

## Reading Novalis in Montana

The dirt road is frozen. I hear the geese first in my lungs.

Then, faint hieroglyphic against the gray sky.

Then the brutal intervention of sound.

*All that we experience is a message*, he wrote.

I would like to know what it means

when first one bird swims the channel

across the classic V, the line flutters, and the formation dissolves.

In the end, the modernists must have meant,

it is the human world we are weary of,

our arms heavy with love, its ancient failings.

But that was not near the first war, not in 1800,

when a young German poet could pick at the truth

and collect the fragments in an encyclopedia of knowledge.

There is a V, then an L, each letter

forming so slowly that the next appears before it is complete.

*The true philosophical act is the slaying of one's self*

Novalis wrote and died, like Keats, before he was thirty.

They have left me behind like one of their lost,

scratching at the gravel in the fields. Where are they

once the sky has enveloped them?

I stand in the narrow cut of a frozen road leading into mountains,

the morning newspaper gripped under my arm.

But to give up on things precludes everything.

*I am not-I*, Novalis wrote. *I am you*.

If, as the gnostics say, the world was a mistake

created by an evil demiurge, and I am trapped

in my body, abandoned by a god who I long for as one of my own,

why not follow the tundra geese into their storm?

Why stay while my great sails flap the ice

as if my voice were needed to call them back

in the spring, as if I were the lost dwelling place for the flocks?