

Fall 1998

## Best Seen from a Dark Country Place

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### Recommended Citation

Noethe, Sheryl (1998) "Best Seen from a Dark Country Place," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 50 , Article 13.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss50/13>

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## BEST SEEN FROM A DARK COUNTRY PLACE

Corner house on Elm, blue with a black roof. Walk past it. Close your eyes.  
In the after-image you can see the later Rothko paintings. Nothing left  
but rectangles.

*Color itself, he said, is reason enough.*

Here where there are no city lights to compete with the skies  
you can watch meteor showers go whizzing across August.  
Best seen, they say, from a dark country place.

Just like this, says my guest, a dark night, dogs reclining like lions.  
A train wails. My pup rests his head on my open palm in the grass.  
There hangs the Rothko, framed by leafy branches.

*However you paint the larger picture, you are in it.*

He later requested his paintings be shown only in dim light.  
Earth's light, smudged and failing.  
Figures lose value. Form disappears. All that's left  
is the drama of the mind. Gradually purging the canvas of memory,

history, and geometry. *Obstacles*, he called them, *between the  
painter and the idea.*

That summer on Clinton Street the sky tore open in the cyanide blue  
and the secrets of form were outlined in a nervous green light.  
*Expanding and quickening in the eyes. Not the farther but the nearer shore.*

We walked the yard, picking up kimonos that fell from us the night  
before like sighs.  
Don't you have these colors in your life, stained until canvas and  
pigment are one?  
Fleeting glimpses of underpainting, repeated washes until the effect  
is of a hidden  
source of light. A maximum luminosity where all colors hover at  
the same plane.

Rothko finally found the human figure impossible for his own use.  
Instead, his color field, the glowing activity between tones.

The sorrow of this later work helps me understand the light here  
in these very circumstances.

The yellow rectangle floating over blue taped to my kitchen wall  
was for a while

the only way to imagine any future at all.

*Specific references to beach, sea and sky are unnecessary.*

The way water holds the scent of the otter who swam past the  
day before

my dog puts his face in the river, closes his eyes, and inhales.