

KATHRYN STARBUCK

*The Bridge at Arta*

Its arch at my back, the heat  
and dust wrapped 'round my arms, my  
neck strained. Why do I remember  
all this? At the shrine of the gentle  
Thessalian, a river of light once  
allowed me to cross under  
the bridge in Arta, to dip my hair into  
the water, to walk on with him, my  
own small miracle.

I was 26 years old and not yet  
a pilgrim though I already had  
a full quiver. It was a safe journey.  
Tree-lined pathways, the occasional  
pause to view a martyr's cave,  
the last long lap of smooth stones,  
then, weary and moist, one more mile  
and the castle on that hill was real.  
The gates stood open.

The visiting children of Arcadia danced  
in silhouette against the whitewash, their  
blood-red aprons glistened in afternoon  
light. The bagpipe and the clarinet  
could not hear each other. They  
howled out-of-sync. Ah, was this not a life  
to be missed? Hisses, booms and sparkles.  
Farewell kisses. Birds in cages  
for sale. Fifty cents a pair.