

Robert A. Christmas

AT MOUNTAIN MEADOWS: FOR JUANITA BROOKS

The mass grave here is set with stones
Piled low inside a low rock wall,
And marked for travelers by a sign
That tells us briefly of the murder
Of six score emigrants, whose bones
Lay here and there once — on the plain,
In the gulley — left to the weather
Of almost a century where they fell —

Like so many others, screaming, shot,
Robbed and left naked in the dust;
A few of the millions underneath,
And killed for something, like the rest
That we remember and forget
In stone and plaque — our modern shrines,
A casual pilgrimage of death
For tourists in the summertime

Who cannot kneel to sift for those yet
Ungathered pieces of the dead
That wash out here in summer floods
Like parts of broken animals,
But choose a few things to take home,
A twig, a name, then pass adept
As visitors around low walls,
Inspecting what they must disown;

Forgetting that such ways will end
When these bones, bursting to rebirth,
Pick through the meadows for debris
We did not number, and the Earth
Burns to a glass in which we see
Ourselves as we are seen, wherein
We read, as guilt and innocence,
The record of our ignorance.