SINGING ROCKS
Grasslands National Park, Spring 2006

Limp, dusty short grasses,
Curving gently to earth, weak still from winter sleep.
Spirit rocks, coated thickly in yellow, orange and white
bountiful growth, bright, beautiful and sad
Silent for more than a hundred years,
longing for the touch of a woolly buffalo.

A brief caress communicates the news -
the buffalo are coming back.
The spirit, released by the message,
Wails as it soars and scatters in the still air.
A brief reminder
of the patience of rocks
waiting decades to feel the thunder of hooves
crossing short grass and...
the rub of warm thick fur
that covers life
that rubs away the lichens
that revives the spirit.

- Gloria Goulet
THE RELEASE
(May 17, 2004, Old Man on His Back, Saskatchewan)
for Sharon & Peter Butala

We have no measure for their vanishing.

I listen in four directions though I can’t remember dreaming sky, and earth. Say it humbly, the bison have returned. We stand behind straw-bale blinds our eyes follow lines we have no story for. The bison crest the ridge, uncertain at the gate.

Fifty yearlings, ragged in their winter coats, they balk, heads swinging. The riders close behind, their horses step muscles straining to the south. Just north of here men once shot bison from rail cars. So many they barely had to aim, brandy and cigar at hand, and the gentlemen felled the bison at the speed of steel.

A scruffy heifer passes through, then breaks, the herd follows, running the fence-line before wheeling around to pass before us. Their fierce hooves praise the earth; this thunder turns into north-wind and from their throats comes a kind of weeping, the thrust of a long singing once heard but not understood. Now the bison walk above and below the stars and the lichen and the grass and the rain and the stones and all is returned to them and returned again.

- Paul Wilson