



Columbarium (Phoenix Poets)

Susan Stewart

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Winner of the 2003 National Book Critics Circle Award in the category of poetry.

In her long-awaited fourth book of poetry, Susan Stewart gives us a series of splendid, numinous poems about truths learned with the mind but set free through the senses. Modeled on the seventeenth-century practice of century forms, or books of one hundred pages, *Columbarium* expresses the bond between the living and the dead in voices of parent to child, lover to beloved, and mortal to the gods. The book arrives as a meditative gift from one of our most respected poet-critics.

Stewart frames her *Columbarium* with four poems paying homage to the elements-to their destructive and creative aspects and to their roles in the human and more than human worlds. Both nest and crypt, the book's center holds an alphabet of "shadow georgics," poems of instruction and doubt that link knowledge and the unconscious. Questions of mortality, of goodness and suffering, and of the fragility and power of memory animate these poems. In one poem an apple calls the narrator back from the dead to savor the echoes of its varieties in myth and literature. In another, the seeds of a pear tree reveal the essential unity that makes the diversity of existence possible.

Stewart's *Columbarium* is both a memorial to the dead and a testament to life.

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