

Camp Floyd Centennial

CLINTON F. LARSON*

West of the mountains, in the expanse of land
Covert because it is beyond our concern, fanned
By the winds of clear azure, I lean to the wind
To know the headstones of ancient death finned
With memorial mists and wisps of seething sand.

There, lying in the spare sun, the sagebrush grey
As the Confederacy, is the plot of the stray
Soldiery of the Union who sought valor in the world
West from St. Louis like the dust that swirled
From some lost spume of wind in a vacant day.

There they are, among the grass-sweeping shadows
Where the seethe of prairies touches the meadows,
The cities of color lost in their hour of seeming
As I look to find them, as I search there, dreaming:
Dragoons lean in the light, near spectral widows,
Wraiths of darkness wending around them from sorrow,
From New Haven, New York, and Boston, who must borrow
Time to stay here through the years that intervene.
Ghostly, you writhe for awareness in the sheen
Of the light of graves as if for duty tomorrow.

Captain, who are we to cross the bridge to the square
Of your camp as if to challenge a province where
Your importance flickers like your burnished sheath
Amid your gear reposing here, in glass, underneath
The dull concerns of some brief, perpetual care?

You have won this day of reliquary local lore
Though the memorial plaques announce no event of war.
If, then, you and your blue cadre had lived,
Had returned east, had been skirmishers sieved
With shot, you had died at Gettysburg, as poor
Of fame as here. Again, crests of your valor move away
In the desolate sectors of Utah where gulls prey
On the darting denizens of earth. It is the feel
Of the wind over the plaques and an ashen wheel
That makes me pause as if to hear what you might say.

*Dr. Larson is professor of English at Brigham Young University.