Leadership University *Reprint*

Reprinted from First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life • June/July 1992 • Number 24

Poetry

(June/July 1992)

Trespassers

Half a day's detour to Gran Quivira—
and we arrive, near sunset,
to find a locked gate across the road.
We climb the fence and leave exact change
for maps of the ruins. A sign warns
of rattlesnakes that shelter in
the deep, open rooms and crumbling walls
of the ancient Spanish mission and,
predating it, a pueblo, now excavated.
Twenty unexcavated mounds surround us
on the ridge. Without a guide, we do not
ask what pestilence, what drought,
disease or war drove the living
from this place. Perhaps we do not walk
with proper awe. Tourists in a state
pocked with extinct settlements,
we are dulled to absence, to abandonment
of landscape to the sky. Still
we are astonished that the light
so rapidly diminishes, leaving us
pathless, surrounded by open pits,
sherds and murmuring brush.

Diane Bonds

By the Road South of Fairplay, Georgia

It assaults the eye, the Ponder family
graveyard, with twin obelisks visible
half a mile away. Inside its fence,
weeds, sawbriar, two monoliths inscribed
-in ivy wreaths- "George L." and "His wife,
Sarah." Beyond these stones lie markers
for three children-"This lovely bud
so young and fair," reads the only girl's.
In a second row-three tiny graves
with dates effaced or nearly so, all
unnamed infants. No other stones, no
children who survived to upraise
monuments, three-tiered and roofed,
with finials, Corinthian columns
at each corner of one tier, each stone
standing on a graduated pediment
and decorated with trefoils, leaves,
rosettes, like a monumental wedding cake.
Sarah (1824-1896) outlived her husband
by a decade, her last born-"Fair fleeting
comfort of an hour"-by forty years.
Don't you think she ordered these stones
to displace her perpetual grief, its
layers and twinings, its weight? How deeply
was her memory etched with the image
of a child staring by the door
as they carried out a coffin so light
and small a man could clutch the box
beneath a single arm? ("Purer this bud
will bloom above in bowers of paradise.")
She knew what a heart is for: to bury it
six times, or seven, without losing it;
to pass through a door blindly and yet
recognize the child, precious and imperiled,
breathing by the sill. Yes, it had to have
been Sarah who commanded marble shafts
to lift their heads above the province
of fever and accident; who demanded
trefoils, vines and wreaths, little roofs,
cornices, pillars, and spires, reasoning
God might dispose of the land but no one
would dare disturb such tormented stones.