

1992

Midwest Religion

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Recommended Citation

Varley, Jane. "Midwest Religion." *The Iowa Review* 22.1 (1992): 179-180. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.4116>

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Midwest Religion · *Jane Varley*

Only the blessed could see it,
the papers said. People drove hundreds
of miles to Fostoria, Ohio,
to see the image of Jesus on a barn.
I worked lawn care that summer,
used to roll my coveralls up
over my knees and pull
my John Deere cap low on my eyes.
That year, I wasn't much
of a believer.

The crew and I were held
in traffic on county road 65
between Findlay and Fostoria,
where cars idled in a constant daze
of humidity and pool of exhaust,
waiting to see Jesus.
We drank Old Milwaukee in the truck
and laughed at the families,
the women in flowered smocks
holding babies in the thick bend
of arms, the men sweating
at the wheels. They parked
on the road's edges and walked,
then sat in lawn chairs
under a huge oak tree, stood
squinting on the porch,
leaned against a card table
where children sold lemonade.

In Ohio, the last day of August,
the sun doesn't shine but filters
through an orange gauze. I'd stopped
looking, and rested my head
against the truck window,
just waiting for the end of heavy hours.
Then I saw it:
the long hair and high forehead,
a face emerging from beneath the peeling
red paint, dark eyebrows framing
small crescents of worry.

As I watched harder I lost it,
but stayed until evening,
the barn rippling
in heat and the people all around
with their single moments of belief,
those moments when they got down
on the open lawn, the grass
giving way to their knees.