Catoctin Mountain Park

He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them.
—Aristotle, Politics (translated by Benjamin Jowett)

Look out across the ridges of trees flushed red as if holding their breath to blue distance, a wager made with the sky.

Look out over the Appalachians’ eastern rampart, then scrap the word for parts—before, prepare, fortify—to take possession of again.

On the road in, two wild turkeys bustle off into the brush.

Off the trail in wet leaves, yellow eyes of a box turtle.

What I take to be the stripes of common shiner in a riffle.

Alone, one might intone whose woods, whose woods, one might whisper democratic vistas.

One might say summit and Summit, as elsewhere, but near, are Aristotle’s other animals—political—at fenced and guarded leisure, though the wind
passes as it pleases,
and when it shakes
the trees, it is not
an agreement at all.

Credit:

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About this Poem:

"In writing about Catoctin Mountain Park, I found myself wanting to capture the spatial experience of the park, which enables different modes of attention—both the broad and reflective attention warranted by overlooks and 'wide shots,' and the 'close shots' as one notices wildlife and natural details underfoot and alongside. A third kind of attention I wanted to engage was that of the creative mind loosed in a body in motion through a natural landscape. The mind responds to the natural stimuli associatively—in my case, through personification, etymological associations and word play, and literary connections (the 'whose woods' of Frost and the 'democratic vistas' of Whitman). I hoped that readers aware of Camp David’s close proximity to the park would let that presence complicate and contextualize the poem from its epigraph to its final stanza. Aristotle’s thoughts on man as the 'political animal' enabled me to sustain this connection."

—Dora Malech

Author:

Dora Malech

Dora Malech is the author of Say So (Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2010) and Shore Ordered Ocean (Waywiser Press, 2009).

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