

Interview with Aidan Norrie

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Niki: Thanks for doing an interview with us! to begin, how did you get interested in history? especially the Tudor era?

Aidan: Thank-you for having me! I have been asked where my interest in history comes from many times, and the honest answer is that it has always just been there. Except for a six-month period in my late teens during which time I wanted to be an accountant (dark days indeed), I have always been interested in the past, and finding out how people in the past lived. I do sometimes, however, attribute my interest in history to an episode of Thomas the Tank Engine I watched as a kid, in which an abandoned castle is discovered on the Island of Sodor. I instinctively knew that the castle was both old and important, so I badgered my parents to get me books from the library all about castles – and it has only snowballed since then!

Elizabeth has always fascinated me. The idea that a woman could successfully rule a country at a time when women had virtually no political or economic rights made me want to know all I could about her. History at school – and even university – is often skewed towards famous men; so reading about Elizabeth (as well as her half-sister Mary I, and her cousin Mary Queen of Scots) allowed me to address this imbalance. I should also confess that Queenie from *Blackadder* added to the fascination.

Niki: Your [latest article contribution](#) to the RSJ is fascinating. Is this a subject you've been studying for years?

Aidan: That's very kind of you. I first started thinking about Elizabeth's biblical analogies during my undergraduate studies, when I first came across the account of Elizabeth's Coronation Procession – *The Queen's Majesty's Passage*. In the fifth pageant, Elizabeth is exhorted to behave like Deborah the Judge, and Elizabeth herself is recorded to have prayed before the procession began in thanksgiving that she was preserved during Mary's reign, as Daniel was from the lion's den. What struck me about the references to these biblical figures is that almost everyone who heard them would have known about them, and understood the connection that was being made. Attendance at Church was all that was necessary to know the story of these major biblical figures, rather than the formal education one would require to understand what was meant by an allusion to Astraea or Diana. The fact that Elizabeth herself also used the analogy meant that they were clearly useful. From there, it was simply a matter of reading as much of the scholarship I could that analysed the phenomenon.

Niki: What went into the research for this article?

Aidan: Almost two years' worth, to be honest! Not only did I have to find the analogies in the primary sources – thank-you EEBO! – I also had to research what the context for the analogy was, and what the analogy was being used for. This was more challenging than previous work because the late seventeenth century is beyond my usual area of research, so it took some time to get up to scratch with the history of the period and with the historiography.

Niki: Was there anything that surprised you when conducting your research?

Aidan: There were two main things about my research that surprised me. The first was the longevity of Elizabeth's analogies. I really did not expect them to continue appearing for a century after she died, especially after the Civil War and the Commonwealth. It highlighted to me the importance of not letting your assumptions get in the way of your research, and also how potent the combined use of religion and politics was in the Early Modern period. The second thing that surprised me was how so few of the primary sources I was locating had previously been analysed in the scholarship. While the concept of the analogies, and the theory behind them, has been well studied, there appeared to be a limited focus on the actual sources themselves. Hopefully, with the advent of EEBO, and the increasing access to these original sources, the analogies themselves will come to the forefront of analysis.

Niki: What are you working on next?

Aidan: I am currently researching some of Elizabeth's analogies that are less analysed in the current scholarship – particularly those to Daniel the Prophet and the widow Judith. My major project, however, is an analysis of the analogies that were used by both Mary and Elizabeth, with particular emphasis on how the different religious beliefs of the two queens influenced the way in which the analogies were employed, and the way in which gender was factored into the analogy.

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