



Booth

Volume 4 | Issue 6

Article 3

6-15-2012

Travelogue

Claire Kiefer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/booth>

Recommended Citation

Kiefer, Claire (2012) "Travelogue," *Booth*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 6 , Article 3.

Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/booth/vol4/iss6/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Booth by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

Travelogue

Abstract

2012 Booth Poetry Prize Honorable Mention, as selected by Linda Gregg.

Keywords

China, travel, visit, globe



BOOTH



A JOURNAL

[← older](#)

[newer →](#)

June 15, 2012

Travelogue

Claire Kiefer

2012 Booth Poetry Prize Honorable Mention, as selected by Linda Gregg

In my dream I am still speaking in Chinese
 though I don't know the words for wisdom teeth
 and I've already been home a week. You heard me
 when I muttered something about the girl
 at the silk market. And that my tooth was throbbing
 all night until you brought me a popsicle, the pain rising
 opaque from my open mouth. I tell the taxi driver
 that something hurts, though I can't tell him
 exactly what. He's taking me four hours east
 to where the sea storms the Great Wall, where no one
 speaks any English and you aren't there to translate
 or compliment my organza dress. I tell the driver
 to turn around because I wore it just for you. It's so cold
 that I can't hear you calling from Shanhaiguan,
 saying, *Come here, this used to be a bell tower. Come,*
no one is looking. If I turn a certain way
 you can see the freckles on my shoulder. If I mispronounce
go straight the taxi driver thinks I am asking him

to be my lover. If he ever brings me to you,
I have tricks tucked in my French braid I know
will make you laugh. I have a plate of eggs made
with salt and rosemary, just how you like them. Teach me
to say *Go a little faster than that*. Teach me to sing
the birthday song. I try to show the driver your address
but when I reach into my bag I pull out my plane ticket.
The date is blurred with undrinkable water. If I'm sick enough
I won't be able to fly. Teach me the word for *hospital*.
Which road grows the wild jasmine? Which road
to the restaurant with red velvet curtains?
The taxi pulls into the airport and I can't think of the word
for *no*. I don't know how to say *my wisdom teeth hurt
too badly*. I don't know how to say *I can't leave him
in that village*. You are waiting in a second-floor room
with a king-sized bed. You've put the smaller slippers
on my pillow. The woman at the front desk knows
you are waiting for an American woman with a set of keys
and likely a lotus root. Teach me the words for
let's not wait. I only know how to say *yes*,
thank you, *goodbye*, *I want*—but I don't know
any nouns. China is gorgeous
where you are. Teach me to say *come home*.

Claire Kiefer is a writer and teacher in San Francisco. She received her MFA, in Creative Writing, from San Francisco State University in 2007, and taught social justice and art to children of incarcerated parents for several years. She now works for *Voice of Witness*, a nonprofit book series that uses oral history to depict human rights crises around the world, and teaches a weekly poetry workshop at San Quentin State Prison.

[← older](#)[newer →](#)[about](#)[archives](#)[news](#)[shop](#)[submit](#)

© 2012 Booth, A Journal

[follow us](#)
[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)[elsewhere](#)
[Booth](#) | [Butler MFA](#)