

**Anne Harding Woodworth, Book Review of *Out of Silence*
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Although some might call Pamela Harrison a confessional poet, she does not beg us to pity her in the haunting poems of her new book, *Out of Silence*. She wants to tell us a long-hidden story, and she does so with a captivating and satisfying craft, keeping us always slightly on edge.

She begins her story with water. In the opening poem, "Her Wisteria," the poet remembers a fountain at her childhood house and its statue of a girl under the wisteria's hue. The lavender of summer's fecundity in this poem soon becomes the barrenness of March when time "pauses" in the balance of the equinox: "when the land lies in its breathless trance, / the starving spirit long for the season's turn." And turn is indeed the word here. It implies, first, the change of season; then the opportunity the season will have to define itself, as in the turn one takes in a game. It also evokes the turn, or *volta*, of a poem, as it takes us into the subsequent poems. And as the last word of the poem, it urges us to turn the page.

This brings us to "Artesian," an ominous twelve-line poem over which water spills copiously, as Harrison taps a source deep within herself: "the muscular rush / that fountains up: countless icy gallons / welling from the world's hidden heart." Likewise in "Aquamarine," we find the poet remembering being dropped off by her mother at a swimming pool, where she felt completely alone underwater. In "Little Curls of Steam" a mother bathes in front of her daughter. It is a warm, damp scene the poet remembers exactly, with its "fragrance of Ivory soap, the unembarrassed grooming / of a woman who never flinched in her nakedness, / who lived in her deepest heart, sequestered." And so is the poet born into a home of secrets that confused the lonely child, long before the word *repression* meant anything to her. The beautifully constructed first section, "Truth to Tell," works up to an ultimate truth, a secret of childhood that the poet is desperate to examine. But what is the truth going to be? "Dear man," the poet addresses her father, "I'm going to tell our deepest secret."

Thus Harrison slowly pulls us into a family that has tried to keep hidden a tragic event. In the second section, "Mother's Lamp," she looks at the aftermath of this tragedy, much of it revolving around the impending death of her mother. In a lovely villanelle, "Last Goodbye," the poet goes up to the very edge of sentimentality, but does not cross over, partly because of the stoic form she has chosen for the telling.

In the third and final section, "The Saving Clue," the *ars poetica* hinted at throughout the work comes into its own. Words are the mother's legacy; she cherished a thesaurus and passed this love of words on to her daughter, who buried it along with the family secret in a leather box. She now lets her words flow out, as if in a stream of water. They convey the truth and are finally freed in poetry.