

SAMPLER

*Nothing Is Lost*

ALSO BY JORDI DOCE

POETRY

*Mar de fondo* (pamphlet), 1990  
*La anatomía del miedo*, 1994  
*Diálogo en la sombra*, 1997  
*Lección de permanencia*, 2000  
*Otras lunas*, 2002  
*Gran angular*, 2005  
*Poética y poesía*, 2008  
*Nada se pierde*, 2015  
*No estábamos allí*, 2016

DIARY / APHORISMS

*Hormigas blancas*, 2005  
*La vibración del hielo*, 2008  
*Perros en la playa*, 2011

PROSE / LITERARY CRITICISM

*Imán y desafío. Presencia del romanticismo inglés  
en la poesía española contemporánea*, 2005  
*Curvas de nivel. Artículos*, 2006  
*La ciudad consciente. Ensayos sobre T.S. Eliot y W.H. Auden*, 2010  
*Las formas disconformes*, 2013  
*Zona de divagar*, 2014

AS EDITOR

*Agenda Review. An Anthology of Spanish Poetry*, 1997  
*Poesía hispánica contemporánea. Ensayos y poemas*, 2005  
(with Andrés Sánchez Robayna)  
*Poesía en traducción*, 2007  
*Pájaros raíces. En torno a José Ángel Valente*, 2010 (with Marta Agudo)  
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Jordi Doce

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SAMPLE

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## Being There: The Poetry of Jordi Doce

“Emotion recollected in tranquillity”: the definition of poetry in Wordsworth’s preface to *The Lyrical Ballads* could well be applied, says Bernd Dietz, to the poetry of Jordi Doce. This seems to me exact, so long as we realise, with equal exactness, that such emotion need not necessarily be one’s own. Doce has expressed his opposition to so-called confessional poetry, where the “I” of the poet is actually the well-worn features of the ego. Instead he prefers what Christopher Middleton calls “configural” poetry, which creates relationships with the world without falling into a kind of subjective, expressionist swamp.

Doce has also explained that before he arrived at his present stage of poetry there was a previous, “darker” phase which also had its roots in the English tradition. It “shouldn’t come as a surprise,” said Gustavo Guerrero about Doce’s collection *Otras lunas*, “that he is the translator of Blake, De Quincey and Coleridge, among others, offering us a journey through the labyrinths of a frightened conscience.” Doce’s poetic career has therefore followed two separate but complementary paths. The first goes from *La anatomía del miedo* (1994) to *Gran angular* (2005) as well as *Lección de permanencia* (2000), and is typified by an intimate or domestic outlook with solid rational bearings, cultivated by what Borges called “the verbal music of England.” At this point in Jordi’s development, the poem, as Sánchez Robayna has noted, “is not just sustained by or made up of memory, but also aspires to be, in itself, memory.”

The second phase of his work is rougher, more intuitive, and less bound by conventional reason. It takes off with *Otras lunas* (2002) and the book of aphorisms and notes, *Hormigas blancas* (2005), before the new direction of the verse is fully displayed in *Perros en la playa* (2011), a book completely devoid of semantic and formal constraints. Here Doce seems to have found an ideal form for the kind of poetic thought he himself describes in one of his aphorisms: that is, “to not repeat oneself, to be always diverse, changing: a flame.” Already foreshadowed in the notebooks, it is an artistic opening-out onto a landscape of fragmented parts where his style of imaginative wandering “without any preconceived goal, arbitrary and spontaneous” finds its home: the comfort of a “non-conforming form,” to use the title of one of his collections of literary essays.



Ultimately we should value Doce's poetry for giving voice to a poetics of the "total eye": an all-inclusive look at reality. The aim is to capture the other half of this world—the invisible half—through an optical image like the "lens," the wide-angled scope that gives a title to one of his books and encompasses more reality by means of an agreeable distortion. As he says, "wide angle, we need you ... the eye that grows / and shelters the shadows of the margin." It is a poetry which seeks, in short, not only to scrutinise the "great segments" of the real, but the small articulations, the tiny joints between the parts. "My poems," explains Doce, "are always focused on the outside, towards exploring the world of the senses as the basis for the meditative or imaginative impulse." Thus a notable trait of his work—which recent volumes have brought to a wonderful maturity—is his rich and polyhedral "vision in movement," which allows him to *be there*, living with, and in, the present. This explains why he has become one of the most unique and distinctive poets of his generation.

VICENTE LUIS MORA

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*For an instant the names are inhabited.*  
Octavio Paz, 'Seeds for a Hymn'

*Do not separate  
the shadow from the light that has produced it.*  
José Ángel Valente, 'The Angel'

*Every poem an epitaph.*  
T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', IV

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I  
(1990-1993)

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## Biography

Van Gogh the lights of a forgotten brothel  
that leads nowhere except to death what whisper death is  
he sprinkles turpentine upon the profaned canvas behind an implacable  
knife sliced the ear chosen by madness Paris the lindens  
in the park embracing a sun spilled at every moment  
from exhaustion your vision fades little by little in fact  
your friends abandoned you some time ago all your francs  
as well it hurts to think of a sky like that there up above  
or of the sun or of a field of wheat struck down by the divine dream  
what curse did my fingers trace O Lord and you you  
barely a shadow on the other side of the mirror the demon leaves us  
the demon leaves us and the light but another grows I know not where  
there are quenched coals in your eyes look there  
a pistol sounds in the quiet of the hotel and draws the bow of  
death in a second the doctor with an invisible gesture palpates  
the chest of the patient what a faint whisper death is on the ground  
the painter's body stretches helpless

1988

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## Moor

These are the domains of clay and frost.  
Beyond the windowpane and the wax drippings,  
the dawn is the growing insistence of its sounds,  
the regular steps by which time revives.  
After leaving the house, clumsy, blurred  
by sleeplessness, we wander through sidestreets  
that spread their blindness over an awkward  
moor, stripped of itself, and we're startled  
by the cold's sharp edge, the red-hot bark  
of some dog grappling with the sunrise.  
Inexorable, lead has muzzled the sky,  
and a fine drizzle wears out our eyes,  
blurring our clothes and skin.  
Once again this trembling, like uncertainty,  
is a trace on our hearts,  
an echo that rekindles old weaknesses.

We walk on, stubbornly forgetful of everything.  
From time to time a friendly gesture  
or some bon mot reminds us  
that the night was full of sentences,  
of judgments as capricious as youth itself  
and unsubstantial proclamations.  
Now, however,  
so close the dark marrow of this world,  
so distant from dreams and dreamed kindness,  
it occurs to me, or rather I sense,  
that too much urgency, too much impotence  
leads us to this craft to take care of the world,  
the complicit heartbeat of vision,  
that distancing that every page demands  
to reconcile ourselves with life.

## Belfast, July 1988

The sun hurts  
like a fistful of broken needles:  
morning is here, according to tradition,  
a faithful premonition of mist  
or a blind music  
said to come from the north.  
Somewhere there are people who hear mass  
or sing sweet battle songs  
to the wrong god.  
Meanwhile, I substantiate signs,  
well-known and palpable clues  
that speak of a sordid existence:  
behind the painted walls  
the rubble hides the home of another time.  
the tea, the hall clocks, the faded china,  
the weight of time  
in old photos of sailors.  
As per custom, fear is here  
the morning's quicklipped tongue,  
this sullen subjugation  
depicted by beds and syllables.  
By its purged light,  
it's hard for me to imagine any other silence  
for death.

# Brighton

Midway through that strange journey  
Brighton was our refuge:  
a palace beside the sea,  
the water green and fertile,

the open gangway above  
planks and cast iron,  
copper light on the flotsam,  
old stone that exhausts

and recovers the terraces.  
You've seen that architecture  
founded on emptiness,  
a chunk of terra firma

in the clarity of fear;  
you stroll every morning  
dangling from a thread, alone  
on the breakwater, and sometimes

you're frightened by so much threat,  
the choppy waves, the sea  
tirelessly harassing us,  
entering into our existence

with a cold, fickle hand.  
When you come back home  
the fire I've laid in the hearth  
burns between my eager hands

and thus we pass the time  
released into our bodies,  
searching for ourselves in the other.  
Our desire reawakens

in that no man's land.



## A Letter

Ochre. A trembling. Hints  
of frost on the windows.  
Capricious gusts.  
If you were to look back,  
you'd know that winter  
flows toward its end.  
Nothing has changed.  
Seated on the rumpled sheets,  
puzzled yet warm,  
I hug my ankles  
and stare up at the sky,  
the washed out blue of the light  
that climbs upward.

A dog  
crosses the street. Plays  
ball with a little boy.  
The same one as always. The one who knows  
your name from that day  
I called you from the hallway.  
If you were here  
you'd see me look back  
and feel the prelude of your shadow.  
The door is  
still open.  
If you were here.  
I know I am repeating myself.  
I wonder  
if there is any remedy this time.  
This story is the product of chance.  
I tell it to you so you know  
what your life is like here, with me,  
when you're not here.  
A car arrives and the boy  
moves away. The ball  
is lost between the wheels,

bangs against the bumper.  
The dog lowers its head.  
It must wait.  
I turn over  
onto my back again.  
Logic leads me far.  
Cosy in the silence,  
I press against my knees  
and stare at the blue distance.  
Beneath a cloudless sky  
March flows toward its end.  
You are not here.  
Nothing has changed.

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# Sylvia Plath

## I. *McLean Hospital (1953)*

I can feel the sea, or a background of bells.  
The noise of the gulls comforts me, eases  
my attacks. From time to time a nurse

adjusts the pillow or tucks in the sheets  
until I feel a weight on my chin  
and it is not cold. The shouts I hear in the distance

are echo and drug. I'm visited by mothers, relatives,  
but I tire easily and they falter. The days  
lisp like old women and a hint of sun

shakes the curtains: it's sour like the soup,  
and murky, and disproportionate. There is a drifting blade  
in my veins, and every night it makes its way

toward the tight knot of my skin. And if I pay attention  
I feel the murmur of the water and of a keel  
plowing the surf of the tongue.

## II. Court Green, Devon (1962)

The unchanging moon. An earth as if it were dawning at the end of the evening where the lights, the wet glass of the fields, the old, dark elm near the garden sink in. She feeds the children, gives the final instructions to the nanny, locks herself in her room. It is still early. Even though the day lasts longer than necessary today, she feels the desire to write like a life preserver. Her mother's letters, piled at one edge of the desk, hurriedly opened, demand an answer that she finds harder to give with every night. The scent of the grass, of the wood that covers the roof, the light speckled by the lace curtains, sometimes a cry from Nicholas, the nanny's voice trying to calm him.

The letters, however, reveal a happiness she doesn't feel, which is strange to her, a performance she attends in disbelief but which she gives herself to body and soul; a way of hiding wounds. Her mother is unable to take her seriously; she knows that well. What's more: she won't let her daughter take herself seriously. She has made pride her main weapon, a pride that often diverts into thoughtlessness, which bases all its strength on negation, in an almost aristocratic disdain for things: there is no need to name them, only a morbid curiosity dwells on them. Sylvia answers unhurriedly and then notes in her diary: *Today the hive arrived. Barely had time to see it, but the play is to work tomorrow. Letter to my mother, despite growing unwillingness. Rain, but the chill has lessened.* Later, the first line of the entry grows into a poem: in a single stroke, barely half an hour, the oddness of creation, a bit of fever.

At some point, the nanny knocks at the door and enters asking about diapers; you give her a smile, at length, absentmindedly, robot-like: as if they were calling you from the other side. Then she carefully folds the letter and slips it into the envelope; a few final corrections while wandering through the room. She peeks outside, closes the window, hears the mechanical sounds of the crickets. Orders her table; *when she gets this letter*, she thinks.

## Rooks

Outside my room,  
across the street,  
an old stone wall  
is a nest of rooks:  
tiny notches,  
black cracks in the brickwork  
from which there hang threads,  
traces of mud and seeds  
hidden days before,  
safe from the wind.

Some afternoons,  
in the light of February,  
the rooks fly down to the ground:  
an abandoned lot,  
haggard ditches,  
sand and gravel.  
Nothing to see,  
nothing  
to fill one's mouth:  
they only squawk and squawk,  
layabouts,  
boasting of the racket they make.

To be who takes care  
of lowering the shutters.  
Thus the afternoon folds on itself,  
occupies its perimeter.  
The chisel of fear  
comes later, darker,  
flowing through the blood,  
and everything is a yearning  
to be elsewhere,  
another life. At night,

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bound to the line of the dream,  
the rooks return to the vacant lot,  
but there their shrieking  
is inaudible,  
a single syllable that taps,  
slyly,  
at flesh-level.

*It is my name*, says the thirst.  
*It is my name*, says the waiting.

1993/2013

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