

Title: Western Avenue and Other Fictions
Author: Fred Arroyo
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“Follow the bluing outline of the fallen Jolly Green Giant lying facedown on the weed-choked parking lot,” and witness the decay of factory life and perhaps the Midwest itself. This is the imagery that fills Dr. Fred Arroyo’s *Western Avenue and Other Fictions* (2012), which was shortlisted for the 2014 William Saroyan International Prize for Writing. In this collection of 14 stories, Arroyo connects the lives of Hispanic immigrants and migrants coming to the Midwest in search of economic opportunity. Arroyo’s book deals with themes of personal loss and family separation, migration and living undocumented in the United States. Told through the eyes of young and old, male and female, parent and child migrants, Arroyo speaks to the fear and loneliness of immigrants and their families in the Midwestern space, where they are always living under the threat of deportation or race-motivated violence. Born to a father who migrated from Puerto Rico to the United States in search of work, Dr. Arroyo grew up living in Michigan, Chicago and Connecticut where he encountered Puerto Rican communities. Dr. Arroyo now serves as an Assistant Professor of English at Middle Tennessee State University and has been recognized by the Library of Congress series Spotlight on U.S. Hispanic Writers.

Dr. Arroyo captures the emotions of transient laborers and of their friends in the Midwest. Boogaloo, the head chef at a restaurant on North Clark Street in Chicago, and Maria, a shopkeeper and mother paralyzed by fears of deportation while grieving the loss of her son, are two figures who stand out throughout the stories. Boogaloo speaks to how “his loneliness, his exilic fortune, was the grand meal of his life no one could take away, and it was Boogaloo’s fate to chew it—macerate it—every day” as he encountered news all around him about the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (6). Maria recognizes this same threat, “ever since the raid, it seems like the street’s empty” (20). Interestingly, Dr. Arroyo also documents exhaustion and desperation permeating the lives of his storytellers, including Luis, who was confused why migrants did not flee upon hearing rumors about an upcoming raid, “maybe they live every day with the fear of the raid. How could they not show up—they needed the work” (33). Arroyo’s story is an important contribution to any study of Midwestern culture and memory, particularly how it speaks to contemporary issues of separating parents from children in immigrant families that persists to this day. It is a hopeful and needed yet painful reflection of a Midwest whose factories and fields bring Hispanic immigrants to the American “heartland.”

Reviewed by Emma Cieslik.