

SAN MATEO COUNTY POET LAUREATE



Poetry Reading *by*

San Mateo County Poet Laureate Aileen Cassinetta

Tuesday, April 9, 2019

About this poem:

This poem was inspired by themes of exploration and migration. Aileen Cassinetta wrote it to honor both her Asian heritage and the place she now calls home.

About the poet:

Aileen Cassinetta is the third Poet Laureate of San Mateo County, the first Asian American appointed to the post. She is the author of *Traje de Boda* (Meritage Press, 2010) and *The Pink House of Purple Yam Preserves & Other Poems* (Our Own Voice & Little Dove Books, 2018).

A Short History of Journey

The fault, dear Arcturus, is not in your star.
I'm afraid we misread the swells
like explorers mistaking one continent for another.

*"Columbus stretched out Asia eastward until Japan almost kissed the Azores."
"The Chinese treasure fleet had been mothballed long before Magellan set to sea."*

In other words, they were imprecise, and they perished.

(Behold the flight of birds on rarefied air,
from breeding ground to wintering ground.
Behold intention, and its kin, precision.)

Be that as it may, we were always meant for motion.

See how the Silk Road was paved with horses' bones.
And more than smuggled silkworm, it brought sugar, silver,
paper—utter world changer.

See how the Spice Trade flourished,
shoring up an empire, its galleons—implacable bearers of a slave
trade from Manila to Acapulco.

The world got its cinnamon, its cocoa, its cassia and cardamom,
its lapis lazuli, and its Balas Ruby—ancient and sapphire-veined.
We got wanderlust.

And the bravest of us looked up and remembered everything—
the fixed star, the dippers, the king, the queen, the bear-keeper—
rubescent and fourth brightest in all the night sky, dearest,
remembered also the cardinal of old fields and every roadside—
brilliantly blue and sometimes true—in the same night sky,
roaming its way home.