

# Blueprint and Ruin Reader's Guide



- 1) How does each word of the book's title, *Blueprint and Ruin*, guide you literally and figuratively through the poems? Since the book title comes from the poem "Blueprint and Ruin," consider how that particular poem clarifies or complicates your reading.
- 2) The poems in *Blueprint and Ruin* often reference ruins from various times (from Ancient Rome's Coliseum to a 1990s shopping mall). What do these structures—and their previous functions—have in common? How does the speaker seem to feel about the ruins? What other kinds of cultural, familial, or personal histories haunt the poems?
- 3) The book is divided into four sections, each beginning with a long introductory poem. How do these poems open their respective segments? What images or themes seem to populate each section? Where do we begin, and by the end of the book, where do we arrive? What has changed or remained the same?
- 4) The poems in *Blueprint and Ruin* could be sorted into two stylistic categories:
  - a. Poems with "gaps" of white space and less punctuation (like "Magi," "Afterlife: Abandoned Mall," "The Birds Are Always in the Corn")
  - b. More cohesive poems that use standard punctuation (like "Exodus with Lightly Sleeping Child," "Wildland-Urban Interface" and "Orchestra Playing as the Ship Goes Down").How do these different formal approaches impact the tone or meaning of the poems? Are there subjects or themes that each approach tends to explore? Now choose your favorite poem from the book and imagine rewriting it in the alternate form. What might be gained or lost with the stylistic change?
- 5) The book begins with an epigraph from Lucie Brock-Broido's poem "A Meadow." How do you see this epigraph relating to the poems in *Blueprint and Ruin*? What concepts might be linked to the idea of a longed-for "meadow"?

## Writing Exercises

- 1) Poems in *Blueprint and Ruin* often involve artifacts from the speaker's childhood (*The Wizard of Oz*, department store mannequins, giant roadside Muffler Man statues, Magic 8 Balls). Make a list of your own childhood artifacts. Choose one and then list images, feelings, and anecdotes related to it—what was fascinating about it to you as a child? How do you see it differently now?
- 2) Poems like "O Bird Singing or Whatever" and "Dear Highways of Our Nation, I am Sorry" use apostrophe as a literary device to directly address non-human entities. Choose your own non-human entity (the houseplant you routinely overwater, the single sock in the gutter you jogged past last Tuesday) and make it your audience. What would you apologize for? Confess to?