Gerard Kilroy

Edmund Campion: A Scholarly Life. Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2015. Pp. xvii + 458. Hb, \$139.95.

More has been written about Edmund Campion than about any other English Jesuit. A brilliant orator whose provocative challenge to the Elizabethan regime led to his capture in the first year of the Society's mission to England, his execution by the state as a traitor on December 1, 1581 made him into the Catholic community's most revered and precious martyr. Gerard Kilroy's new biography is the first major reassessment of his life and legacy for more than half a century.

Earlier studies of Campion naturally devoted most attention to his years as a missionary and to the grim course of events that led to his tragic death. Here, Kilroy adjusts the balance and fills in some significant gaps in our knowledge of Campion's life prior to his arrival in England in the summer of 1580. He is unstinting in his treatment of the process leading to Campion's arrest, trial, and death: the latter part of the book is an intricately detailed and powerful treatment of these years. Tracing his surreptitious journeys through the country, it compellingly evokes the impact of his preaching on those who flocked to hear it in barns at dawn and the drama of his betrayal and entrapment by the informer George Elyot. Overcome with emotion by his sermon on Christ weeping over Jerusalem, the household at Lyford Grange was "all drenched in teares" (231) as it became clear that Campion's arrest was inevitable. Kilroy lingers on the story of his subjection to torture, which he regards as one of most "disgraceful episodes in the history of English law and government" (255), and devotes complete chapters to his disputation with the authorities and his conviction and path to execution. The route on which he was dragged on a hurdle to Tyburn is seen as "almost a synecdoche of Campion's life in England" (337).

It is the first half of the book, however, that contains the freshest insights and most original findings. Kilroy sheds intriguing new light on Campion's earliest years in London. The son of a stationer, he was born in 1540 and educated at St Paul's School and Christ's Hospital, where he was surrounded by the partially restored ruins of former monasteries. Kilroy surmises from Campion's use of the word "persecution" to describe the Marian campaign to extirpate heresy that he must have been horrified at "the cruelty and barbarous reciprocity" of the religious struggle he witnessed as a youth (25). He sees Campion's years at St John's in Oxford as a student and then as reader in rhetoric, which culminated in his ordination as a deacon in the Church of England (a decision which later tormented him) as "a painful and hesitant journey of theological

assent" (62). Kilroy also underlines the formative role of Campion's time in Ireland in his conversion to Catholicism and in imbuing him with a lifelong devotion to St. Patrick. Even more revealing is the chapter on the years in Prague, where he finally entered the Society of Jesus in 1573 after a period in Douai and Rome. This was a climate in which he flourished as a scholar and a teacher, from which he begrudgingly tore himself away to answer the call to join the Jesuit mission to England, and in which his memory was preserved by his many Bohemian disciples down to the fifth generation.

Indeed, the notion that Campion was a reluctant missionary and martyr is keynote of Kilroy's interpretation. Here, he parts company with recent work by a number of historians, including John Bossy and Peter Lake and Michael Questier, rejecting the former's emphasis on his naivety and "angelism" and the latter's stress on his "charismatic enthusiasm," and dismissing claims that he was reckless with his life (158). Instead, he underlines Campion's temperamental aversion to becoming embroiled in a scheme that was compromised before it had even begun. It was seriously jeopardized by Nicholas Sanders's papally backed invasion of the west coast of Ireland in 1579—an event to which historians have thus far accorded insufficient importance. Kilroy is clear that responsibility for the miscarriage of the English mission and the difficulties in which English Catholicism found itself in the 1580s and 90s must be laid firmly at the door of William Allen, who concealed the Smerwick campaign from Campion when he summoned him to Rome. Writing of "the criminal folly" of sending the Jesuits into a country in a state of emergency (146), Kilroy cannot disguise his view that the enterprise was doomed by Allen's political meddling. Exploiting Campion's vow of obedience (394), it was Allen who "pulled the thread" that dragged him unwillingly into "the murderous whirlpool of English politics" and sealed his fate (130). "When Campion landed in England," writes Kilroy in a memorable passage, "he might as well have walked onto a battlefield carrying an umbrella" (146). He repeatedly insists that Campion himself had no sympathy with Pius V's bull of excommunication, which he believed had "procured much severtye in England" (91).

If the vision of Campion that emerges from Gerard Kilroy's biography is thus "a more credible model of human sanctity" (138), it is also one still lightly tinged with moral judgements and with an older hagiographical view of him. Kilroy's admiration of his subject shines through and he is sometimes more sanguine about the reliability of Paolo Bombino's *Vita et martyrium* (1618) as a source than perhaps he should be. Psychological truths can undoubtedly be embedded in literary convention, but further critical evaluation of the distorting martyrological lenses through which we see Campion may be desirable. Some of the issues surrounding his posthumous construction are discussed

in chapter 12, in which Kilroy also reveals his polite and cautious scepticism about Richard Wilson's controversial thesis positing a link between this iconic Catholic martyr and William Shakespeare.

This is a long book in which there are occasional elements of repetition, but it is also a compelling one. It will be valued by scholars and by general readers alike. Rooted in exhaustive research in libraries and archives around the world and drawing on a number of manuscripts unknown to previous historians, it is a work of meticulous scholarship and measured and careful analysis that will surely be regarded as the definitive account of Campion for many decades to come. It rightly reminds us of the need to recognize Campion as a cosmopolitan European figure who left a legacy "transcending the insularity that was gradually separating England from its continental cultural heritage" (396, xvii).

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