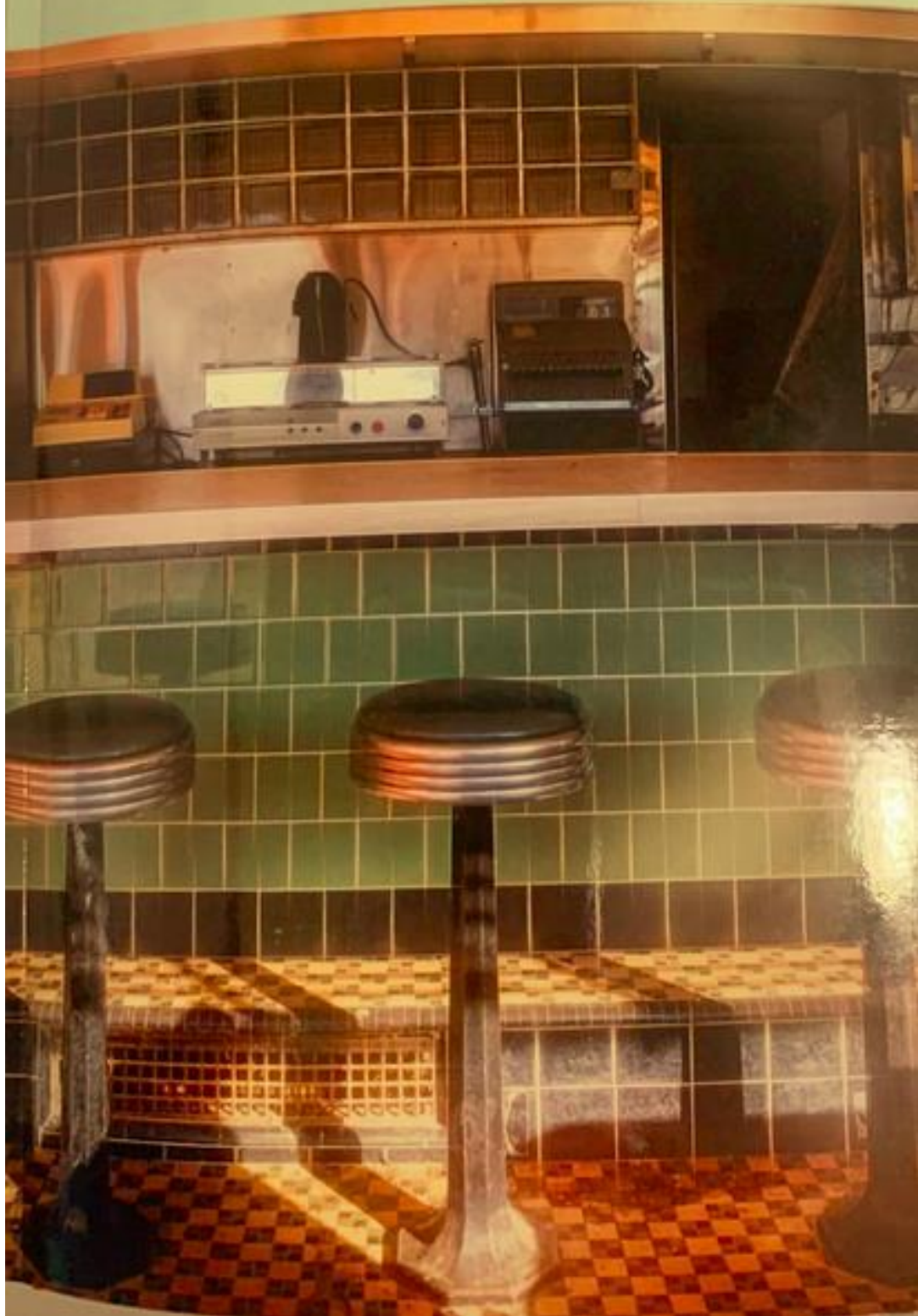


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Kathleen Zamboni McCormick

Annie Rachele Lanzillotto; WHADDYACALL THE WIND? (Bordighera Press, 2022); ISBN: 9781599541938; 320 pages.

Annie Lanzillotto's *Whaddyacall the Wind?* invites us on her most epic, passionate, and mythic journey to date. The book's title and its identification of winds evokes Homer's *Odyssey*, one of the earliest texts to name winds. The winds blow her through Naples, Messina, Rome, Bitetto, and Acquaviva della Fonte in Spring 2018—she is partly on a speaking tour, partly reuniting with family, partly very much alone. Every day becomes a “commitment” to small moments, to daily creating “*un momento di luce*.” This “poet’s moment” exists in “vertical time” where time stands still and creates “oneness.”

Living vertically is invigorating: the effervescence of *acqua minerale* infuses so many vital moments, generating that “rare feeling of wanting to take all life in”—whether learning not to trip on the *sanpietrini* of Napoli, connecting with the Italian gay community, rinsing clothes, recovering family ties with her mother’s family in Acquaviva delle Fonte, searching for family in Bitetto.

But experiences expand as the stillness of verticality is fanned by winds from eternity “in the cleft of seconds.” With friends at *Spiaggia Santa Teresa* in Salerno, the richness of the vertical moment—“I wish there were more nights like this in life”—contrasts with horizontal history: “loneliness, poverty, disease, abuse.” While doing a vocal improv in a Pompeii amphitheater and experiencing an “overwhelming feeling of belonging” in the present, Annie’s pushed into a possible future of feeling “lost and alone.” Pleasure doesn’t cancel sorrow: but the *momento di luce* harmonizes both memories and expectations of pain. Whaddyacall a wind with the power to whip oppositions into coherent oneness?

Our Aolean wordsmith is a keeper of so many winds. She sells winds to sailors, offering an almost endless variety—“*La Tramontana! Il Scirocco! Il Maestrale! ... Zephyrs... Aquilo...*” These winds blow the horizontal past into the vertical present and the eternal. They calibrate time, reconcile oppositions. We see this when Annie, her sister Rosina, and Zia Annunziatine are all “in instant tears” when they’re reunited.

It was as if Grandma Rose left Acquaviva and then in a blink my sister and I, one hundred years later, returned...And just as we could see our grandmother in Zia Annunziatine, she could see our grandmother and her mother, in our eyes . . . She grabbed the moment, knowing it would never come again.

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The winds bring all time into one *momento di luce*.
 A cave in Matera—whose tools show how men worked “like beasts of burden” crushing grain—blows Annie back to childhood Bronx basement rooms, and she gains insight into her father’s rage. Donato, the poet who brought them to the cave, enables Annie in that moment to “honor the past by weaving it into a future.” Whaddya call the winds that keep uniting all of time into a single point?

Annie’s mother Rachele winds throughout the book. Annie’s love of the wind started with her mother’s breath: “as a child, asthmatic, her kissing me and staying close, our faces, breath mingling.” Annie discovers Rachele’s “magic kitchen”—with frittattas, gnocci, meatballs, washed parsley—recreated, not displaced by but conjoined with this food. When eating breadballs with her sister in Matera, they both burst into tears thinking it’s like Rachele came alive to cook for them. “Or somehow from the angelic sphere, she snuck breadballs onto the menu.” The intersection of the eating pleasure of the vertical present, the lovingly remembered horizontal past, and the eternal angelic Rachele circulate through time, through Annie and her sister, back to “the ancient past,” unifying all in a breath of eternal return.

In Messina, Annie answers a ten-year-old invitation to read her work at the University—as horizontal time evaporates in a single gust. She drives to Enna and discovers an “impossibly tall” ladder, old, handmade, and high enough to have rescued girls on the top four floors in the 1911 New York Triangle factory fire. Many jumped to their death trying to catch ladders reaching only to the sixth floor. In New York, Annie is active in the *Chalk* project where annually each Triangle worker’s name is chalked outside where they lived. Annie chalks Giuseppina Cammarata. From Enna. Where the ladder was made. Annie, the keeper of the winds, is witness to it all in one painful moment, but she’s granted enough time to drive to Avola for a ceremony installing a plaque honoring the twenty-six Sicilian Triangle girls killed in the fire, including Giuseppina.

Fusing opposing energies into harmony is what gives *Whaddya call the Wind* its epic proportions. The book boldly acknowledges conflicts but finds ways to intertwine them together. Annie tells the sailors they need “winds that weave.” When wind blows from a different direction and becomes the verb, “to wind,” it is a synonym for weave. Frequently the book asks why various women are crying. It’s because they are, in a sudden moment, woven into unity, across time, space, and eternity. And when this unity comes, there is a *momento di luce*.

“It is the winds I call . . . the northerly *Tramontana*, the easterly *Levante*, the southwesterly *Libeccio*, the westerly *Ponentino*, the northwesterly *Maestrale*, the southeasterly *Scirocco* . . . Winds from all directions. Breath, come inside me.” Thank you, dear Annie, for calling all the winds to help you tell your story. You have magically given us faith that even when life

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feels like an “errant puzzle piece to a giant jigsaw puzzle,” there still can blow into our lives effervescence, wonderful friends, great food, new cousins, endless love, and momenti that will sustain us.

Near the beginning of the book, Annie “woke up to the sound of chainsaws.” In August 2018, “Grandma Peach Tree”—the seventeen year old tree, two stories high, laden with fruit, that magically grew from peach pits Grandma Rose had tossed out the window years ago—is cut down by nine men employed by Annie’s landlord because the tree was too hard to maintain: The killing of the tree blows a haunting wind through the book in its repeated references to death. But Annie finds a way to resurrect Grandma Rose. She’s just in a different form from the peach tree.

The point of intensity, the *momento di luce*, created by the intersection of vertical and horizontal time, overseen by the eternal and with many digressive winds along the way is not just a point, but a circle. Not just a circle, but a compass. Not just a compass, but a compass rose. Not just a compass rose, but Grandma Rose. The compass rose is said to symbolize the end of a soul’s journey—which can be seen in the death of Grandma Rose, the death of the peach tree, the death of the Triangle girls, the death of Annie’s mother Rachele who blows her spirit through the whole book and who is the alpha and omega of unity. But Grandma/Compass Rose also symbolizes the point where everything in conflict becomes harmonious, where opposing energies are not set to rest, but united as complementary. Fusing opposing energies until they become harmonious is what *Whaddyacall the Wind* does. The book boldly acknowledges tensions and oppositions, but Annie finds ways to weave them together. Because Annie Rachele Lanzillotto is, if we didn’t already know, the ultimate weaver of the winds.

