

## THOMAS FORTENBERRY

### People Crossing an Arched Bridge

Something came together  
inside the first time I saw  
Ariwara no Narihira, or People  
Crossing an Arched Bridge,  
that nineteenth-century woodblock  
explanation of a poem.

Look at the backwards glance of a woman  
perched at the centre of the bow  
bridge with her companion like dual arrows  
ready to shoot into heaven.  
Where is she  
going? To what  
is she pointing? Down  
goes the path, or up  
froths the water, or dry  
float the miraculous leaves?

Look at that laughing fan  
flapping the forward-leaning fun  
of two fast friends facing each other  
with their burden firmly between  
their ascension assured.  
It is the spontaneous release after death  
has been faced; I know. Wordsworth  
be damned, I have witnessed it  
in the duality of their swords.

Look at the two fishing  
in the rapids of life  
beneath the bridge so high.  
Or has the one already fallen  
in and is just now scrambling  
his way back onto the bank

while the other attempts to fish  
his lost belonging out of the water?

Look at the two opposite  
everyone else approaching:  
their burdens are tremendous  
and they are hugging  
personal demons; bundled  
within may be doubts and fears,  
the past pulled forward