

Bento Teixeira Pinto (Porto, Portugal, 1561-Lisbon, Portugal, 1600)

Bento Teixeira was born to a family of New Christians in a time when Judaizers were persecuted and punished for their beliefs and practices. His father, Manuel Álvares de Barros, was a sincere convert, while his mother, Lianor Rodrigues, was a crypto-Jew. Lianor “initiated her son into the Law of Moses,” although that meant that young Bento had to suffer his father’s fierce opposition (Galante de Sousa 12).

In search of a better life, the family moved to Brazil in 1567. They lived first in the Capitania do Espírito Santo, and then in Ríó de Janeiro (1576). In both places Bento had the opportunity to receive a good Catholic education at Jesuit schools. He later continued his education in Bahia, where the family moved in 1579; after his parents passed away, he continued his education with the support of church dignitaries. Around the year 1583 Bento married an Old Christian named Filipa Raposa. He worked as a teacher in several cities at schools established and directed by himself, sometimes with his wife as his assistant.

In 1594, Bento Teixeira’s life made a dramatic turn. In January he had to appear before the Visitador of the Inquisition at Olinda. And on December of that year he killed his wife, presumably because she had been unfaithful. After this horrible act, he took refuge at the Monastery of Saint Benito, in the same city, where he wrote *Prosopopeia*, for which he is now considered the initiator of Baroque literature in Brazil and one of its first writers. In 1595, he tried to escape from Olinda but was arrested, and in 1596 he was taken to Lisbon. He was tried and repented in an Auto-da-fé that took place on January 31, 1699. He was freed on probation, but since he was already very sick, he died the following year (Galante de Sousa 11-12).

Published for the first time in Brazil in 1601. *Prosopopeia* is a long poem of 752 hendecasyllable lines organized in 94 stanzas of eight lines each known as real octave. Prosopopeia literally means personification. Here it also means a discourse attributed to a real or fictitious character; in the poem this character is Proteus. The poem sings the deeds of the Albuquerque family, mainly of Jorge de Albuquerque (1539-ca.-1596), who participated in a military campaign against the indigenous people in the Pernambuco area from 1560 to 1565.

Work Cited

Galante de Sousa, José. *Em tôrno do poeta Bento Teixeira*. São Paulo, Brasil: Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros, 1972.