The wind holds a key place in the history of artistic and literary representation as both an atmospheric force and a complex metaphor. Landscapes have been shaped by the power of wind, and historic naval battles fought in the name of empire have been won or lost due to its whims. We feel, rather than see, wind — it connects us to our environment through touch, smell, and shared invisible space.¹ In some cultures, wind has even come to represent divine beings.² A connection between Godly wind and sea travel was established in the English cultural narrative as early as 1066, when William the Conqueror prayed for a favorable wind to cross the English Channel and attack the natives at Hastings. Needless to say, God answered his prayers and he came

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² Wind has been represented by pagan gods, the Greek Aeolian specifically, and the Christian God.
to rule England.

The Protestant Wind was similarly said to have been sent by God to protect the English from the Catholic Spanish Armada during the summer of 1588. The National Maritime Museum’s *Armada Portrait of Elizabeth I* is one of the better-known representations of the Protestant Wind; the painting commemorates the English victory through the portrayal of three distinct climates and temporal periods.

In the *Armada Portrait*, a curious atmospheric divide between the calm space of the Queen and the chaotic space of the Armada events reveals the artist’s desire to represent her as a strong, formidable, and almost king-like, queen. Crashing waters and sailing ships are present in the open windows depicted in the painting’s background, yet the Queen appears unaffected by these same weather conditions. The effects of the invisible force of the wind are discernable in the dramatic seascape to the right of the Queen. The wind became of central concern in an age of exploration; Elizabethan sailors were especially aware of the effects and dangers of wind at sea, and even the most experienced seafarers could be thrown off-course due to the unruly elements.

The power of wind is most visible on the sea because of the way it controls water, forcing the liquid to move into ripples and waves, much like the way air moves invisibly around us. Both air and water are fluid forces of nature that obey the same laws of physics, but air, in the form of wind, is stronger and faster. Those who ventured north in search of the Northwest passage were especially affected and reports of the environment from these voyages verge on mystical, the topography described as a blurred void where ice, sea, and air mingle together. Though sea travel to the Artic was more extreme than the voyages taken around the British Isles, sailors’ descriptions of the blurred nature of seascapes helps paint a view of how dangerous yet monotonous sea travel was in the 16th century.

In the Elizabethan age, the invisible nature and quality of wind also resulted in its descriptive use as a religious metaphor. Although air is an invisible force, its existence is demonstrated, as it is in the *Armada Portrait*, by its perceived impact on the physical world: ripples move across an otherwise still lake, trees sway in the wind, and various atmospheric effects allow us to ‘see’ air in the form of wind. Similarly, God can

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4 Ibid., 50.
6 Ibid., 147.
be ‘seen’ indirectly through miraculous acts and is sometimes, fittingly, represented as wind. Jan DeBlieu, author of *Wind: how the flow of air has shaped life, myth, and the land*, writes: “God is not merely seated in a remote heaven, but [is] whirling all around us,” encouraging readers to “[t]hink of the wind as God and God the wind. Think of the fluid element in which we live, on which we depend, as a divine current that envelops us, swirls through us, and joins us to a great, organic, barely fathomable whole.” Air is required for life, for breathing, just as God is necessary if one intends to lead a respectable Christian life. In the Elizabethan era, wind was understood as both a physical force and as a metaphor for God, and the idea of the Protestant Wind demonstrates just how intertwined the two concepts were at the time.

There is ample evidence of the connection between God, wind, and the sea in the Bible. The Hebrew word *ruwach*, which is found in both the Old and New Testament, can mean breath, spirit, or wind, and was used frequently. In Genesis, God breathed life and intelligence into Adam and allowed Moses to harness wind to part the Red Sea. Deblieu reminds us of the variable weather in the biblical Holy Land and how to the authors of the Old Testament used it to determine the times of feasting or starvation, fluctuations that are compared to the moods of a “nurturing yet jealous and vengeful God.” The many narratives that involve boats and seafaring in the Bible are further evidence of this; Jonah learns that God is present even on the empty sea, while Jesus amazes his disciples by calming storms and helping them catch fish. Thus, it seems almost natural for a naval battle such as the Armada to be associated with God’s presence.

The 1588 events of the Spanish Armada consisted of multiple small-scale raids rather than large battles between the Spanish Catholics and English Protestants. King Philip II of Spain desperately wanted to restore Catholicism in England and return the country to the state it was in during the reign of Queen Mary I. The attack ended when Spanish ships were wrecked in a “grote tempest” on the coast of Ireland, an event that the English believed was sanctioned by a God who supported the Protestant, rather than the Catholic, agenda. In 16th century England, God’s will could seemingly be discerned from how the country fared in battle. Passages written by John Hawkins, an

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9 Ibid., 13.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
English naval commander, and Howard of Effingham, the Lord High Admiral, associate victory and protection from the elements with God’s will and the ‘correctness’ of one’s faith. John Hawkins wrote of the Spanish moving northward in a letter to Francis Walsingham, principal secretary to the Queen, stating: “The spaniards take their course for Schotland, my Lo[rd] { High Admiral Charles Howard of Effingham} dothe follow them. I doubt not w[i]th gods favour, but we shall impeach ther landing…”\textsuperscript{14} Luckily, or perhaps by the will of God, the Lord High Admiral was hit by a wind that impeded him from following the Spanish to their demise. The Lord High Admiral certainly equated the ‘Southerly wynde’ with God’s blessing of the English fleet, writing: “The Southerly wynde That brought us bak fro[m] The cost of spayne brought Them out God blessed us w[ith] Torny[n]g us bak…”\textsuperscript{15} For the English, their escape from the storm and ultimate victory was seen as a sign of God’s support for Protestantism.

Despite the failed attempt in 1588 to return England to Catholicism, King Philip II sent more ships in 1596 and 1597, and once again encountered hostile weather.\textsuperscript{16} During the war, England’s sea power grew considerably, though not enough to pose a real threat to Spain. Historians agree that “in terms of population, economy and military power, England was dwarfed by the might” of Spain.\textsuperscript{17} However, this fact did not stop the English from celebrating the earlier victory profusely or from touting their imperial desires through carefully constructed artworks, which sought to present Queen Elizabeth and her rule as favorably as possible. The iconography of the royal portraits, and in particular those from the last years of Elizabeth’s reign, make clear her plan to expand the British empire and her country’s strength for expelling the Spanish.

There are, in fact, three Armada portraits: one at Woburn Abbey, one at the National Portrait Gallery, and the version at the National Maritime Museum, which is the subject of this paper. In the National Maritime Museum’s version, the seascapes of the Armada events in the windows were repainted by a Dutch-trained artist working in England in 1707 and are the most noticeable difference between the National Maritime

\textsuperscript{14} "A Letter from John Hawkins to Francis Walsingham." John Hawkins to Francis Walsingham. 1588. \textit{The National Archives of the United Kingdom.}
\textsuperscript{15} The letters in [] are from \textit{The National Archives of the United Kingdom.} The {} and italics are mine. "Lord Howard of Effingham, Admiral of the English Fleet, Sent This Report to Francis Walsingham 21July 1588." Charles Howard to Francis Walsingham. July 21, 1588. In \textit{National Archives of the United Kingdom.}

\textsuperscript{16} Arthur F. Marotti and Steven W. May, "Two Lost Ballads of the Armada Thanksgiving Celebration [with Texts and Illustration]." \textit{English Literary Renaissance} 41, no. 1 (2011): 37.

The Elizabethan Sea

Museum’s version of the scene and the others. X-rays of the portrait reveal that it once included the original seascapes found in the Woburn Abbey version, in which the ships are larger and more bulbous and the color scheme is brighter. The Armada portraits were produced during the latter part of Elizabeth’s reign, when it was obvious that the ageing Queen would never marry or have children. Consequently, the images from this period proclaim her virginity and timeless image. In them, and in many portraits from the latter part of her reign, she wears a brilliant red wig and heavy make-up to conceal her age. She also wears a huge pear-shaped pearl that hangs at her waist, reminding the viewer of her chastity. This large pearl, along with the pearls strung around her neck and placed in her hair, allude to the sea and England’s new naval and colonial power. The portrait shows Elizabeth at the high point of her reign: victorious over the Spanish she is the “miraculous savior of the country” and “aspiring empress of the world.” Through her Protestant faith, and consequently the will of God, England had been saved.

The National Maritime Museum’s Armada Portrait (Figure 1) is thought to have been commissioned by Sir Francis Drake in 1588, as it was held in his family’s collection until 1777. Drake, an experienced seaman, was vice admiral during the Armada battles and was instrumental in sending fireships into the Spanish Armada and disrupting their formation. The resulting confusion was pivotal for

![Figure 1: Armada Portrait of Elizabeth I, 1588, Unknown/British School, oil on oak panel, 1125 x 1270 mm, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.](image)

18 David Starkey and Susan Doran, Elizabeth: the exhibition at the National Maritime Museum (London: Chatto & Windus in association with the National Maritime Museum, 2003), 120.
the English and is memorialized in the left window of the *Armada Portrait*. The painting shows a triumphant Queen seated in her splendor while two separate moments from the Armada play out behind her. She wears a sumptuous dress of silver and black silk that reflects light, much like her perfectly pale complexion, and her dress and hair are decorated with bows and pearls. Her right hand rests on a globe, covering North America, as she gazes serenely out of the scene, her eyes meeting the viewer.

British artists during Elizabeth’s reign often ordered their paintings like heraldic shields instead of attempting to display naturalism. Thus, Elizabeth appears flat, her body stiff, while the items around her are represented from several angles. The furniture in the National Maritime Museum’s Armada portrait — two tables and an ornate chair — are represented without strict illusionism in mind and are painted on multiple visual planes. The chair features a naked mermaid, seen in profile, while the royal crown sits on a table to the left of Elizabeth. It is the windows that add depth to the scene, framed by dark green curtains that part to reveal the events leading to the English defeat of the Armada. The repainted windows in the *Armada Portrait* depict the English sending fireships into the Spanish formation on the left and the defeat of the Spanish fleet off the coast of Ireland on the right.

Though the windows represented are fully open to the elements, the Queen is unaware of the wind and atmospheric effects present in the seascapes within them; she sits oblivious to the destruction behind her. It appears the space in the windows and the space inhabited by the Queen are separate from each other, although they are not visually distinguished from each other within the painting itself. Similarly, there are no signs of wind swirling around Elizabeth, as not a hair or pearl is out of place. It is possible that the Queen is unaffected by the elements due to the fantastical and

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indiscriminate setting of the painting, where non-linear events occur at once, but her steadfastness against the wind could also support the idea of her as a strong, victorious monarch that is comparable to any king.

Negative commentary about the Queen because of her gender, as well as the patriarchal belief that women are weaker and less intelligent than men, are subdued in the National Maritime Museum Armada Portrait. Not only can the wind not touch her, Elizabeth also exudes masculine strength. The bare-chested mermaid in the right corner acts as a foil to this by reminding the viewer that the Queen is not a typical woman according to the standards of the time. She covers her body in heavy clothing and jewels that help to convey her virginal, untouched, status. She is the opposite of a flighty, changeable wind, one that could be associated with the 16th century perceptions of female nature. By demonstrating her mastery over the weather, Elizabeth has taken the place of God — she was, after all, head of the Anglican church — as she is unaffected by the elements, further demonstrating her godly power over the world by resting her hand on the globe.

The Armada Portrait was not the only instance where Elizabeth’s theoretical authority over the weather is made apparent. In the Rainbow Portrait (Figure 2), she holds a rainbow in her hand, and in the Ditchley Portrait (Figure 3) she faces away from a dark storm and turns to the light. Elizabeth I and the Three Goddesses by Hans Eworth (Figure 4), however, comes closest to the Armada Portrait in the way that it depicts the Queen in control of the wind. In the painting, Elizabeth takes the place of Paris at the moment when he chose the most beautiful goddess between Juno, Venus, and Minerva, resulting in the Trojan War. In Eworth’s version, the Queen stands on a platform that places her higher than the goddesses who, in turn, flee from her, suggesting Elizabeth’s

Figure 3: Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, “The Ditchley Portrait,” circa 1592, oil on canvas, 2413 mm x 1524 mm, National Portrait Gallery, London.

beauty, intellect, and might is greater than theirs. Elizabeth stands against a brick archway wearing a heavy and stiff dress and holding a golden globe, a symbol of her imperial goals, in place of the iconic apple. By comparison, the goddesses are backed by a vast, lush landscape, their divinity emphasized by their complete nudity or by dresses made of thin, diaphanous fabric. Like the half-naked mermaid in the Armada Portrait, they serve as a contrast to the Queen’s virginal nature and fixed strength.

Elizabeth’s space within Eworth’s painting is separate from that of the goddesses, though not formally so. There is no clear barrier between them, yet the air around the two types of women is completely different. It is as if the Queen is capable of commanding the wind around her, giving Elizabeth a God-like status that overshadows the goddesses. In Eworth’s painting it is clear that Christianity, and thus Elizabeth’s divine right as the English monarch, reigns victorious over the pagan goddesses of the past.

The Queen’s ability to command the atmosphere around her is carried over into the later Armada Portrait, in which she sits in front of the windows but does not feel the moving vapors, airs, and waters from the legendary Protestant Wind behind her. She is separated from the events transpiring behind her by a sort of shoreline, not one that connects land and sea, but one that marks a boundary between two realms: her space and the naval events of the Armada.

A more direct connection between God and the Protestant Wind can be found in a Netherlandish commemorative medal from 1588, the year of the Armada. The medal was likely made in the Dutch Republic, which converted to Protestantism about a decade before Spain sailed to England and which aided England during the Armada.

24 On the original frame of the Eworth painting is written “Pallas was keen of brain, Juno was queen of might, / The rosy face of Venus was in beauty shining bright, / Elizabeth then came, And, overwhelmed, Queen Juno took flight: / Pallas was silenced: Venus blushed for shame.”

events. The obverse (Figure 5) of the medal shows the engagement of the fleets on rippling water. The Latin inscription on the medal’s edge reads “He blew and they were scattered,” alluding to the powerful wind sent by God that destroyed the Spanish. On the reverse (Figure 6), a lone church is situated on a rock amongst rough waters. Wind from the heavens — the Protestant Wind made visible — blows down to the church, which withstands the violent waves. The inscription on this side reads “I [England] am assailed not injured,” which refers to the country’s, and to a lesser extent Elizabeth’s, strength. Outside of England, the idea that Queen Elizabeth’s divine nature brought on the storm is played down and agency is given to the Protestant God Himself. The Protestant Wind, however, remained a key feature in the events of the Armada.

The idea of the Protestant Wind was revived a century after the Armada, when once again Catholicism threatened England. In 1688, King James II was removed from the throne by William of Orange for his desire to reinstate Catholicism throughout the kingdom. Wind patterns were observed carefully for weeks as William prepared to sail from the Netherlands to England, reminding the British of the tense and windy summer of 1588. The easterly wind, the one that would aid William, was deemed the Protestant Wind and the westerly, the Popish Wind. Ballads announcing the return of the Protestant Wind were sung until the threat was diminished.

The Armada victory itself also became a part of a British Protestant mythology. It was celebrated by the country in November of 1588 with a national thanksgiving. The Queen herself was to go to “Westminster to gyve publyck thankes to god for his miraculous goodnes in overthrowing” the Spanish, the “mortall ennemyes” of the English. This event was

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26 Beneath the main scene is the coat of arms of Maurice of Orange.
29 Marotti and May, "Two Lost Ballads of the Armada Thanksgiving Celebration [with Texts and Illustrations]," 38.
30 Ibid., 31-32.

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celebrated with fervor, despite the uncertainty that the Spanish had truly been defeated, and became a recurring celebration of England’s military history. The victory was also immortalized in luxurious tapestries of the event. Commissioned by Lord High Admiral Howard and sold to the Crown during James I’s rule, they hung in the House of Lords until the building burned down in the 19th century. Interestingly, the tapestries were recreated in paint in 2007 from prints, making clear the importance of Elizabeth’s victory even in the present era.31

Queen Elizabeth takes on the role of God in the National Maritime Museum’s *Armada Portrait*, and it is through her Protestant faith and otherworldly ability that she harnesses the wind and England is saved. Much has been written on the material objects within the painting—the globe, crown, and mermaid in particular—but the presence of wind and three different climates and temporalities has been largely overlooked. Studying the *Armada Portrait’s* atmospheric effects, or lack thereof, reveals how the sea was regarded during the Elizabethan era, as well as the measures taken to emphasize Queen Elizabeth’s nature as strong and formidable. It also reveals the belief the English had in the invisible forces of the world, specifically wind. These forces were thought to be controlled by God, who ultimately favored England for the country’s Protestant alliances. Unseen in the painting, but undeniably present, the Protestant Wind enhances both the image of Queen Elizabeth and her country.

—Erin Riddiford

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