

# XXII & other poems...

By Edward Zahniser

*(To maintain the poet's dedicated spacing Hezekiah's' note follows the poems. Eds.)*

## XXII

—*After William Carlos Williams*

so much depends

upon

the brain's love-sex

neurons

glazed with hormones

beside

themselves like white

chickens

with their heads cut

off

— Ed Zahniser

## Poetics Over Time

In time, poetics is like a diaper  
you must change or hazard making  
that newest family member fuss. *Wipe her  
or else!* Poetics is like aspens (quaking)

who root-sprout after a hot forest fire.  
Absent fire, slower-growing trees crowd  
aspens out: conifers, spire after spire  
up-thrusted like the sky itself needs plowed.

So keep poetics moving down the line  
or suffer—it's planned-in?—obsolescence.  
Recall how Tarzan swings from vine to vine.  
What fails to dawn on us is senescence.

On that I pay heed to Alice Notley  
who said "poetics is an industry."

---Ed Zahniser

## No Great Difference

Writing as a writer, Zadie Smith says: "There is no great difference between novels and banana bread." She speaks in terms of Covididities, not some pastries but our use of time. In an earlier epoch Bob Dylan advised: "Strap yourself to a tree with roots. you ain't going nowhere," a useful adage for our politicized pandemic that begs self-isolation in collective efforts to flatten Death's steep curve. As a successful writer, one might well equate a banana bread with a novel. Both mean "food" for Smith. Now therefore may we all write on.

—Ed Zahniser

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Poetry editor Hezekiah writes... For the cherished, rare few who prefer romance to red wheelbarrows here is Edward Zahniser's take, double take . . . stolen glance?—nothing like a bit of pilfered poetry with a savory hormone glaze. I think I just might like this borrowed one better than the barrow one. Scroll down, 'Poetics Over Time' is a great relief to me as I, too, will soon be back in diapers. Zahniser speaks to poetry's place in literature as an ever-changing genre of boundless self-expression; as Aspens, rising like phoenixes in dead forests to make way for heartier conifers to follow, "spire after spire / up-thrusted like the sky itself needs plowed"—what a deliciously non-deciduous line. And just as the timber trades, quoting Alice Notley, "'poetics is an industry.'" And read 'No Great Difference' too, you'll find him equally dismissive and inspired referencing Zadie Smith comparing novels to banana bread." Now therefore may we all write on."*

## THE POET SPEAKS:

*The XXII poem was formally inspired by the William Carlos Williams titled as "The Red Wheelbarrow," although Williams himself never titled. In a book of poems he simply numbered it XXII. What*

*caught my eye at this juncture was the phrase “so much depends,” and too often it does, on those hormones. And I also took the “beside themselves” phrase from the poem “beside the white chickens,” whose fauna suggested “with their heads cut off.” That was inspired by an incident my wife and I encountered in Morocco. We were at a shop with other tourists, and there was not room for us to enter at the tail end of our group, so we hung outside. Across the sidewalk on a bench, two Moroccan fellows cut off the head of a white chicken, which proceeded to do backward somersaults, about six repetitions, with no head, spurting blood, but landing perfectly on its feet every time! You can extrapolate how that might redound, as an image, to humans under the thrall of, for example, testosterone. Although I’ve always thought that if we pronounced testosterone as as though it were Italian—testosteroney—it might cut down on bar fights and even wars.*

*Generally my stylistic influences are John Berryman, Ted Berrigan, Frank O’Hara, Gerald Stern, and the long single-sentence poems of Stern, Howard Nemerov, and a few others.*

*Poetry is important to read and write, for me, because it’s the way I negotiate the world and, often, figure out the meaning or import of phenomena and experiences. I think the poem “Poetics Over Time” comes specifically out of that impulse regarding phenomena.*

**AUTHOR’S BIO:** Ed Zahniser was a founding editor of Some Of Us Press in Washington, D.C. He is the author of seven books of poetry, recently *Confidence in Being and Other Poems*, Red Dashboard Press, and seven chapbooks. He co-founded *The Good News Paper* and was poetry editor for 40 years. As Shepherdstown Poet Laureate he curates Poem of the Month, posted at Town Hall. His books, chapbooks, edited anthologies, and curated exhibit catalogs of art gallery shows of poetry as works on walls are in the University at Buffalo Special Collection of 20<sup>th</sup>-and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Poetry in English.

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