

THE DOLLHOUSE OF RODOLFO: A CASUALTY OF OTHERNESS

BY

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

Major: Poetry

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ABSTRACT

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The Dollhouse of Rodolfo is a collection of disidentifications. The protagonist of this collection is constantly delicate, fractured, and touched. This is a collection of narratively linked free verse poetry that is in conversation with fictitious environments and a world engulfed in pandemic, with a non-linear goal of unlearning literal truth while also unlearning culturally biased narrative expectations. The unlearning of truth and of narrative happens through a Queer approach of othering, although this approach isn't directly addressed in the collection, the construction of this collection is influenced by a Queer mentality.

My intention is for my writing to read vocally, without a wasted moment, yet somehow playfully.

The narrative of this collection stems from despair as the origin for a story that is circular. The narrative connects thoughts that are orderly and disorderly. This narrative seeks to make sense and does not quit when those attempts fail.

Themes and/or conceptualizations of therapy, loneliness, pandemic, alternative realities, artistic vision, emotional intelligences—are all present in this collection.

The narrator of this narrative is in a rebellious space, and their words are therapy for what has happened prior to the moments of the narrative. The narrator explores chaotic space and recollects these moments as words to the reader. The narrator's home is a rebellious space, while the windows, drain pipes, holes in the roof—are portals to chaotic space.

The intention of this book is to present a character in a Queer space where there are points of access to different ways-of-knowing. The speaker's relationship with knowing is constantly being reinvented and realized differently.

Some of the works that have inspired this collection are Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy The Kid*, Frank O'Hara's *Meditations in an Emergency*, Clarice Lispector's *The Passion According to G.H.*, as well as the film *The Red Balloon*, directed by Albert Lamorisse.

Keywords: Experimental, Queer, Quarantine, Play, Disidentification, Therapy

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INTRODUCTION

I wish to acknowledge the land on which New Mexico State University operates. As a first-generation Mexican-American, I am personally and also generally so grateful and honored to have the opportunity to work with this land of Chihene Nde', Mescalero Apache, Lipan Apache, Raramuri, Ysleta Del Sur, Tortugas Pueblo, Piro, Manso, Tewa People, the Aztecs of the North, Navajo Nation, Laguna Pueblo, Acoma Pueblo, Zuni Pueblo, Sandia Pueblo, Isleta Pueblo.

I also wish to acknowledge the colonization that the academy is built upon, and to pronounce my hope of a decolonized version of higher-education for future generations to enjoy.

I love flowers. I love plants, floral things. Trees, things that are of nature. I always keep flowers in my laboratory when I'm working, just to keep the energy in a certain pattern. (MF DOOM)

This book is like any other book. But I would be happy if it were only read by people whose souls are already formed. Those who know that the approach, of whatever it may be, happens gradually and painstakingly—even passing through the opposite of what it approaches. They who, only they, will slowly come to understand that this book takes nothing from no one. To me, for example, the character G.H. gave bit by bit a difficult joy; but it is called joy. (Clarice Lispector)

I originally began this essay, already, but that version of what was needed to be said is gone. I don't know what happened to it. I am both too tired to search for it, and too anxious to continue to wait for it. This feeling, this combination of feelings I have, I think, is the genesis of this thesis.

There is also an object attached to this purposed genesis. That object being a table I purchased from Walmart. If you were to go to Walmart today, you might see the same model (although in a recent search, you could not find one). The table was long and thin, the approximate shape of an office table. It had a vinyl padded top and four metal legs. The legs were painted a glossy black. The padded vinyl was a matte, leather-ish material. Then I brought it home, it became other things: a side table, a dinner table, a work bench, many other things, many at the same time. This is also the genesis.

The table made its way into the thesis and became the journey.

In another truth, my process in creating this narrative collection was associative and paralleled my real life. I did have a neighbor who played videogames loudly both day and night, that is true. Many of the other details are inspired by reality, inspired by a contextualization of reality. An eagerness to reveal a perspective that would make every moment an othering.

Each moment stands on the other side in playful competition to be most important.

As the artist MF DOOM, quoted above, might fancy, some moments are best had in play. What do you think of the game, Uno? These are my rankings for Uno variations that I have stolen from Walmart/Target (and two purchased from an independent comic book store). How might you rank the games from my collection provided below?:

1. Uno Flip! (This mountain,)
2. Uno Mario Kart (over which)
3. Uno Corns (there are airplanes)
4. Uno Minimalista (flying so high)
5. Uno Toy Story 4 (they might)
6. Uno Classic (as)
7. Phase 10 (well)
8. Dos (be)
9. Uno Dare! (stars.)

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From my bedroom
window I see those
kids sitting on the
edge of that rusty water tower.

Somehow, they know I'm here and
they know my name. In a mocking tone,
they spell it to me,
and in a mocking tone, I
spell it with them.
R-O-D-O-L-F-O.

Then, they remark fondly
on every John ever named John.

Those kids,
they're probably seeing the sun set—
their faces look so golden
from down here.
And that's why
these buildings are built
to one day crumble and—

I thought I'd climb that tower,
see the land myself, yet,
for so long I've been frightened
by heavy greenery and distracted
by low hanging flowers, and laying
under their petals.

Now—I'll burn that damn tower down.
the sun too dammit.

Dear Therapist,

I just watched this
cheap American romance
called Emily in Paris.

And I find it beautiful
how Emily is in Paris.

How Emily experiences
France as an American,
and is in Paris.

Burglarizing culture
just like how Americans do,
feeling uncomfortable as she
sits there pretending
she does not, yet is how it is
to be in Paris as an American.

In a few seasons, I predict,
they will show her in a crowd
of French people and Americans
will believe she truly belongs.

Dear Therapist,

So your new idea
of having me write
to you seems to
have begun at least.

These emails, what is
their protocol? Do these
emails share the same
reality as our meetings?

With your couch I sat
on and your bowl of
candy on the table, your
window that was so
high up, I could never
know what was outside
this world we met in.

Never mind, you said
in our last meeting there
that we were entering
a traditional reality.

What an interesting way
to phrase that.

Doubtful of how I
feel, if I could resolve
this complaint—a hole
in my roof means nothing
in comparison to the
problems I have accumulated.

But by the problems
I have accumulated,
they have manifested
as a body
motionless in the center,
or maybe not quite
the center, of my
living room space.

Dear Therapist,

Hello, I'm sorry
I couldn't respond
sooner, I saw
a gust of wind
and fainted.

I hope this is
fun for you too,
to know that
I was lifted. I got
carried away, saw
a red balloon
in France, smiled.

I feel no urge to clarify
myself today. Carried,
sand, wind, the.

I've never seen
a red balloon, was
never bourgeois in Paris,
never enjoyed love, never
spent the day smiling.

In the countryside,
acres of glass
hot with pinot
noir.

What your
reading here is circular.
Cyclical. Or call it circular,
but think of movement too.
It'd be selfish for there
to be an end.

I was conversing sort of
with the hole. In a way,
ironically.

And I heard someone
through my window say
whoa in that way of
being oddly impressed.

That's good, better than
some other more violent
ways my voice is heard.

And the body
on the floor?

It's been there
for a while. I've
been, they've been.
The warmth I
wish for diminishes
daily. My mind is
where I feel freest,
I say to my body
as it continues
to colden.

Someone in some other
apartment is calling
themselves a freeloader
which is a shame
if they announced themselves
no one would call
it freeloading they would
call them pretty
say they've got a body say
they're someone at least.

Say that they have a mind
and it is working as it
should every piece of it
is working as it should.

Unlike my ceiling,
there is no good in a ripped table.

A no-good table.
Thin, left on the
side of the road.

Who might take it?
The city? An artist?

I hope an artist,
I could see the table
one day as beautiful.

Maybe it'd be better
left at the park. A table
waiting alone in the park.
If there was a chair too,
I could work at that table.

In the park so beautiful I should try.

I would write so much
there, worlds, even my home
could be written. Would be
written in odd forms that
don't link. Phrases,
the breath of phrases.

Well, sure. There
is a logic. I mean
I need to explain
my limbs. Infuse
my body with
oil like primrose
or canola. Enter into my own
biochemistry.

The wood flooring—
I shouldn't know
what wood is. I shouldn't
know my own body.

A body is found, yet
no longer exists enough
to be honored. No
honor for this dead
one, no lower place
to be than death.

I tell to my body
as encouragement
to survive.

Allow
this to be an expanding
breath—one to
larger breaths.

I imagine myself lying
forever, in a rocking chair
with a steam powered
engine, low-power,
forever. Tapping objects
in my direct path to confirm,
with relative confidence,
that I am yet again still alive.

Dear Therapist,

I love this idea, to
build myself a doll
house and have inside
a world I create.

Although, frankly, I
have found it difficult
to use tools, even hand
tools frighten me.

But I've never shied
away from electronics.
Well, I use electronics.

What if I set up some
email addresses. Each
one a different character?
And I could have these
characters speak to each
other? Watch as they
naturally create their own
reality. And really get
myself into a dialogue.

I can't believe it!
I'm so happy and
excited and nervous,
I can't say
much else now,
just trust I am so happy!

Like sweet bread or
anything baked so specially.
I'm sure I'll tell
you more when that
time comes.

I'd love if
we could make pillow forts,
but they are a cherry tree.

This is where love
first showed up—
Well, before this
there was love and
maybe I caused it.

Actually, it was a tone.
The wind through their leaves.

So I make coffee at
midnight with the idea
of drinking five cups
before bed. Otherwise

I won't be able to stay up
all night to look at that
crack in the ceiling.

If it rained how would water
fall through? Would it—
the rain, its leaves—clog the hole?

I would hate that or I'd
learn to love that.

There is so much depending.
It would be a shame
to make a decision—there'd
be nothing else to wonder.

The good table. Covered,
absolutely covered in
padded black vinyl.
Which felt alarming on my skin.
What was I to do?
Other than rip the vinyl off
and expose the truth,
that underneath
was nothing
but cheap cardboard.

What if I locked myself
in the bathroom and
surrendered to gradual decay?

Could I pretend, then?
The shower drain has been
clogged for eight months,
ever since the end I've been
allowing the water to pool up
to my ankles. I could fix it
all in a moment
but I've also grown
an appreciation of being
surrounded.

I'm your
partner. But for what?

This is so odd, Rodolfo, to message
myself, but as someone
else. Although my therapist
says it is normal enough.

You can message me always, Rodolfo.

Out of my window
I see green
fields and too many gnats.

One green field
has a blue flower.

All I'll ever do is pretend to live.
Make believe. I am made
to believe somewhere
in my window there is
someone singing for just
another day, just another minute.

I am responsible
and uninterested
in collecting waste,

so I take out
the trash. In
a small trash bag.

Out to
the trash.

These things they
can't
always be controlled.

We
built these things
to have layers.

A container
to hold wasted food.

A bottle with juice,
my distressful moments,
this body gets heavy,
my body wiggles.

Dear Therapist,

Thank you, our
session today was
helpful! I had
a question, you
know the answer?

Hope it's okay
if I ask? Assuming insurance
also covers emails? Or maybe
this is a loophole.

I've always been
fond of loopholes, and
other ways of cheating the system.

And speaking of insurance,
what if I didn't have any?
How much might this cost?
What is the cost of an email?

I'm asking for a friend,
actually. I don't pretend
to understand your business,
but maybe you could do a
2-for-1 special? Cure
two diseases in one
session, or one disease
in two? To me, it
sounds like simple economics.

This is our last letter,
I've simply
run out of perfume
to show you my
love with. It is
all done,

please don't question
me Rodolfo, or ask me to clarify,
again, this is our last letter.

Stay home if you need to.
Healing is all good.

But besides that, tell me
what you're thinking?
What're you thinking?

My mind's playing tricks
on me again, I'm holding
my own hand. Laughing
at mountains with faces.

I watch the mountains.
Is it only me who imagines
this as love? This love
that is so fragile.

And is where I find myself. My
hand resting on a mountain.

Dear Therapist,

It seems like all that
life is, is what's between
these shapes.

For example,
a triangle, and
inside is a circle. The
circle is safe there
in that triangle.

There is no telling
if the triangle is safe.

I'm never safe, was
never the circle nor
the triangle.

I am an observational
rock rolling down a hill
of moss and buildings.

Later, I'm sure to be paused
by so many flowers.

My neighbor screams this
or that—they sees themselves
as intelligent and above
explanation.

I wonder about this logic,
and our differences. They sound
obsessed. I'm obsessed too,
with how I might sound to
a dislocated ear.

Can you hear me neighbor? I feel
you breathing. I
feel the earth break. My
legs twist.

Through this I can still
imagine myself doing
backflips, and landing on an
asterisk. A beached
whale force fed Tylenol,
or whatever, to ease
the tension of being
stuffed with dynamite.
This is how it is, and you?

Can you hear me? Are
you breathing? The walls
are moving.
I think I'm dying from
this shoe string budget.

No more affordable bananas.

There is a man walking—I
wonder if he is my neighbor
too. That neighbor
with all that late night hustle.

My neighbor (like all neighbors, basically)
has been yelling at me
all night. There is a
window between our
apartments and most nights
we sit and talk.

Strangely enough,
our two apartments used
to be one apartment. But
they built a wall inside,
and, funnily enough,
put a window between us two.

Even funnier, the heater
is on my side of the apartment,
so we keep the window
between us open
for the heat to pass through.

I see the survivor emerging from
the entrance of a cave. They
appear as they open
their mouth and approach me.

I see myself as ready
to be a cutting board.

How will you recognize
my worry, Rodolfo? A cutting
board, I said. How will
I recognize, you asked.

A cutting board, a worry.
The hole is my ceiling
is a portal. On the
other side, this time,
is what I survived.

A joke about a table
never ends up going
as planned.

Remember
the cliffs
of the swampland?

Actually, those cliffs
were only exposed caves.
And I imagined I jumped
in but actually I walked away?

I thought, bluntly, of
adventure—.

Dear Therapist,

Here's something that's been
pecking at me for some time.

There is this wandering thought
I've been having and it found me.

The thought relates to the earth
and my mind.

It could have been a sweet thought,
but it is so sour to think.

What a surprising thing.
Clearly, it stems
from my various sadnesses.

I finally had a dream. Neighbor,

you have three paintings
on your left wall, painted
with oil, all made by you—
all of other people.

The first closest to
the front door is shirtless,
their skin is touched by
daylight. The second one
reveals itself, too, but in
a room with less light, so
that the face belongs
to the room. The third
looks both down and away.

For a little while, I thought
I saw you had a dollhouse.
A colonial home, painted
pink on the outside and with
white accents. But then, you
strike me as someone who
wouldn't be interested in
a colonial home, and so
the idea of you having a
lighthouse is unrealistic.

A colonial home,
and in the basement
of this imagined home is
rubble, rubble, rubble.

I imagine, you never know
what to say when, asked for a
tour, you approach the basement.

Someone is here
hiding in the shading
someone is living here
nondescriptly where my eyes
never wander and my feet
never touch.

There's my body
in the middle of
the living room
floor, cold
and dead. I'm sure
I should tell
someone, but I
have resources to
gather. This is
what I am
accustomed to,
using my body
for resource gathering.

Maybe I shouldn't
reveal too much,
would it be
believable if I
called it all a
practical joke?

Here I am at this desk
in the park
and this is all I can think.

I rip and pull and hum.
Piles of trash. I request
myself to ignore. Somehow
the piles remind me
of an old relationship. That's so childish.

Your body is not trash. Still,
I call the pile you.

I make another pile
that becomes my neighbor
and another and then a third
that is in the shape of my own body.

Everything becomes a pile.
Then I snap my fingers and
everything is a fruit tree.
Just like that, I am all flowers
and peach trees.

Just then, my neighbor
knocks on my door,
waits a moment, peaks
in my window, and sees me.

We hold eye contact for a while.
I pretend I'm a coconut.

How do you end
when you feel eager
to end? Running out
of body, ending. And
the magnolia tree still
shivers, did I tell you
it shivers? It shivers.

There is a sea
or a forest
behind my home,
made entirely of flowers.

All pink and blue,
some taller than others,
as if they were oak trees
but they all are flowers.

That's how I want
to leave this. Just these
flowers—imagine
if they appeared endless.

It's obviously not endless
but appears so. How
the flower seems to
agree and conform
to the surface of the Earth,
bending, in the distance.

Inside me
is a hole too.
That has mold,
still rearranging, and
growing other stuff
in there, maybe
some gum I swallowed.

I look
into my mirror and associate
with broken glass. My
neighbor does the same
and sees money, not much,
but money.

My comfort is home.
Is ruin. I am
ruined like the
named storms
off the coast
of the swamplands, causing
trouble as I spin.

Or, a forest ranger
stationed in a crowded city,
laughing as I
guard any bit of nature
within reach.

This is a
late night
perfumed email,
it isn't anything else.

I am your romantic partner.

Remember to tell me
what you think.

Keep yourself still,
formulate your thoughts,
and think as if a poem.

Inhaled through one window
and exhaled through another.
Inhale orange exhale cherry.

In breath, I think productivity.
But it might be the body
getting me to think about writing
outdoors and worse so publicly.

And the objects
have accepted a silent life.
No magic of stars.

And besides that I hear
of my neighbor tell
of plots to steal
my silent body.

What if I was hunted?
Might I escape because
of knowledge of the hole?

I feel hunted, we are. Yes,
neighbor? Otherwise I'd
just be distancing
myself from communication
by use of words.

Lights flicker on the
other side of the hole
—the world trembles.

Or does it always shake
this way? As a sort of,
on the verge, the leverage
to engage with a safety pin.

Needles hurt, can we agree?
Safety pins too, even with their
shape. I remember poking
my skin with safety pins. Because
their shape could never hurt,
instead it was useful, helpful.

Safety pins, like, paper clips
but sharp? Imagine: being
used as a utility. The reality
of their existence, uses we
see as acceptable. I close
my letters with safety pins.

The time it takes to
build walls and formulize
barriers. Wouldn't rise
to the ashes without
walls to block the wind.

My eye lashes could
never sing a song to a flock
of eagles or flamingos. Today
is a sour day.

The mail neglected to show,
will neglect to show for even
more weeks, even months.

The swampland is haunting
me. I haven't seen
it in years, yet I hear
that water through the
hole in my ceiling.

I have too many
blankets for my situation.

I smile, my brain tickles.
Under my blankets is
ethereal and beyond
presumption. Under my
blankets is the stench of
oil paint and coffee.

I don't have a dog like
I should. No one to bite
at my legs. It is getting
to that point. When I
look out the window
I see Jesus in a diaper.

This is nothing to mock.
They handed me a bottle
of liquor, brand named,
said, "Hit the hay."

And so I often do.

Under the moon where
famous people will often
compliment my looks. but
never compliment how
often my face is a mirror
instead of a portrait or a
flower or a well.

No matter which of my
four windows I look
through, I see a survivor
yelling—and I make that
same face silently.

Just again, today,
I was struck by a fist.
And it does hurt, but,

I remember the other
time I was hit, and you
protected me from
being hit again.

Would you be surprised
to hear how, this time,
I ran fast and jumped and hid?

I want to see a tree
wrapped in a red blanket and
call it myself, to scratch my
neighbor's window with my branches
to remind my friends that
some years have passed

since the last time
I was struck by
lightning, to have
the thought of
being cut down
pondered over me,
my body sliced
and dried. to
be struck by
lightning a second
time and be
entertainment as
I turn to snow.

After all, maybe finally
I'll see my life for
what it is. I hide in
caves and make promises
to rocks. I say, "I
won't leave this cave,
or the cows that
wander about,
I am both herder
and immovable object."

Excuse me
while I return
from my
disassociation.
This is all to
digress, to avoid
the dying tree.

Dear Therapist,

Yesterday there was
a purple bush in my dream.

I went to lay underneath
but as I laid, the bush yelled,
and all the yelling stung,
so I left.

This is what my education
has done to me. I know it,
the yelling required to be
left alone.

Leave it.

So
I told
the world,
reminded the
world, that
we chose
this to
be true.

All
my
confinement,
world.

And
besides,
there was
never a
reason I
should
be free.

“This will never end”
and the thought breathes throughout
my home, through my open windows,
with luck to my neighbor who
will always scream.

Of course I am thinking,
but not how you want. This
is how it is for me too, like
a circle or some sort of
circular path. That is to say
there is no endings. My story
about crape myrtles. Who
will consider me in this isolated
world, all interior and windows?
Will the thought sift through drywall?

It reverbs in my
interiors. And through my windows
is the exterior world. In this
exterior world, exists a poplar
tree similar to me. I'm no tree,

I'll never know a life
so fulfilling, but
there is the tree and I obey it.

Like me, the poplar
waves at the wind, saying,
"of course I am thinking,
but not how you want, Rodolfo."

I am my own
obstacle over any
other obstacle.

In another way,
here's how it is.

The hole I mentioned
previously is small,
I don't consider
it a structural issue
for the building.
It is like a skylight
for me as I lay in
paralysis. My bed
just below. Never
can see the stars
but the planes fly
so violently. The
violence enters
in through the hole
and surrounds me.

I could trace the hole,
I watched it grow too.
When the paint started
separating. The fresh
scent of mold. I moved
my bed below the hole,
now my bed is in the
center of the room.
On my way to bed,
one time, I hit my
knee on the valet table.
What a bump to
keep me up, looking
up through my hole,
I hear the rumble
of airplanes.

The Sun is out today,
the air
was cold but the Sun was warm
and I told my neighbor how
the doubled experience
made my body feel so terrible.

They bought me an umbrella,
said they cared about my
body, and we both laughed
because we felt that for
each other.

Dear Therapist,

Just recently, I found
that a sad song
lives in my bones,
knots my bones. It
tightens, my couch spins.
I can't make it to bed,
my couch spins—

small birds spin above
my head, make a nest
on my head, produce stars
shaped like eggs, stars
with wings.

Someday I'll be a bird
drawn to a twig bobbing
my head and singing about love.

If I'm just kidding
I want to know what I mean, what
I'm alluding to, what I'm
getting at.

I imagine falling asleep
and waking up in the same moment.
I imagine dreaming of blankets
and pop tarts, that first time
I fell in love, the first time I felt
fond for two birds flying
in tandem on a blue road up above.

From my
bedroom
window
is the
whole world,
flowers,
rusty towers,
etc..

Rather there is a
tree. Just a generic
tree instead of
towers that don't
seem to belong.

The trees are kind,
they allow me to theorize
on breezes that sound
like mocking, and other
breezes that sound
like admiration.

And I can accept
the mocking, this time,
the trees teach me
to believe every word
is breezy.

And so the future
is better for me
for this.