



CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE
AZORES

Personalities



**ROBERTO
DE MESQUITA**

Despite having almost always lived in Flores Island – with short stays in Terceira, Faial, Pico and Corvo Islands, and a single trip of a few months to mainland Portugal – and having published only one book, *Almas Cativas* (Captive Souls) (an expression taken from the last verse of the first sonnet in Antero de Quental's poem, "Redenção" [Redemption]), published at a later date (1931), the poet ROBERTO DE MESQUITA (1871-1923) is one of the most remarkable names in Portuguese Symbolist poetry: according to Vitorino Nemésio, who first drew attention to his poetry, «Roberto de Mesquita requests an important spot in Portuguese Symbolism, next to its princes, who shouldn't be embarrassed for his not being a resounding company (António Nobre, Camilo Pessanha, Eugénio de Castro), and that he is the first poet to express something essential on the human condition the way it presents itself in the Azores Islands» (Nemésio, 1939).

Born in Santa Cruz das Flores, into a family of the small local aristocracy, Roberto de Mesquita could not pursue an education beyond high school, from which he graduated in Horta High School, since his parents didn't have the means to support two sons studying in the mainland: the older brother, Carlos de Mesquita, a poet of merit, was already in Coimbra attending University. Resigned, the young Roberto de Mesquita returned to his home island, where he became, although with a certain geographical intermittence, a Treasury clerk in Santa Cruz and Lajes, and also in S. Roque do Pico and Corvo. Meanwhile, through his brother Carlos, a teacher in Viseu, he kept in touch with the happenings of the Portuguese and European literary environment, and he composed his poetic work which, although small – a poetry book and about two dozen poems published in dispersed local newspapers and magazines (Santa Cruz, Horta and Ponta Delgada) and some nationals (*A Ilustração Portuguesa*, Lisbon, *Ave Azul*, Viseu, and *Os Novos*, a Coimbra Symbolist Magazine) – it occupied, once divulged by Vitorino Nemésio, and later by Pedro da Silveira and Jacinto do Prado Coelho, a first tier rank in the Portuguese symbolist trend.

Roberto de Mesquita did his job as a civil servant in an unmotivated manner, to the point of having been punished (compulsory transfer to the Island of Corvo, 1912-1913) and a disciplinary process for lack of professional zeal (1915), which isn't surprising if we take into account the dryness of an administrative and bureaucratic profession, which served him exclusively to make a living, in the face of a poet's great sensitivity whom, almost without leaving the little and isolated Island of Flores, managed to accompany the best Parnassian and Symbolist poetry being produced in Portugal, and in Europe, to which he gave a precious contribution. Jacinto do Prado Coelho even stated that «in the isolation of Flores, the poet integrated himself perfectly, in many ways, in the "climate" of French Symbolism – as if not leaving his home» – adding that, in his poetry, «tied to the remote island, landscapes and soul states, so often Verlainian, are also typically Symbolist: the dusk, the Autumn, the mist, the rain, boredom, melancholy, sparse sobbing, nostalgia, longing», and that in another «Verlainian corner of Roberto de Mesquita, where the *Fêtes Galantes* influence shows through, is the nostalgia of abolished times, with their aristocratic effulgence, their "departed elegances", "deceased fashions", park or lounge parties, minuets, masked balls, harlequins and pierrots; the melancholic charm of the old albums, of houses either abandoned or in ruins, of the mossy stones. The poet escapes into the past, "breathes" romance and ballads, dreams» (Coelho, 1973).

With unknown social life, unhappy in love – in 1907 he called off a wedding to the one of whom is said to have been his great love (and who would die single, after having dressed in mourning

black for his death...), marrying, the following year, D. Maria Alice Lopes, in what was held as a marriage of circumstance, without understanding or procreation – a frustrated military man, a republican, a substitute municipal councilman, a Spiritism practitioner, Roberto de Mesquita has left us a life which, in its essence, is his poetry. Which is not much, and yet is so much.

One of the purest Portuguese Symbolist poets passed away reciting verse in Portuguese and French – it is unknown which or whose – on the final day of 1923, he was buried on the first of 1924 at the sound of a funeral march played by the Filarmónica União Musical Florentina, where he had played first-clarinet.

Credits:

COELHO, Jacinto do Prado (1973). “Roberto de Mesquita e o Simbolismo” (Roberto de Mesquita and Symbolism), preface to SILVEIRA (1973).

NEMÉSIO, Vitorino (1939). “O Poeta e o Isolamento: Roberto de Mesquita” (The Poet and Isolation: Roberto de Mesquita). Coimbra: Revista de Portugal, vol. II, 6, January, 1939, pp. 246-261. Reedited in Conhecimento de Poesia (Knowledge of Poetry). Salvador: Bahia University, 1958; Lisbon: Editorial Verbo, 1970, pp. 131-149.

SILVEIRA, Pedro da (1973). Roberto de Mesquita, Almas Cativas e Poemas Dispersos (Captive Souls and Scattered Poems). Text establishment, compilation of scattered texts and notes (...), with a preface by Jacinto do Prado Coelho. Lisbon: Edições Ática.

To define the routes in this Itinerary, we had the indispensable cooperation of

Luís Filipe Noia Gomes Vieira, Flores Museum Director.



«Here, I take the word “isolation” in its etymological sense: an island's loneliness. A man on a rock, surrounded by the sea. It was in this equation that the poet Roberto de Mesquita naturally found himself, of whom surely no connoisseur of Portuguese poetry has ever heard, for the simple reason that the only book he left us, “Almas Cativas” (Captive Souls), was poorly published in 1931, on a pink cover pamphlet, on worn out yellow paper, not at all seductive. (...) And that's not all; also because Portugal lets flow the torrent of its versed books with no poetry filter. If fashion helps, if the author knows how to launch his product, if a sincere or a snob circle forms, fine! But how would such things reach this Treasury clerk from Flores Island, who died unedited and spent his whole life (...) smoking, a cane on his shoulders, on the fringe of the Gulf-Stream (...).»

Vitorino Nemésio

Our tour of Roberto de Mesquita's Flores starts here. The Franciscan convent of São Boaventura was founded in 1651, and now houses the **Flores Museum**. Inside, one can admire the elegant simplicity of the



2 **Cloister** which might have inspired Roberto de Mesquita's sonnet “Melancholy”

MELANCHOLY

*I entered the cloister: the fountain, as before,
Sang in the marble basin
– But a vast silence shrouded
The sad uninhabited mansion.*

*From the ground sprouted, flourishing,
Wild flowers, mosses, weeds.
And the dead monastery carried
My soul to distant times.*

*«Arise, good monks!», with a roar
I then shouted in the sleeping cloister,
The centuries have anointed with sorrow.*

*Alas, my urgent appeal
Is answered only in a painstaking psalm,
By the ailing voice of the wind that there prays...*

SANTA CRUZ – We start the tour on foot

1 São Boaventura Convent



Leaving **Largo 25 de Abril**, next to the Convent, head towards **Rua da Conceição**, where we find



3 **The house** where Roberto de Mesquita lived, wrote and passed away

A MAGE S TOWER

*The sad house where I live rises
Amongst plain white houses
That, on this golden Spring,
Like dazzled eyes, open their windows.*

*Only my building is shut and dumb on the road;
Everyone calls it the abandoned house.*

*The windows in the houses next to me
Drink from life's odd symphony:
Screams of pain, songs of joy,
Funeral bells and wedding bells.*

*Only my building is void of windows into life;
Everyone calls it the sleeping house.*

*One sees the other houses staring,
Through this tender loving April sun,
The crowd of those laboring
As if in a laborious anthill.*

*But my building only receives light
Through an open skylight on the roof
From where only the immensity's blue is sighted
Velvety and remote...*

*The vast church of an abandoned convent,
The old gold, the windows, the architecture,
Speak to the souls with a raised psalm
In the solemn dumbness of the vast dark aisle.*

*Anointed with an ascetic, sacred silence,
The old temple in a meditative look,
A look of absent primitive clairvoyance
Plunged into an alien vision...*

*A permanent twilight semidarkness
Wraps the shapes; and in the placid setting,
Where ancient perfumes unknown to me lie,*

*My soul as if breathing holy legends
Of medieval nuns, of mystical princesses
Asleep in the august sarcophagi...*

*Next, head down the same street until we
find the*



4 **Mother Church**, dedicated to Our Lady of Conceição, where Roberto de Mesquita was baptized

*Heading down the same street, we
pass the*



5 **Poças Harbor**, from where ships depart to Corvo

Head left through Avenida Diogo de Teive, by the sea, and make a left into Rua Senador André de Freitas and go up until Praça Marquês de Pombal, where we find the



6 **House of the Holy Spirit**



Ad in the newspaper *A Seringa*, no. 1, May 27th 1917. It was a prank, allusive to Roberto de Mesquita's habit of spending long hours talking to friends and acquaintances.

Return to Largo 25 de Abril, in front of São Boaventura Convent.

We start the tour by car

Leaving Largo 25 de Abril, head down Rua da Conceição, make a right at Travessa da Igreja, head up Rua Dr. Armas da Silveira and make a left at Avenida Príncipe de Mónaco. Head forward, circumvent the Airport, and reach the roundabout. Take the second exit to Estrada Regional 1-2A and carry on until Rua das Flores, where we find the



7 **House where Roberto de Mesquita was born** and lived until he married

ABANDONED

*The old house where I once lived
Long since uninhabited
And silent wraps me in seeing me now,
In a sad abandoned lover's gaze.*

*With such bitterness inside cries
A sensitive ignored soul
Voiceless to complain, although
Seeing herself alone, forsaken by all!*

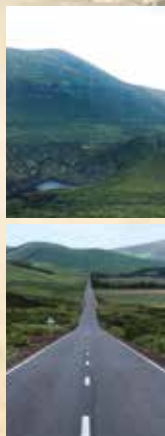
*You cold deserted house aging
In abandonment, without affection,
I feel you see me, you know me*

*And remember days long gone...
I have forgotten you, friend, and you seem
All hurt by such ingratitude...*



8 Island Interior

Return to **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, towards **Vila das Lajes**, converging with **Estrada Regional 2-2A**, heading **Southwest**, where one find the breathtaking views of the



9 Ribeira Grande Waterfalls

Fields, green lush ravines, trees
Dressing the mountains like soft velvet...
The afternoon, a faraway bell raises its call
To the evening blue, as deep as a secret...

- 1871** **June 19th:** ROBERTO DE MESQUITA Henriques was born in Santa Cruz das Flores, into a family belonging to the small local aristocracy. His older brother, Carlos de Mesquita, had been born on February 14th, 1870.
-
- 1878** **Autumn:** He enrolled into the royal school of Santa Cruz.
-
- 1885** **September:** He enrolled in Angra do Heroísmo high school, where his brother Carlos already was. He acquired an interest for literary creation.
-
- 1886** **June:** Having been unsuccessful, he returned to Flores.
October: Matricula-se no Liceu da Horta.
-
- 1887** **June:** He concluded the 1st year of high school, having passed at all subjects.
-
- 1890** **March 1st:** He published his first poem, the sonnet “Fé” (Faith), in the newspaper O Amigo do Povo, Santa Cruz das Flores, under the pseudonym Raúl Montanha. **June 4th:** He published the poem “O Último Olhar” (The Last Look), in Diário de Anúncios, Ponta Delgada.
-
- 1891** **January 31st:** He published the poem “Na Aldeia” (In the Village), in the newspaper A Ilha das Flores, under the name Roberto Mesquita.
February 22nd: He published the poem “Remember” in the newspaper O Açoriano, Horta. April 26th: he published the sonnet “Doente” (Ill) in the same newspaper.
August 9th: He published the sonnet “Flor Murcha” (Withered Flower) in A Ilha das Flores. September 27th: he published the poem “Dia Santo” (Holy Day) in O Açoriano.
November 8th: He published the poem “Crepuscular” (Crepuscular) in the same newspaper. He concluded the 3rd year of High School. Due to the family's financial difficulties, he was unable to attend the Army School, in Lisbon, as he wished and so, he returned to Flores.
-
- 1892** **February 1st:** He published a first draft of the poem “Of the Soul Book” in Revista Faialense. April 3rd: he published the poem “A Janela do Poeta” (The Poet's Window) in O Açoriano.
November 20th: He published the poem “O Missal” (The Missal) in the same newspaper.
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- 1893** **December:** He published the poem “Do Livro Alma” (Of the Soul Book) in the Symbolist magazine Os Novos, Coimbra.
-
- 1894** He travelled to Horta to report for military inspection, having been declared exempt.
-
- 1896** He was elected substitute councillor to the Santa Cruz das Flores City Hall.
August 13th: He was approved for the position of Treasury clerk, and was nominated for Ferreira do Zêzere Township.
November 16th: He was appointed to São Roque do Pico, after asking for a transfer, settling in Cais do Pico. He was initiated in Spiritism.
-
- 1898** **April 2nd:** He was transferred to the Treasury Office of Santa Cruz das Flores. August 7th: he published the poem “Vilancico” (Carol) in the newspaper Actualidade, Ponta Delgada.
-
- 1899** **February 26th:** He published the poem “Primavera dos Mortos” (Spring of the Dead) in Actualidade.
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- 1900** **June 24th:** He published the sonnet “Romanticismo” (Romanticism) in O Faialense, Horta.
August 6th: Intern chief of the Treasury Office of Lajes das Flores.
August 19th: He published the sonnet “Já se me apagam n'alma brilho e cor” (Brightness and color fade out in my soul).
October-November: He published the poem “Além...” (Beyond...) in Ave Azul, a magazine from Viseu.
December 16th: He published, in the same newspaper, the poem “Perante a Face da Noite” (Before the Face of Night).
December 30th: He published the sonnet “Azul de Inverno” (Winter Blue), in the same newspaper.
-
- 1901** **June 23rd:** He published the sonnet “Mar Largo” (Wide Sea) in O Faialense. He returned to Santa Cruz, and later, to Lajes.
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- 1902** **April 12th:** He was appointed second aspirant in the Treasury Office of Santa Cruz das Flores.
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- 1904** **February 17th:** He travelled to Lisbon to apply for Treasury clerk, a job he got. He travelled to Viseu, where his brother Carlos was a teacher, and to Coimbra, where he met Eugénio de Castro and Manuel da Silva Gaio.
April 5th: His father, António Fernando de Mesquita Henriques passed away. May 6th: he boarded a ship, in Lisbon, heading back to Flores.
June 5th: He was a clerk in the Treasury office of Santa Cruz das Flores.

- 1907** He joined the republican ideology.
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- 1908** **May 31st:** He married Maria Alice Lopes, a teacher in Santa Cruz, with whom he had no children.
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- 1910** **November:** he was a member of the installing committee for the Portuguese Republican Party in Flores Island. He interrupted his collaboration with newspapers.
-
- 1911** **November 29th:** After a case of embezzlement in the Santa Cruz Treasury Offices, which he managed, involving a relative who had, in the meantime, committed suicide, and having been found guilty of negligence, he was compulsorily transferred to the island of Corvo.
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- 1912** **April 13th:** He took office as Treasury Manager in Corvo Island.
-
- 1913** **April 2nd:** He was inducted as Manager of the Treasury Office of Lajes das Flores.
-
- 1915** He was subject to disciplinary proceeding for lack of professional zeal.
-
- 1916** **May 9th:** His brother Carlos de Mesquita passed away, in Viseu.
-
- 1917** **April 15th:** He subscribed the editorial-program of the republican newspaper Açoriano Ocidental, Santa Cruz.
June 2nd, 9th: He published the only known article attributed to him, "Uma Sardinha Intolerante" (An Intolerant Sardine), in this same newspaper, under the pseudonym Rafael de Mântua.
-
- 1919** **September 21st:** He was transferred to Santa Cruz, as Office Manager.
-
- 1921** His mother, D. Maria Amélia de Freitas Henriques, passed away.
December 1st: He published the sonnet "Igreja Morta" (Dead Church) in O Arauto, Horta.
-
- 1922** **March 11th:** He published the satirical poem "A um Poeta Novo" (To a New Poet), his last known poem, in O Florentino, under the pseudonym Diatribe.
October 28th: Ilustração Portuguesa magazine, Lisbon, published the sonnet "Melancolia" (Melancholy), together with a portrait of the poet, by initiative of the Flores-born reporter and writer António Maria de Freitas (Santa Cruz, 1859-Lisbon, 1923), chief-editor of the newspaper O Século and general secretary and the actual manager of Ilustração.
-
- 1923** **November:** He fell ill, with a swelling on his neck. December 26th: he became delirious, mumbling poetry in Portuguese and French. **December 31st:** He passed away in his house, in Santa Cruz das Flores.
-
- 1931** The book Almas Cativas (Captive Souls) was published in Vila Nova de Famalicão, with a preface by Marcelino Lima, in a small and humble edition, promoted by his widow, Maria Alice Lopes, and by the poet's sister, Júlia de Mesquita.
-
- 1939** **January:** Vítorino Nemésio published the essay "O Poeta e o Isolamento" (The Poet and Isolation: Roberto de Mesquita) in Revista de Portugal, consecrating Roberto de Mesquita as a first tier poet in Portuguese Symbolism.
-
- 1973** Almas Cativas e Poemas Dispersos (Captive Souls and Scattered Poems) (Lisbon) was published, and edited by Pedro da Silveira, with a preface by Jacinto do Prado Coelho.
-
- 1989** A bronze bust of the poet, by the sculptor Raposo de França, was inaugurated next to the house where he lived and died, now Roberto de Mesquita Square.

Head down towards



11 Fajã Grande Harbor

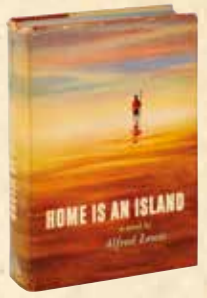
Return through the same **Municipal Road** to the extension that accesses **Fajãzinha** parish, where one can see, at **Rua do Pico Redondo**, the



12 House where the Portuguese-American writer Alfred Lewis was born



Alfred Lewis (1902-1977)



Novelist, short story writer, poet and playwright, **Alfred Lewis** – born **Alfredo Luís** – emigrated to the United States in 1922. Two years in a row (1949 and 1950), he published short stories in *Prairie Schooner*, a nationally prestigious literary magazine, which also integrated the anthology *The Best American Short Stories*. Amongst his work, the novel **Home is an Island** (New York: Random House, 1951), which was reviewed in the great American newspapers, including the *New York Times*, stands out, confirming Alfred Lewis as the most prominent Portuguese emigrant writer in the United States.

From here, retake the **Municipal Road**, and then head South through **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, passing by

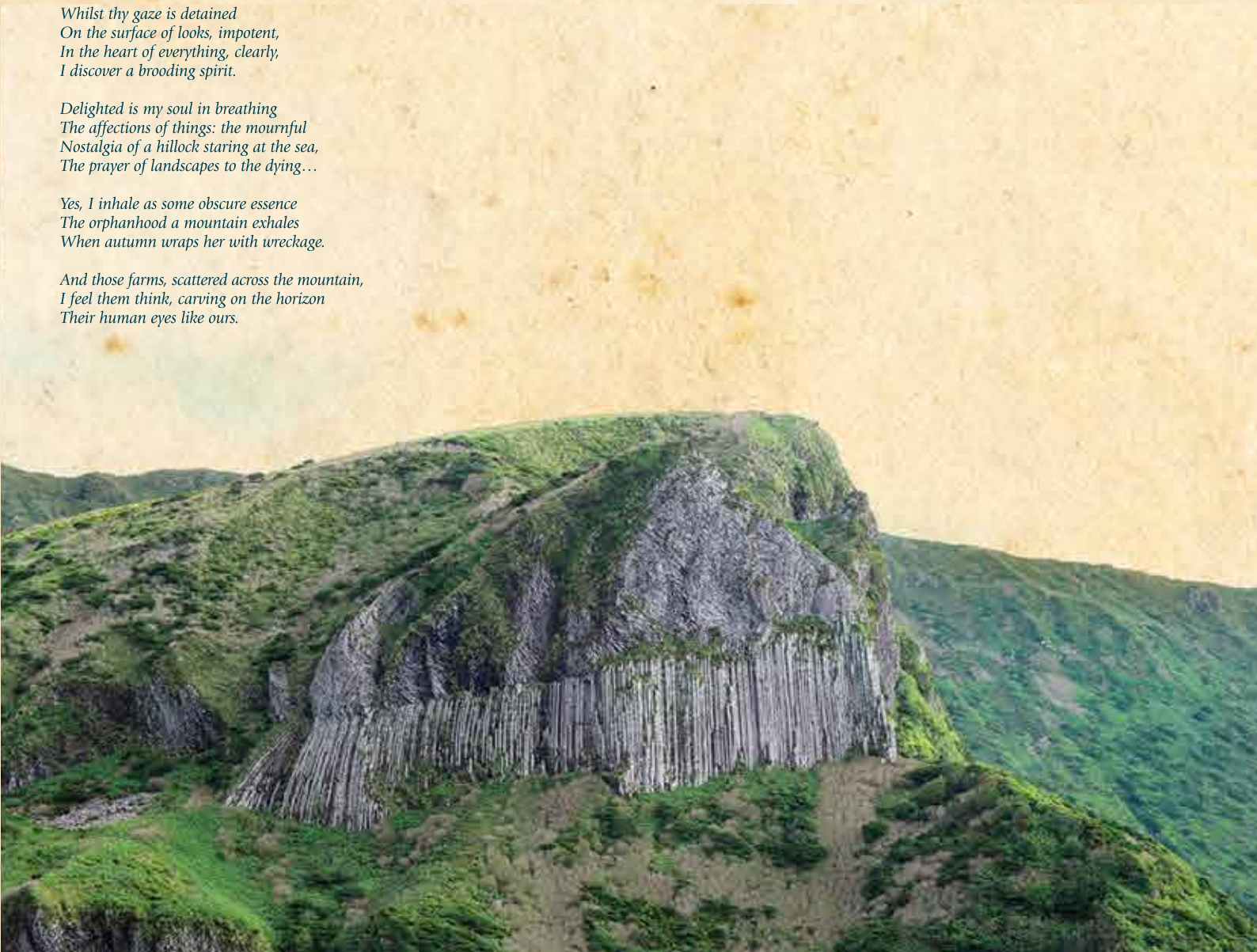
13 Bordões Rock

*Whilst thy gaze is detained
On the surface of looks, impotent,
In the heart of everything, clearly,
I discover a brooding spirit.*

*Delighted is my soul in breathing
The affections of things: the mournful
Nostalgia of a hillock staring at the sea,
The prayer of landscapes to the dying...*

*Yes, I inhale as some obscure essence
The orphanhood a mountain exhales
When autumn wraps her with wreckage.*

*And those farms, scattered across the mountain,
I feel them think, carving on the horizon
Their human eyes like ours.*



Carrying down the same road towards **Vila das Lajes** where, at **Rua Roberto de Mesquita**, one can see the

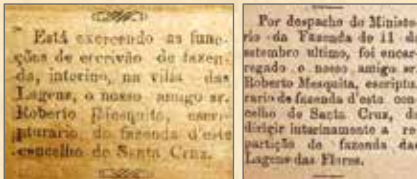


14 House where the poet lived while he worked in Lajes

... until we reach the parish of



17 Ponta Delgada, in the far north of the Island...



A Ilha das Flores, n.º 1, 5-10-1901

A Ilha das Flores, n.º 3, 5-11-1901

... and head down to



18 Ponta Delgada harbor...

Head **Northeast** down **Estrada Regional 1-2A**, towards **Vila de Santa Cruz**, following the same road, where one can enjoy



15 Views of the sea and Corvo

In the **Tapada da Forcada** area, on the same road, one can admire other



16 Inner Island scenery...

... where the tour ends. From here, the traveller might get lost in the inhabited solitude that is the Island of Flores – and, who knows, listen to the echoes of the voice of Roberto de Mesquita, who was born, lived and passed away here...

EXILED

*When the evening Light loosens in the West,
Laying nostalgic tones on the velvet evening,
And the mystical emotion that manifests in everything
Echoes in the vibration of a plangent angelus*

*For whom in a foreign land evokes the absent home
Exile becomes rougher and more oppressive,
And in his heart, like an acute spirit,
The now more pungent nostalgia is carved.*

*But there is no one, who like me, is exiled
In their own homeland, feeling that odd longing
That morbidly grows in my heart*

*In the evening my gaze sometimes turns to the faraway:
Longing for a country more vague than a dream
Which I shall never see, nor do I know where it
hides...*

GAZING INTO THE FARAWAY

*The tropical day heat is appeased,
The sleepy evening is a velvety caress.
Under the slow wither of the evening gold
The mirror sea, like an immense lake, sleeps.*

*Indented in the red setting sky
Isolated, two pines grow on a ridge
And vaguely seem to gaze upon the faraway
By the magic splendor of the evening dazzled...*

*And in seeing them ecstatic on high, one would say
Their souls are penetrated by that melancholy
That comes in the late evening to anoint the immensity.*

*I believe an undefined slumber absorbs them,
That they brood, staring at the polished steel sea,
And a vague yonder they nostalgically remember...*



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Governo dos Açores

SECRETARIA REGIONAL DA EDUCAÇÃO, CIÊNCIA E CULTURA
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