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Les Animaux

> *This summer I planted ten acres in potatoes and barley. The ferry gave me more work than I wanted. We lived pretty good without the hunting.*
> *In 1880 or 1881, I led the last Saskatchewan hunts, but les animaux were gone and our ancient ways went with them.*
> — Jordan Zinovich, *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*

gone, uncle they're gone
and something in us goes too following after
les animaux, those who you "called" as if they were your brother
les animaux, those that you called mon frere and herded with their great beards
les animaux, the brothers that have left us they have moved to another plain,
uncle, on the last hunt instead of seeing a moving sea of brown backs, a rippling ground
now, you see only a few stumps feeding on grasses
now, their great size is swallowed by the bigger prairie
prairie that once seemed like it couldn't hold all
les animaux their sound like distant thunder will never reach your ears again
uncle, how sad that day when no one spoke of them
as if speaking their name
could slice an arm from one's own body
because they were you
  were you less of a man because of them?
les animaux made you captain of the hunt
now you are the captain of fighting men standing ground
against the settlers rolling in by the thousands
now they are the new herds,
but they are not les animaux
the brothers that fed and clothed us
and gave us reason to dance
gone, and now the prairie is mute

Marilyn Dumont