

*The ADVENTURES and MISADVENTURES
of the EXTRAORDINARY and ADMIRABLE*
JOAN ORPÍ,
Conquistador and Founder of New Catalonia

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**Council on
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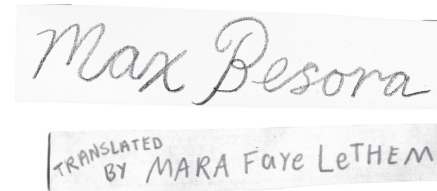


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Preamble

Everything we know about the figure of Joan Orpí del Pou (Piera, 1593–New Barcelona, 1645), founder of our country, we know thanks to the historian and geographer Pau Vila, who states, in his rigorous, severe biography—the only one to date—that Orpí was “a Catalan man who went through a lot and managed to come through it all.”¹ However, that study was the last of any research into this personage—a Catalan lawyer who worked for the Spanish Crown, became a conquistador and, finally, founded New Catalonia on the other side of the world—as the Chronicles of the Indies and modern historiography have, generally, shrouded him in silence.

About a year ago, however, destiny or providence brought to my hands an unpublished volume that shed further light on our character’s story. It was while I was in the Archives of

1. See *Joan Orpí, l’home de la Nova Catalunya* (Ariel, Barcelona, 1967) and the later edition, expanded and translated into Spanish by Pau Vila himself: *Gestas de Juan Orpín, en su fundación de Barcelona y defensa de Oriente* (Universidad Central de Venezuela, Venezuela, 1975).

the Indies in Seville researching some *relaciones de servicio*² from the conquest, when a sheaf of old papers tied together with a goatskin cord fell to the floor. The text had a printed cover but the pages inside were written in a shaky hand faded by the passage of time. The poorly cut and glued paper and the lack of stains made it clear that it was an unpublished document. After a few months of furious literary archeology, during which time I deciphered and copied the text, I came to find some wholly surprising results. The book was written by an anonymous soldier who, during the 1714 Siege of Barcelona, had transcribed his captain's oral narration of the life and adventures of a man named Joan Orpí, who had lived in the century prior. The manuscript was not published or distributed in its time, nor in the centuries that followed, remaining forgotten in that dusty corner of the archives, until I "stole" it in order to make its contents known to both the scientific and lay communities.

Now, would it be accurate to call those soldiers from 1714 "historians"? The answer is uncertain. In fact, it's more than likely that this document is as dubious—if not more so—as the Ossianic poems, the *Fragmentum Petronii*, or Scheurmann's *Der Papalagi*, and we have made that clear in this critical edition, in which the dates do not always match up with the accepted timeline. It is precisely in such manuscripts as ours, which is to say deriving from an oral source, that such historiographical problems often crop up. How much truth is there in this document? To what extent does literature reflect society and to what extent does history? How does literature transform our perception of history? These questions, while perfectly legitimate, open up a whole can of worms, since any

2. *i.e.* Reports delivered to the Spanish Crown in order to obtain recognition for successful missions and compensation in the form of pensions and other rewards from the royal authorities.

close inspection of history books soon reveals divergences. *The Adventures and Misadventures of Joan Orpí* blurs the distinction between poesis and mimesis (or what boils down to the same thing: invention versus history, because they are but two faces of a single coin), and employs an extraordinary variety of narrative strategies including the picaresque, rumors, decrees of the period, annotations, chronicles, legends, official government papers and files, myths, letters, fables, songs, contradictory narratives ranging from popular to elitist, hegemonic and counterhegemonic, with trips down to various hells, legal treatises, the Byzantine or chivalric novel³, records, polemic tracts, catechisms and sermons, the rhetoric of the heroic epic, biography, allegory, satire, and, of course, the historical events of the conquest of America that later would become legendary in the conquistadors' own words, in *The Chronicles of the Indies*.

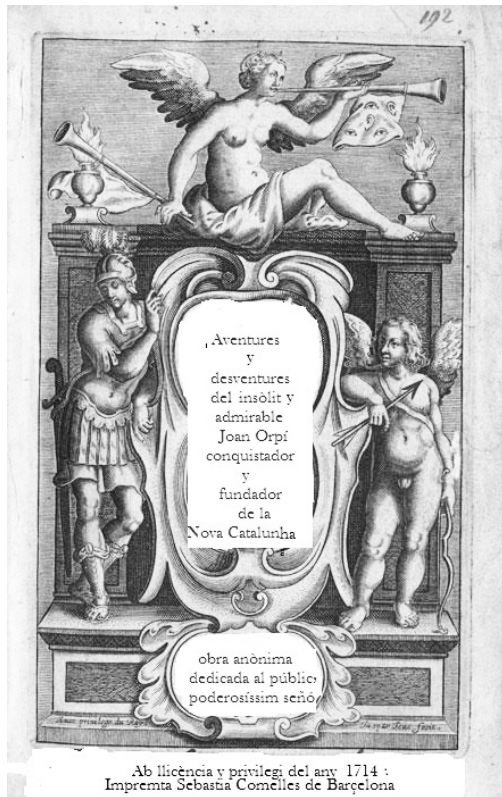
In short, this text offers a wide range of narrative resources that fill in the blanks left by Pau Vila's biography, and show Joan Orpí moving between two very different times: Catalonia on the Iberian peninsula and New Catalonia on the American continent; modern Europe and "primitive" America; the Baroque world and the incipient Enlightenment; the mechanistic and the magical views of the world; always between two spaces, constantly fluctuating between the real and the imagined. This ambiguity allows us to use this historical personage as an instrument for reinterpreting the subject in history, for rethinking the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, as well as the figure of a person made metaphor who must face up to the failure of a utopia and accept

3. The subtle distinction between fantasy and reality, on which the power of conviction of many chivalric novels lies, was due to the audience's demand for guaranteed true events. Often, in their prologues, they claimed to be adaptations of some original document or a manuscript happened upon by chance.

Sic transit gloria mundi, a person who created an alternative historical reality.

To conclude this introductory note, we want to point out that we decided to revise the manuscript, transporting the narrator's voice to modern Neo-Catalan and leaving only the dialogue in the original language, to avoid losing contemporary readers' interest. That said, we have kept the changes and annotations to an absolute minimum, except for the footnotes (which meet the criteria for the quality and precision demanded by the Academy) used to correct some historiographical errors or simply insert information to allow modern readers to judge for themselves.

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*Dicere etiam solebat nullum esse librum tam
malum ut non aliqua parte prodesset*
Gaius Plinius Secundus, *Epistulae*, III, v. 10

4. *i.e.* The original cover to the manuscript. The printing house of Sebastià Comelles was famous in its day for publishing the works of Lope de Vega and Avellaneda's apocryphal third volume of *Don Quixote*. However, neither the font size of this manuscript's title nor the metal type match with the Barcelona printer's typical style. Not to mention that the rest of the text is written out by hand. As such, we've deduced that this cover is merely an intellectual forgery, as I explain in further detail in an essay entitled "Joan Orpí: History or Literature?" (Edicions La Parranda, 2097).

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*September 10, 1714,
The Siege of Barcelona*

A group of infantry soldiers and their captain opt to smoke and drink in an abandoned theater rather than be stationed at the walls, firing against the Bourbon troops. Bombs fall on the city night and day, ceaselessly. Everything is ruin and desolation. Death hangs gloomily over everyone, scythe at the ready.

“What mindless suicide!” one of the soldiers suddenly exclaims. “We shall die as rats yf we continue on this way. A pox upon the Hapsburgs and a pox upon the Bourbons: *Ni dieu ni maître!*”

“Die as dogs, jolt-head!” chides another soldier. “I should beat thee down at present! For at least we shall make history! They’ll write book after book about us, they will erect museums, make paintings, write poems in our honor . . . we shall be heroes of the fatherland!”

“Aye, if there’s any fatherland left,” grumbles a third infantryman.

“I had rather be a living deserter than a dead patriot,” muses a fourth soldier.

“That’s enough! Quiet, all ye!” bellows the troop’s captain. “Chance to die and chance to live but, in any case, remember that the fatherland doesn’t always coincide with the territory. I wot the tale of a man named Joan Orpí, who refounded our Catalonia on the other side of the globe, less than a century hence. On my word.”

“Incredible!”

“Cock and pie!”

“And what befell henceforward, Captain?”

“And what befell henceforward, bid ye? Well, in ’is quest to try that all, he lived a thousand and one adventures,” declares the captain. “Ye shant find these in any book of history, yet they be no less memorable or less important. *Au contraire*. Would ye care to hark, and forbear complaining for a time?”

The infantry soldiers smile like children, nod their heads, and perk up their ears. They pour more wine and pass around tobacco. The captain/narrator lights his wooden pipe and begins his declamation.

“Who was this adventurer what founded a New Catalonia thousands of leagues away, yet went to the diet of worms leaving naught a trace in our history?”

“Joan Orpí!” one soldier shrieks.

“Precisely! Who traversed seas fill’d withe mythical monsters and virgin forests at risk to his life (and the lives of many others) for a fistful of gold coins and (perchance) posthumous glory . . . ?”

“Orpí . . . !” bellows a soldier.

“The selfsame! And who risk’d chicaning the very Catholic Kings and came cross’t near as many enemies as friends?”

“Christopher Columbus . . . ?” ventures another soldier.

“No, ya beef-head, none other than Joan Orpí! At least that was what I was told by a corky criollo from the Yndies I happen’d upon one night when tippling in Seville. He quoth

to be a ‘friend of a Catalan conquistador, humble altho an old Christian⁵ and a nobleman of New Andalusia in the Americas, later founder of New Catalonia.’ Thus he even spake Catalan.”

“Hold up . . . one moment, Captain!” says one of the soldiers. “Canst thou truly trust a brandy-face? Art thou convinced the criollo was whom he sayd to be and that he werent lying with a latchet? How many years pass’d betwixt these events and the telling of them? And, once for all, why have I this tic in mine eye each tyme I get nervous?”

“Enuf tilly-tally, soldier, and merely heed the tale,” orders the captain, in a didactic tone. “Whence my ‘informant’ explaint this historical drama to me, the criollo in question were four sheets to the wind. Nonetheless, I didst believe him. And knowth ye why? 1) For the criollo spake Catalan, and 2) for I be a man of faith (faith in the imagination, to be clear!). And now, allow me begin with Chapter XVI, of whych I am inordinately fond.”

5. *i.e.* In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the subject of blood purity divided the Hispanic world into new Christians, in other words, those descended from Arabs or Jews, and old Christians, of pure Christian blood.

Chapter XVI

In which young Orpí celebrates Carnaval
with his fraternity and ends up
dressed as the Stag King

I shall begin with a day when Joan Orpí was celebrating Carnaval. Following the parade, our young hero ended up in a cemetery, where a band of joyous revelers were engaged in a wide range of obscenities. Some were licking others' anuses, some were eating fruits and tomatoes they'd rubbed on their genitals, and others were drinking sacramental wine and masturbating and dancing to the improvised music of drums and tambourines. All were dedicated to the collective ritual, singing, shrieking, praying, making offerings and insinuations, muddy and half nude . . . ducks and rabbits fell at their hands . . . hens were violated and eviscerated . . . some slathered themselves with the blood of the dead animals—

[One instant, Captain . . . halt! Forbear the tale!]

"How now?" he asks, irritated.

"For the lyfe of us, we cannot fathom why thou beginnst with Chapter sixteen. Would logick not state the first Chapter?" asks one of the soldiers.

"Yea, start withe the first! The first!" cry out other soldiers.

"How's that? Doth ye seek the typical story with a beginning, middle, and end?" asks the captain, perplexed. "Dunderheads! Don't ye know that true literature is only true when written against itself? Why put plot over language and form?"

"Here we hie again," complains one of the soldiers. "Art thou one of those pedantic academics, ay? For if that be the case, I prefer to be killt by enemy troops . . ."

"Numbskulls!" bellows the infuriated captain. "When I speak of going against the narration I don't mean there shall bee no story, no adventures, no characters! I speak of the need for a hybrid construction, plurilingualism, exaggeration, hyperbole, pastiche, and bivocal discourse to bring together what convention & morality strive to keep separate. Literature must be a frontal attack designed to suspend all rational judgment in order to reinvent it each second anew!"

"I cannot bear these sermons . . ." says one of the soldiers.

"If he keeps up this proselytizing, I'm outta hither . . ."

"Yawn . . ."

"Fine!" exclaims the captain in exasperation. "Okay, Okay, fine! Quit thine complaining! I shall beginne at the beginning, as you wish! But no more interruptions, I'll lose the thread, and judge me not for mine invention, but rather for the grace of my wit, glossed in three books and their corresponding Chapters, which one of ye shall 'copy' anon. And that's an order!"

Book One



In which is narrated, with great gusto and an eye on posterity, Orpí's infancy and childhood, first in the town of Piera and anon during his studies in the city of Barcelona, where he had varied experiences, as many good as bad, which taught him that life is no bed of roses but rather a long ordeal where one learns from hard knocks, and as such and befitting his story shall be explained perhaps not exactly as it truly happened, but at least quite similarly.

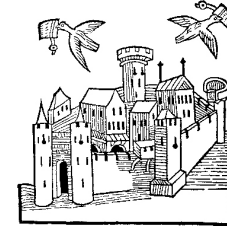
Chapter I

Thus begins the story of Joan Orpí,
indubitably some sort of premonition
of his later life of adventures

It is said that while Joan Orpí's birth was a bit strange, it was highly spectacular, regardless. And if you don't believe me, listen to this: It all began in the small Catalan town of Piera, one evening of the Year of Our Lord Jesus Christ MDXCIII (if I've got my Roman numerals right), when an old, ailing pigeon, wet from the falling rain, flying hither and thither from clouds filled with electrical activity, soared through the trees and sown fields, made three shaky circles around the church bell tower, and floated through the heavens of smoking chimneys in a prodigious final flight, until its wings could take it no further and, finally, amid hoarse *glook-glooks*, it landed clumsily on the angular sill of a window where, agonizing in horrific pain, it consumed its last moments of life in absolute sepulchral silence.

That window belonged to the home of the Orpís, a family of respectable wealth and notable local pedigree, and inside

the room the light given off by three candles revealed spread-eagle legs covered in varicose veins and hair, trembling from the effort of bringing a new soul into the world. Mrs. Orpí was about to birth an infant in such a way that would become legend, and fodder for numerous sessions of rumor-mongering in the town of Piera (at least for the duration of Sunday afternoon).



“Push . . . ! For the love o’God, Eulàlia, push . . . !” shouted old Orpí.

“This child be driven by the Devil, my beloved . . . !” she bellowed, the birth being such great torment that she couldn’t help dire prognosticating.

The woman had flooded the bed with excrement, blood, and other fluids, and was straining her nether regions to get the baby out of her womb once and for all. So loud did she bellow that it seemed the sky would crack and splinter into a thousand shards. Alerted by the hollering, a throng of curious neighbors had gathered outside the house and were pointing their fingers at the window of the Orpís’ home.

“Even me bottom is set to essplode!” she shrieked, her eyes rolling back in her head. “Ay, God’s loaves and fishes . . . I’m dying hither!”

“Come now, woman, don’t scream so, thy serenade of hurtling and shouting shall bringeth all Piera here!”

“Sssh! Quit thy rubbish talk, Pepet,” ordered the woman. “This birth art an executioner come to take me!”

“Peace be quiet, woman, prithee, any moment now he’ll be out in the worlde, a perfect right genius . . . wid a moustache andall!”

“And who woulde have thou believe my baby art a boy-child, big lump?” asked the woman, pushing.

“Come now, woman . . . caint ye see we needs an heir to tend these lands?”

“Always with your mind on coin, vile leech! Whilst here I beest dying of excruciating pain! My wish is a girl and she shall be called Maria . . . hither, thither, and yon!”

“Over my dead bodikins! Firstmost a male heir . . . it’s the least thou canst do!” countered her husband. “And we shall name him Joan, as my father (who art in Heaven), whether thou liketh it or not! I’ll respect thine pain, at least respect mine legacy!”

“If that be true, then thou oughten warn all those whores of yours since, out of respect, thou should lyst only withe your wife!”

“Darent ye commence that ole song & dance, Eulàlia!” bel-
lowed her husband, feigning indignation. “Let us get this birth over withe . . . or I’m like to faint!”

“Oh, yea, sure, when I rayse the subject of the bawds ye frequent in Barcelona, out comes the broom and, flish-flash-flish-flash, thou changeth up the subject right quick . . . ya swine!”

“Eulàlia, cry thee mercy . . .” said her husband, kneeling by the bed. “Quit gabbering and push . . . for the love of all that be holy!”

Just then, at the eleventh-hour, the town midwife rushed in. She was in such a rush that she came wearing just her nightgown and slippers. “Let us see if we caint get this here show upon the road, milady!” she barked with a macaronic howl as Eulàlia’s husband crossed himself. But despite the

best efforts of that expert in births natural and unnatural, it didn’t seem the child would be born that night, nor that the storm had any desire to wane; quite the contrary, the sky spat out its fury harder than ever, with clouds colliding violently and creating brutal electric jolts that fell upon the earth, cleaving mountains, burning forests, and splitting trees in two. So great was the storm that one of those streaks of lightning fell right atop the Orpí home, hid in the chimney, snaked down like a bulimic cosmic worm and burst through the fireplace into the living room, where it hit a dog in the snout. The electrical charge set its pure canine instinct into motion, and it bit one of the servants who was stretched out on a straw bed; the young man leapt up from the pain and banged into a shelf above him, and from the shelf fell a pot containing two thousand Catalan reals, ten gold maravedis, thirty billion castellanos, forty of Barbarossa’s pfennigs, eight liards, five hundred deniers, five croats, two-hundred pounds, eleven 1/3 trentíns, and a bunch of counterfeit money (plentiful as it was throughout the country in that period), of which one coin went flying and, tracing a perfect semicircle, landed in the mouth of the woman giving birth. A curious detail: throughout this entire chain of circumstances, the lightning’s electrons had transferred from one object to the next when they touched, and the coin the woman swallowed sent an electric charge through her entire body, helping her with the final push needed for her to expel—with a shy “oh!”—the newborn from his maternal cave, whilst the coin emerged from her nether-slot in a wholly ultranatural way.

Plof.

Thus was born Joan Orpí del Pou.