

CAMPION

A Short Play for Campion Day

by Adrian Porter SJ

This short play is intended for use in schools for the Feast of St Edmund Campion SJ (which occurs on 1st December). Schools are free to use and adapt it as they wish.

The parts can be subdivided to accommodate a larger number of performers. There is no reason why, given lack of time, the parts cannot be read from scripts, or the actors perform while the script is read by others.

Characters

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Thomas, a Recusant

Recusants (five or more)

Edmund Campion

Gaoler 1 – Delahays (who later became a Catholic inspired by Campion's martyrdom)

Gaoler 2 (the nasty one)

Lord Howard (member of the Queen's Council)

Sir Francis Knollys (member of the Queen's Council)

Judge – Sir Christopher Wray

Chief Prosecutor – Edmund Anderson, Queen's Serjeant at Law

Prosecutor – John Popham, Attorney General

Prosecutor – Thomas Egerton, Solicitor General

Bystander 1

Bystander 2

Alexander Briant (Catholic priest, Jesuit and fellow martyr with Campion)

Ralph Sherwin (Catholic priest and fellow martyr with Campion)

Soldier

Sheriff

Thomas Gawdy

The Recusants were Catholics who refused to follow the new religion. They celebrated Mass in secret in their homes. Priests, including many Jesuits, travelled about the countryside in disguise visiting Recusant families.

A series of PowerPoint slides with simple backgrounds for each scene are available from the Jesuit Institute website.

Much can be achieved through use of a few well-chosen props and costume items: keys for the gaoler, hats and cloaks, a sword or pistol for the soldiers, perhaps darker clothes for the recusants and brighter colours for the others. A bell might be rung to indicate the journey through London. Lights might be switched off while the Narrators, holding a lantern or candle, tell us about the execution.

Scene 1
A London Street
Monday 17th July 1581

Recusants *(a group of recusants are gathered on a street corner, they are talking animatedly and we hear snatches of their conversation; but they are wary and go silent whenever anyone comes near)*

Today . . . never? . . . yes, I tell you . . . I can't believe it . . . who told you? . . . are you sure you haven't got this wrong? . . . he was in a safe place . . . yes, miles from London . . . but their spies are everywhere . . . you can't be too careful . . . yes, watch yourself . . . don't let anyone overhear . . . you've got to be careful . . . etc.

(Thomas appears and notices the group; these are his friends and he goes over to join them; but they are too wrapped up in whatever it is they are discussing to notice him; he becomes increasingly irritated at being left out.)

Thomas **What? What is it?** *(they don't notice him)*

(the group continue their whispered conversation as before)

Thomas *(louder)* **Ralph, Nicholas, what has happened? What? What?** *(they still don't notice him)*

(the group continue their conversation as before but more loudly)

Thomas *(louder)* **What's happened? Will someone tell me what's happened?** *(they ignore him)*

(Thomas has to shout to be heard . . .)

Thomas *(shouts at the top of his voice)* **WHAT?**

Recusants **Sssshhhhhh!**

Recusant 1 **It's bad enough that Campion is captured without you getting us all thrown into gaol.**

Thomas **Campion? Our Campion? Edmund Campion?**

Recusant 2 **Yes.**

Thomas **Where? When?**

Recusant 3 **At Lyford Grange in Oxfordshire – this very morning.**

Recusant 4 **Betrayed they say.**

Thomas **Where have they taken him?**

Recusant 5 **To the Tower.**

Scene 2

The Tower of London

(we discover Campion on his knees at his prayers; the gaolers appear and watch him)

Gaoler 2 **So . . . didn't last very long did we?**

Gaoler 1 **Leave him be. He has done nothing to deserve this harsh treatment. Solitary confinement. A cell so small you can't stand up or lie down.**

Gaoler 2 *(offering Campion an apple or a piece of bread)* **Ah, ah, ah . . . not so fast . . . I'm not sure a traitor deserves to be fed, do you, Delahays?**

Gaoler 1 **He has little enough. Give him the food.**

Campion **I am no traitor. I am a loyal subject of the Queen, our Sovereign Lady Elizabeth.**

Gaoler 2 **But you are a Catholic!**

Campion **A Catholic, yes. But an Englishman too.**

Gaoler 2 **Hmmm . . . well in my book you can either be an Englishman or you can be a Catholic. Not both!**

Campion **But how can that be? For centuries Englishmen were Catholics, loyal to their faith and to the Bishop of Rome, but good citizens of their country and loyal to their King also.**

Gaoler 2 **Yes, yes. You may well be right but we can't dither around here all day.**

Gaoler 1 *(whispers so as not to be overheard by Gaoler 2)* **Good luck Campion. May your God be with you.**

(as the Narrator speaks, we see Campion taken from his cell and off to the torture chamber)

- Narrator 1 **Campion was the most important prisoner in the land. He was the headlines in the newspapers and the talk of the town. Here was proof positive that the King of Spain was sending his secret agents to prepare for the Spanish invasion. Campion was a Catholic in a Protestant country. And worse still, he was a Jesuit.**
- Narrator 2 **Each day Campion was questioned. Each time he insisted he came in peace as a priest to look after the Catholics of England. This was not the answer the Queen's Council wanted.**
- Narrator 1 **So they put him on the rack and stretched his arms and legs until the bones cracked and the sinews twisted and tore. Hot metal was pushed under his fingernails.**
- Gaoler 1 **So how are you today master Campion?**
- Campion **I cannot tell because I can feel nothing. They have racked the feeling out of my arms and legs. *(he has to raise one arm by lifting it with the other)***
- Narrator 2 **August, September, October, November. For four months Campion was questioned and tortured, imprisoned and starved.**
- Narrator 1 **And still he told them he was a priest and no traitor or plotter against the Queen.**
- Narrator 2 **On a cold November morning, Campion was taken by boat up the Thames to Westminster Hall where they had prepared his trial.**

Scene 3
Westminster Hall
20th November 1581

- Judge **What charges are brought against these men?**
(Alexander Briant and Ralph Sherwin have also been brought to trial alongside Edmund Campion)
- Egerton **They are Catholics, your honour. They belong to a forbidden religion.**
- Anderson *(aside to his fellow prosecutors)* **Wait! We cannot charge them because they are Catholics. The people will never allow it.**
- Popham **And it is rumoured the Queen is to marry the Duke of Alençon.**

- Egerton *(astonished)* **A Catholic?**
- Popham **Indeed.**
- Anderson **What else have we got?**
- Egerton **Witnesses!**
- Anderson **Reliable witnesses?**
- Egerton **They will be, Anderson, for they are well paid.**
- Judge **Come, come, I ask again, what charges are brought against these men?**
- Anderson **The most serious charges, my Lord.**
(he reads from the paper handed to him by Egerton)
They have plotted to murder our Queen, Elizabeth.
(gasps from the crowd)
They knew about the King of Spain's plans to invade our country and slaughter our people. *(more gasps)*
(whispers to Egerton) **Are you sure about this?**
- Egerton *(to Anderson)* **Yes, yes! Do you not see the people's reaction. These men are as good as condemned already!**
- Popham *(loudly and confidently to the whole Court)* **The prisoner Campion even spoke of "the great day" when the realm of England would be defeated by Spain.**
- Egerton *(trying to outperform Popham)* **The Jesuits poison their students' minds and teach them murder and treachery. They even have an expert in explosives. What more evidence do you need?**
- Anderson **Your honour, the prisoner Campion has even written about his plans. *(Egerton hands him a copy of the Brag – a single sheet of printed paper)* He claims that "all the Jesuits in the world shall cheerfully carry the cross you *(he means us, your honour, you and I, all of us good and Christian gentlemen of England)* *(he looks around the Court for this to sink in – reactions of shock all round)* . . . the cross you shall lay upon us, and never to despair your recovery, while we have a man left to enjoy your Tyburn, or to be racked with your torments, or consumed with your prisons. The expense is reckoned, the enterprise is begun; it is of God; it cannot be withstood. So the faith was planted: So it must be restored."**
- Judge **Shocking, Anderson, truly shocking.**

Popham **A plot. A Jesuit plot. To invade England with the King of Spain.**

Egerton **And what is more, there is a book.**

Popham **Illegally printed.**

Egerton **And left in the pews of the University Church at Oxford on Prize-Giving Day.**

Popham **Hundreds have seen it.**

Egerton **And read it.**

Popham **Who shouldn't have!**

Anderson **He is condemned, your honour, from what he has written with his own pen.**

Judge **What have you to say, Champion?**

Campion **What I write of is the Mass. And the Sacraments. Of bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to his people. Of ministering to the sick and to the sinner. Or are the poor people of England not to hear God's word and feel the comfort of his Sacraments?**

Egerton **The good people of England will hear Christ's gospel from the ministers of our new religion, Champion. The people of England are good Protestants now. They have no need of the old ways.**

Judge **Enough! We have heard enough. Have you anything to say, Champion?**

Campion **God give you grace to weigh our causes aright. I commit the rest to God and our consciences to your good discretion.**

Bystander 1 **They cannot find him guilty. The case of treason is not proved.**

Bystander 2 **They can. They are determined.**

(there is a pause – the Judge looks over his notes – he looks up at Champion who stands before him – everyone looks at him – the tableau freezes)

Narrator **Condemned. Condemned to die for his religion. Champion was taken from the place of his trial back to the Tower of London. The authorities were afraid what people would think. Champion was known to be a good and**

honest man. For ten days he waited.

Narrator **On the morning of 1st December 1581, Campion was tied to a hurdle and dragged through the cold and muddy streets of London. Some in the crowd jeered and booed and spat. Others felt pity and prayed for him. Some Catholics silently crept forward and asked his blessing, wiping the mud from his face.**

Narrator **Soon they came to Tyburn – the place of execution.**

Scene 4

Tyburn

1st December 1581

Soldier **The prisoners, sir:** *(the prisoners are pushed roughly forward by the soldiers)*
Edmund Campion.
Alexander Briant.
Ralph Sherwin.
Oh yes, and the warrants for their execution. *(he hands three scrolls to Lord Howard)*

Sheriff **Edmund Campion, Alexander Briant, and Ralph Sherwin, you have been found guilty of treason against our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth.**

Briant *(gently)* **We are but Catholics and priests.**

Sherwin *(with resignation)* **And Englishmen too. We are not traitors.**

Lord Howard *(angry)* **Even now they still refuse to admit what they have done.**

Knollys *(shouts at them)* **Confess your treason!**

Campion **For the treasons with which you charge me, and I am come here to suffer for . . . bear witness, I am altogether innocent.**
(the crowd shouts and boos – though some, the Recusants, remain silent)
I am a Catholic man, and a priest: in that faith I have lived and in that faith do I intend to die. And if you reckon my religion treason, then I am guilty. As for any other treason, I never committed, God is my judge.

Knollys **Do you renounce the Pope?**

Campion **I am a Catholic.**

Gawdy **Ask forgiveness from Her Majesty!**

Campion **How have I offended her? I am innocent. This is my last speech – I pray for her.**

Lord Howard **What Queen do you pray for? For Elizabeth the Queen?**

Campion **Yes, for Elizabeth, your Queen and my Queen.
I die a perfect Catholic.**

Narrator 1 **And with these words Campion was hanged. While he was still alive, his guts were ripped out and burned before him; his head was cut from his body; his body was torn into four pieces.**

Narrator 2 **It would be many years before England knew peace again. Men and women, Catholics and Protestants, were persecuted and killed. And all in the name of religion. Campion died praying that he might be a “perfect Catholic”. If we wish to be perfect Catholics, perfect Protestants, perfect Christians, perfect men and women, we must see the God who is in each of us, whatever his religion, or beliefs, or race.**

All **Amen!**

Adrian Porter SJ
Campion Hall Oxford
1st December 2011

