

Poem Not Published in the Ark River Review, 1974, Vol. 2, #4

I have been writing this poem all of my life, and something last night reminded me of it. Buddy and I had been drinking Scotch. Liz was telling me about her daughter's endeavors. My next wife wasn't there. She implied she would never be again. The Wichita literati were playing monopoly on the other side of the Ark River. We called Iowa City to talk to Phil Haskell to see why last week The New York Review of Books said we can't write fiction anymore. Buddy was thinking that if we stopped writing poetry & wrote fiction again, it might be more real. Phil was at a party. He might call back. We called James Mechem to cover our story. Just in case. He guessed it'd be okay if we came over for a quick drink. A week before I'd written a joke to submit to the Ark River Review. I thought the eds would see the wit (and impress Diana, I admit). It was called Poem Submitted to the Ark River Review, 1974. It was adolescent. Mechem asked if we wanted some wine. Buddy did. Mechem placed a glass between Diana and me. She was with Jonathan Katz. Diana (no, this time I mean the goddess) was putting together a jigsaw puzzle. She apologized if it was too easy a metaphor. There might have been some sarcasm. I had written a poem last week, And So It Happened Near the Time of Jeroboam, after we work-shopped her Jephthah's Daughter, so it seemed important if it was Diana's wine or mine. I never dreamed she'd drink my wine. Diana didn't care anymore. Buddy and I were drinking Scotch, and I knew if I mixed it with wine, I'd have to pretend to be sick. Buddy told Jonathan Katz that he could tell Katz wasn't at all from Wichita. The brass at the Ark River Review was from Brooklyn! I had told Buddy in the car that my wife knew Katz well in Ohio, and now we

are in a second stanza. But don't give up yet on the Ark's lit. Sure, there's little subtext, no metaphor. Get used to it. It's just life. This ain't Professor Katz' Moby Dick seminar. Yeah, take that, Jonathan. This ain't your Moby Dick seminar. You think this isn't even poetry? What can I tell you? (In twenty years, someone will come out of the blue and call it creative nonfiction.) I watched the goddess stack LPs on the record player. Buddy wanted to leave and it was his car. Now it is Sunday morning. My ex-wife meant to play golf. At Buddy's, she confessed she had to go, let's just say, camping on the river with her ex-husband. I want my coffee black. This is an apology to Di and Jonathan for how I act. I want to go back to the tent and sleep it off. But I am still waiting for the call,

to hear Phil say it is okay to write fiction again and add “Oh, Paul,  
by the way, get real. The Ark won’t publish either me or you.  
We’re a postmodern reductio ad absurdum on their latest issue.”