

*Edmund Campion: A Scholarly Life*. Gerard Kilroy.  
Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. xxii + 458 pp. \$139.95.

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A decade ago, Gerard Kilroy published *Edmund Campion: Memory and Transcription* (2005), a succinct study that examined the transmission and conservation of Campion's writings among English Catholics. The author has now turned to Campion himself and produced a massive biography of the famous English Jesuit and martyr. Weighing in at nearly 400 pages of text and thirty of bibliography, this work will be essential for anyone interested in Edmund Campion. Kilroy's stated purpose — "to reimagine Campion's life as a scholar and priest, to provide documentary evidence for every assertion, to show Campion as a human being," and his decision to direct the book toward "the many admirers of Campion who are outside the academic community" (xvi) — leads us to understand that the book does not offer an explicit argument, but is instead meant to offer a window into the world in which Campion lived and worked.

As a result, the book follows the chronology of Campion's life from his childhood in London to his time at Oxford, and from his travels in Ireland, Rome, and Prague to his final days in the Jesuit mission to England in 1580–81. The author is keen to provide ample context at every turn, offering detailed descriptions of everything from sixteenth-century London to the Jesuit novitiate in Brno. However, this narrative is so dense that it sometimes repeats itself — a nearly identical sentence about the dissolution of the monasteries appears twice in one chapter (pages 2 and 21), for example. The text is also filled with long quotations throughout, to "enable the reader to hear [Campion's] voice" (xvii).

The book is strongest when offering close readings of Campion's speeches and writings, such as the play *Ambrosiana* and a verse monologue entitled *Anima*, where Kilroy explains how Campion drew upon Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for its composition. Likewise, there are fascinating passages analyzing the material history of Campion's writings. The author explains how Campion's most famous work, the *Rationes Decem*, was printed and bound, examining the typeface used, the glosses added to it, and how the method of binding ("it was stab-stitched") was chosen because of its speed. Significant, too, is the author's emphasis on the repercussions of the 1579 invasion of Ireland as well as Campion's time in Prague and Ireland, aspects of his life that are often neglected in favor of events that took place during the English mission.

This is an account that is strongly sympathetic to Campion. If this book makes an argument, it is that he was careful to stay out of political machinations against the Elizabethan regime unlike Robert Persons, Nicholas Sander, and William Allen, the last of whom is especially blamed for the English mission's failure. Unlike these men, Campion is depicted as a thoughtful scholar and effective orator — he is shown to win over nearly every audience to which he spoke — who returned to England only reluctantly in 1580. One does wonder, though, to what extent this depiction is based on sources that are themselves sympathetic to Campion. For example, some passages of the book follow the account given in Paolo Bombino's hagiographical vita of Campion (1618) so closely that entire series of footnotes refer to Bombino and nothing else (e.g., pages 220–21 and 275–76). This is partly a problem of available sources: recusants and other Catholics would naturally have been more interested in some aspects of Campion's life (including his imprisonment and torture) than others. Nevertheless, a reader cannot help but suspect that the current narrative is shaped by those hagiographical accounts: for instance, when the author decries the Tudor monarchy's "inconsistent and illegal treatment of Campion" (269) and "the incoherence of the Privy Council's policy" in interrogating the Jesuit (244).

All of this is not to detract from the biography's thoroughness. If one approaches it for what it is — a quasi-hagiographical treatment of Campion's life — it can be very informative. It will likely replace Richard Simpson's account (*Edmund Campion: A Biography* [1867]) as the standard biography of Campion and should be read alongside *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits* (Thomas M. McCoog, ed. [1996]). Any scholar interested in Campion can make use of this book.

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