? So...who did it and where is his tomb? What were the Miracles...?

Sarah

Oh! Shhh!... someone's coming...

Ms Foster

Well, you two look engrossed; don't you know what time it is? Come on, put the books away and get off to Lunch!

Matt

Okay, er...don't let anyone touch those books Miss!

Ms Foster

What an earth has got into you Matt Johnson?

Sarah

Yeah – we want to listen to, er, I mean, read them again...

Ms Foster

Okay, not answered your essay question?

Matt

What?

Ms Foster  
What did you learn about St William of York?

Matt  
He was a man of prayer, prayer gave him muscles and he made  
history!

Sarah  
...That no one remembers...

Ms Foster  
Oh really, very interesting....

Sarah  
Well, he was a man of peace and miracles, like Jesus really.

Ms Foster  
Hmmm...yes, well, that's a new one on me, very profound...  
*(fast)*, don't quite understand it but go and get your lunch;  
Do I have to chase you out?

*(Long pause...)*

Christopher  
I can help you understand.

Ms Foster  
What?! Who's there?!!



## Reflection

1. Imagine being part of a very unpopular family. How would this affect you?
2. Have you ever been bullied or left out?
3. Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed?
4. How easy is it to forgive those who hurt us?
5. How do we *feel* when we forgive and let things go?
6. Have you ever used prayer / meditation / spirituality to feel better?
7. Is William a good role model for us personally or politically?

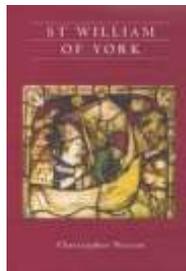
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The character of Christopher is homage to the following author and biography, where you can find out more details on William, his complex life and beatification.



**Norton, Christopher; (2006) St William of York  
York Medieval Press: England**