

Translating *Ulysses*

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Abstract

In this article Joaquim Mallafrè reflects on the factors that converged in his 1981 translation of *Ulysses* into Catalan, a second edition of which appeared in 1996. These factors include the literary and linguistic formation of the translator, sanctioned and proscribed languages in social life, and the peculiar challenges posed by Joyce's work. The article goes on to detail the method adopted by the translator and to illustrate this method with several examples.

A Portrait of the Translator as a Young Man.

I have been asked more than once about how and when I first thought of translating *Ulysses* into Catalan. It is not easy to answer: I know when I set myself to work, but the interest in Joyce and the idea of reading his famous novel goes far back in time to my school days, when I was sixteen or so, and memories may be blurred. But I shall try to retrace the steps of the process until I decided to translate it, from memory and from some notes I keep.

Literature attracted me. I wrote some (rather bad) poems, and, a naive teenager, dreamt of reading all the great books of the world. I was lucky enough to have a good teacher that now and then told us about some writers not necessarily included in the school program.

We used to translate a lot at high school and I think that was a good training. Translation from Latin was a deconstruction of one language that had to be re-codified in Spanish. I would not dare write in French now, but since my secondary school time I have been able to understand French, to make myself understood, and to read books in French. So, from my experience, those systems based on the translation of *morceaux choisis* were not bad, and, in my opinion, some modern approaches to languages, better as they may be in many aspects, are wanting in translation.

I studied English later, especially when I went to England as an assistant teacher of Spanish in a grammar school. At the time, I could hardly speak English, but having thirty children in a class sharpens your wits for survival. In order to learn a wide vocabulary and become more or less familiar with the syntax, I used to translate poems, prose, advertising, and whatever I could. To translate plays was most interesting because of the dialogues. My first translation of a lengthier piece was John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, and it was gratifying to find expressions, allusions and set phrases faithful to the original in my own language. It had to work well on stage. Listening to a translation or reading it aloud is always a good thing to do for the sake of rhythm and sound and realistic words. We should not forget, though, that, first of all, the translators' responsibility is for the model imposed by the author they are translating, for his thought, language and style, which in translation are to be expressed in the language the translator knows best: his/her own.

At this point, a major fact must be mentioned. Catalan was my mother tongue and Catalan was the everyday language of my family, of our neighbours, of the people in the street, in shops, etc. But under Franco's regime (Sorry, it may be boring to hear the same every time Catalan speakers take the floor and talk about this period, but I think this digression is justified here), under Franco's regime, I say, Catalan was no longer a language of culture. It was deprived of any official status, banned from many places, cinema, books, shows, and public events, and, of course, from school. But orality was strong at the time. Television did not exist, we did not even have a radio set at home, so jokes, songs, and poems were present in family meetings. And in summer, during holidays in a village where I had some relatives, I heard and spoke Catalan all the time. Spanish was only necessary in a bureaucratic world, somehow distant from everyday life at that time. Besides, secular clergy in Catalonia kept the vernacular alive on many occasions, and political authorities did

not dare to oppose them, so, the catechism questions and answers in Catalan when preparing for the first Communion provided me with a more abstract language. The prayers of the Catholic liturgy would give me later the exact translation of some of the references of *Ulysses*, which were more immediately familiar than to a speaker of English that lacked religious learning.

I went to a secondary school, and then to University, and Spanish was *the* language for anything really serious there. I took my degree in Romance languages, taught Spanish Literature, which I am fond of, and I was not aware of what I had been about to lose as far as language is concerned.

Recovering my own language for cultural purposes was the most exciting experience in translating. I rediscovered it while I was remembering and enlarging it through books and classes given, in a hostile context, by people or cultural institutions that believed in a revival of Catalan. And it is amazing how well I knew it in spite of all those years when it was not taken into consideration, not even by me. I spoke Catalan without being conscious of how rooted it was in my inner expression, which the Spanish school was not able to match, although I learnt the structure of language there, through Latin and Spanish, which would serve me well in the future. But Catalan was the language at home, in the streets, in the market, and also the language of tales and novels published before the Civil War and found among other old books when I was a child. Later I read Catalan writers, too, from Ramon Llull and Ausias Marc, to the revivalists of the 19th century. I discovered them later than Spanish classics. I liked these, too, and their language. But the varieties, dialects, registers, undertones that I could sense in Catalan were the ones that could help me in translating such writers for whom language is so rich and complex, as Joyce, Beckett, Pinter, writers that I have translated, attracted by their complexity of their writings.

When Carmelo Medina Casado invited me to contribute to these “Papers on Joyce,” he was looking for “una aproximación personal a la traducción de esta novela [*Ulysses*] que por su dificultad es un excelente ‘test’ para reconocer la madurez de una lengua.”¹ It was exciting to find solutions, from different fields and registers apt to match Joyce’s prose. Catalan had the tools. My duty was to use them as well as possible.

Why did I choose *Ulysses*? I think I heard the novel mentioned for the first time in the classes of Literature at high school. Proust, Joyce, Kafka were the highlights of modern prose, so

it is only natural that a young man keen on Literature was eager to discover their works. But curiously enough, *Ulysses*, a 20th century masterpiece according to our teacher, could not be found in bookshops or in libraries in the late fifties. I was surprised. I learnt that the book had been banned in Nazi Germany, in Communist Russia, in the U.S. By that time I saw a film, *The Young Lions* (“El baile de los malditos” in Spanish), based on Irwin Shaw’s novel, and directed by Edward Dmytryk in 1958. There, private Ackerman, dramatically impersonated by Montgomery Clift, was severely punished for reading *Ulysses*.

Forbidden fruit is sweet. I went to university. In the back room of a bookshop in Barcelona you could buy books by Henry Miller, D. H. Lawrence, especially in South American translations, and works by dissident writers like the ones published by “Ruedo Ibérico.” And there I was able to buy *Ulises* translated by Salas Subirats.²

I confess that I did not finish reading it then. And yet, those fireworks, those displays of language, the stream of consciousness and a lot of devices Joyce used, awakened some parallels, reminded me of something that I could hardly identify, but that left me with the feeling that I had to come back to the book in due time.

Meanwhile I read on Joyce in García Sabell’s *Tres síntomas de Europa*, in Curtius’s *Ensayos críticos acerca de la literatura europea*, and in Eco’s *Obra abierta*, and a couple of biographies. In 1968 I bought *Ulysses* in English, and a year later *Ulisse* in French. In 1972 I translated a couple of pages, just for fun. In summer 1973 I wrote the first chapter and since then I went on translating and getting useful information, although it was after I got the post at the high school in Reus in 1975, that I could devote myself, regularly but unhurriedly, to translating *Ulysses*. At first I had taken pleasure in finding solutions that seemed to me to reflect the puns, the quotations, the living, meandering, colloquial or highly elaborated forms of the original. At a certain point I decided that I would translate the book. I had not got in contact with a publisher, but I was convinced that Joyce’s work would meet with interest, and that my translation would be correct enough to be considered, in view of the encouragement I got.

Apart from high school I had been asked to give some classes in Tarragona when university studies were created there. Jaume Vidal Alcover, a Catalan writer and professor, taught there too, and we used to meet and talk. One day, he and M. Aurèlia

Capmany, another influential writer, came to my house for dinner. I had mentioned to them that I was translating *Ulysses*, and they wanted to know more about it. I read the first chapter and some more passages, and they not only liked them, but told me that they would put me in contact with some publishers. M. Aurèlia Capmany addressed me to a couple of them. They were interested in having the book in Catalan. I signed a contract with the first one, but after some time, the publishing house went bankrupt (it was not my fault, I swear!). A major publisher was then interested, but on studying the cost of a translation of more than seven hundred pages, and considering that there had been a decrease in Catalan translations in the seventies, postponed the project. I am quite sincere if I say that I felt rather relieved. When you sign a contract, you are urged to finish work by a given date, however far in time they fix the limits. I hated to be hurried, the translation of *Ulysses* took its time and I had much work ahead. I was translating the last chapters when Elvira Cobos and Pedro Ancochea offered to publish my translation. They owned “Leteradura,” a bookshop in Barcelona that not only sold books but published them, and reproduced old magazines. They had heard of my translation from some customers and from a couple of articles that mentioned my project. They, wisely, looked for some patrons to pay a given price for a bibliophile copy, which helped them to pay the printing costs of the paperback edition. Cultural activities in Catalan have often needed private support. I was glad to see the book in 1981. It was well received by critics and sold well for Catalan standards. I had not finished work, though. Some years later I had to prepare a new edition according to Hans Walter Gabler’s revision. It appeared in 1996.

Inside *Ulysses*. A search for shared materials.

While translating *Ulysses* I wrote and reviewed and rewrote its pages, looking for a correct solution. There was a lot of cultural and linguistic stuff shared by English and Catalan. I had to investigate it. It was necessary to recover expressions, proverbs, set phrases, songs, jokes, jargons, that would help in finding the correct rendering of Joyce’s. I asked some relatives from town and village for old ways of naming things Joyce mentioned. I met some Gypsies that dealt in scrap iron and whose lingo was useful to translate the verses in the third chapter, for example. I picked up Catalan books of

all ages to render credible the prose of *Oxen of the Sun*. I read the standard Catalan translation of the Bible, of Shakespeare, and other writers quoted or alluded to in *Ulysses* to reproduce a parallel expression. Joyce lived in an oral environment, of which he made use, quoting proverbs, tales, jokes, popular songs and games, and writing with the same resources: puns, set phrases, forms of abuse, down-to-earth verse. At the same time, he was acquainted with Catholic prayers and practices, with literature, legal and medical jargon, opera, the basically written culture. I call this “polis” language, from Greek, that is to say, the language of the city and of politics (modern technologies being absent from Joyce’s world, there is no need for more complex considerations about oral and written in our time).

I became familiar with biographers such as Cixous, Ellmann, Paris, Romana Paci to know more about the man, and was guided by Adams, Benstock, Bowen, Budgen, Burgess, Gilbert, Hart, Hayman, Herring, Litz, Tindall, Senn, Valverde, and many others that brought to light the intricacies of the book. *Allusions in Ulysses. An Annotated List*, by Weldon E. Thornton, was an excellent guideline; Miles Hanley’s *A Word Index to James Joyce’s Ulysses* allowed me to check if a word in a given context had been translated consistently when repeated; I followed the steps of Dedalus and Bloom through the maps of Clive Hart and Leo Knuth in *A Topographical Guide to James Joyce’s Ulysses*. The advantage of translating *Ulysses* is that every chapter, almost every expression has been studied by Joycean scholars; sometimes I had to choose between two different explanations, but the amount of information at hand was enormous. The practical information in the Spanish, French and Italian versions was to be taken into account, too.

Many traditional expressions are found in several languages,³ and many quotations from good books have their correspondence in foreign translations. Joyce uses plenty of previous materials, which he elaborates at will. Attention will be paid to these expressions, in which I tried to reproduce sounds, rhetorical devices, tales, set phrases, quotations, common in Western languages, both in their folklore and their literary tradition; there is a lot of pre-existent stuff that the translator must know. Joyce quoted some piece or fragment, literally or just as an echo of the original, but it was always necessary to detect it. I had always in mind the two concepts, largely discussed among theorists, but useful for my purposes: literality and equivalence, in the sense that the meaning has to be preserved,

sometimes with the same words, sometimes with different words, respectively, according to the best solution for the translation.

Proverbs provide good examples. A clear example of pre-existent literality could be: *To take the bull by the horns* (2.336) / *Agafar el toro per les banyes* (p. 37.29).⁴ The same solution was predictable in other translations: *Prendre le taureau par les cornes* (AM 35), *Prendere il toro per le corna* (GA 34), *Coger al toro por los cuernos* (G&V 2.422).

We may find a good instance of pre-existent equivalence in *Fine goods in small parcels* (11.368) / *Al pot petit hi ha la bona confitura* (276.9), “Good jam is in small jars,” in both cases praising quality over quantity; applied to valuable presents, to women, etc. The same meaning is expressed by different objects in other languages: *Dans les petits pots les bons onguents* (AM 259), *Lo bueno si breve dos veces bueno* (V 420, taken from a saying by Baltasar Gracián), *Nelle botti piccole c'è il vino buono* (GA 258), *El buen perfume en frascos pequeños* (G&V 11.459).

So far, the task of the translator consists of knowing the resources of both languages. He or she has not to look for personal renderings. But more often the parallel does not exist (or the translator does not know of it, or it is not possible because a particular word has to be kept in translation). Then the translator has full responsibility to *adapt* a solution that must refer to the same field intended by the original writer. In this case, adaptation means that the translator has to reconstruct the original text in the translated text, so that it reflects not only the words but the effects added to them: sound, verse, rhyme, proverb, cadence, jargons (literary, scholarly, religious, legal) that the mere translation of words in the code of the translating language would not necessarily reflect. Needless to say, different translators find different solutions.

The adaptation, too, may be literal or equivalent. An example of literal adaptation would be: *In cups of rock it slops: flop, slop, slap: bounded in barrels. And spent, its speech ceases. It flows purling, widely flowing, floating foam pool, flower unfurling* (3.458) / *Clapoteja en gots de roca: toc, xoc, cop, acomboiat en bocois. I, esgotat, exhaureix la xerradissa. Flueix en un murmuri, fluint a l'ample, flotant bassal d'escuma, flor que es forma* (54.14), where, together with a fairly literal rendering, we cannot forget words and sounds that reflect the breaking of the waves on the shore and their softer backward movement.

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An example of equivalent adaptation could be: *I. N. R. I ? No: I. H. S. [...] I have sinned: or no: I have suffered, it is. And the other one? Iron nails ran in (5. 372) / I. N. R. I. ? No: I. H. S. [...] Inic he sigut. O no: Immensament he sofert. I l'altra? Invicte natzarè reu immolat (85.39) "Iniquitous (I) have been" "Immensely (I) have suffered," "Invict Nazarene, immolated defendant." It is not a literal translation, except for a few words, but the priority was the adaptation to the initials, and it is equivalent insofar the sacrifice of Christ is implied, even though *nails* do not appear.*

Apart from these general ways of translating, I gradually became aware that it was important to distribute Joyce's references into separate fields to make it easier to find and control their Catalan counterpart. I must say that I was to develop the full system later,⁵ but I felt, when engaged in translating *Ulysses*, that there were different compartments, and I had to assign my notes and cards accordingly. They would amount to a dozen groups. Here they are.

TRIBE	POLIS
1. Body & Environment	6. Social organization and practice
2. Language	7. Science & Technology
3. Proverbs & Popular knowledge	8. Ideology
4. Spells & Magic	9. Religion
5. Tales & Stories	10. Literary world

THE BRIDGES

11. School
12. Mass media

Five are the stages of oral development: 1) the set pieces of language that refer to the body, movement and environment (nursery and action rhymes, especially); 2) the acquisition of language, from phonetics to semantics; 3) sentences of old to inform or guide us; 4) blessings and curses, terms of abuse or spells that are meant to act through language; and 5) every arrangement that tells a story, from gossip to jokes, songs, and tales.

The polis requires a specific language, somehow parallel to the one from the tribe (physical body vs. body politic), but transcending the area of the tribe, 6) we need identity cards, we must learn how to understand signs, timetables, fill in forms, contracts, the new messages that the city creates; 7) technical terms identify specialized knowledge; 8) governments, industry, politicians try to convince us with their instructions; 9) religions of the Book provide

us with a body of *writings* that establish themselves as a code and a guide, and, finally, 10) the world of literature is not only limited to literary books, but to theatre, movies, opera, all that nourishes the world of fiction, not anonymous any more, at least in its origin.

The bridges between tribe and polis are 11) the school, and, increasingly nowadays, 12) the media. Pupils at Mr Deasy's, like all schoolchildren, learn to read and write and do sums as a training for a life not limited to the countryside, and *The Freeman's Journal* puts people into contact with a wider world and shapes their mind and tastes.

The limits for those fields, and for written and oral, are not clear-cut. A philosophical sentence may become a popular proverb in due time, a proverb may give rise to a tale or vice versa. An expression highly specialized in its origin becomes commonplace in modern cities or adapted to the school needs. But I found it useful to classify the several units of language in those twelve fields, so that Catalan reflected the original as properly as possible.

The scope of this paper does not allow more than a few instances to illustrate my procedure. A single example and a brief note should suffice to illustrate my Catalan translation. As the field of language is more complex, it will be expanded to examples according to sound (2.1), meaning (2.2), rhetorical device (2.3), slang (2.4), names and nicknames (2.5) and set phrases, which act both syntactically and modify the meaning of its components (2.6)

1. *here's the lord mayor, here's his two horses, here's his gingerbread carriage and here he walks in, chinchopper, chinchopper, chinchopper, chin.* (13.258) / *barba barbata, boca boqueta, nas de pericó, ulls de bon minyó, barbata, barbata, bo.* (365.11)

A traditional rhyme played on a baby's face in both languages.

2.1. *Peter Piper pecked a peck of pick of peck of pickled pepper* (9.276) / *En pic pica un poc de pebre Peter Piper té picor* (201.2)

The repetition of letters suggests a tongue twister.

2.2. *I was just going to throw it away [...] Throwaway.* (5.537, 12.1550, etc.) / *també acabarà llençat [...] Llançat.* (90.27, 337.30, etc.)

“It will be thrown (‘llençat’) in the end.” “Llançat” also means “at full speed,” a suitable name for a race horse. The two words are homophonic.

2.3. *Able was I ere I saw Elba.* (7.683) / *Elba m’ailla allí, amable.* (145.5)

“Kind Elba isolates me there.” The palindrome is maintained, and some words of the original as well. A process with some logic may be inferred; Napoleon was able before being confined to the island of Elba, but considering that St Helen was worse, Elba may be seen as a kinder (“amable”) island.

2.4. *Shut your obstropolos* (14.1569) / *Atxanta la mui.* (438.23)

“Shut your mouth” is expressed by a Gypsy expression known to Catalan slang. Slang was the main source for the translation of the last section of chapter XIV.

2.5. *Buck, Blazes, Hoppy...* (*passim*) / *Boc, Brases, Rank...* (*passim*)

Nicknames are translated literally or nearly so (“he-goat,” “live coals,” “hoppy”), as they refer to a trait of the person so called. Besides, they sound like “English” words to Catalan ears.

2.6. *It’s as uncertain as a child’s bottom* (6.138) / *És insegur com el cul del Jaumet* (96.1)

Catalan has the same expression to express constant change or movement, except it calls the child “Jimmy.”

3. *Out of sight, out of mind* (6.872) / *Lluny de la vista, lluny del pensament.* (117.19)

There is literal coincidence in both languages.

4. <i>The curse of my curses</i>	/ <i>Maleït siga Barney Kiernan</i>
<i>Seven days every day</i>	/ <i>set setmanes per setmana</i>
<i>And seven dry Thursdays</i>	/ <i>i set secs dijous de més.</i>
<i>On you, Barney Kiernan</i>	/ <i>Maleït siga Barney Kiernan</i>
<i>Has no sup of water</i>	/ <i>que no em dóna ni un glop d’aigua</i>
<i>To cool my courage</i>	/ <i>ni una poma per a la set.</i>
<i>And my guts red roaring</i>	/ <i>Els budells em grunyen, Lowry,</i>
<i>After Lowry’s lights.</i>	/ <i>quan encens els teus llumets.</i>
(12.740)	(324.23)

We have recourse to literal adaptation, with minor changes for the sake of rhythm.

5. *Tell her a ghost story in bed to make her sleep. Have you ever seen a ghost? Well, I have. It was a pitchdark night. The clock was on the stroke of twelve.* (6.754) / *Explica-li una història de fantasma quan sigueu al lli per fer-la dormir. Has vist mai cap fantasma? Doncs jo sí. Era una nit fosca com una gola de llop. Al toc de les dotze.* (113.40)

It is practically a literal rendering. In Catalan there is an equivalence for “pitchdark”: “dark as a wolf throat.” The last sentences identify topics of tales and ghost stories.

6. *Everything went off A 1* (6. 684) / *Tot ha anat de primera.* (111.37)

A set phrase originated in navigation. A 1 “was used to denote a first-class ship in Lloyd’s Register, and so came to be used as an adjective, in a general sense, for ‘excellent’, etc.”⁶ “De primera” has a similar origin.

7. *mountain gorse* (*Ulex Europeus*) (12.158) / *argelaga de bosc* (*Ulex europeus*) (308.21)

Latin identifies the species and must not be translated. But this link, although not present in the text, has to be found to be sure of the equivalent popular name for plants (scarlet runners, loofah, rape, etc.), and for animals (bluebottle, earwig, lapwing, gunnard, etc.). There are many other such names in *Ulysses*: figures of speech, chemistry, names for illnesses, sports, printing types, and so on.

8. *every country, they say, our own distressful included, has the government it deserves.* (16.1096) / *diuen que cada poble, fins I tot aquesta dissortada pàtria nostra, té el govern que es mereix* (638.9)

Joseph de Maestre’s conservative saying has often become a cliché known to many languages.

9. *They believe in rod, the scourger almighty, creator of hell upon earth, and in Jacky Tar, the son of a gun, who was conceived of unholy boast, born of the fighting navy, suffered under rump and dozen, was scarified, flayed and curried, yelled like bloody hell, the third day he arose again from the bed, steered into haven, sitteth on*

his beamend till further orders whence he shall come to drudge for a living and be paid. (12.1354) / Creuen en el cop de vara, assot totpoderós, creador de l'infern a la terra, i en Jep Quitrà, fill de sa mare, el qual fou concebut per obra de l'acudit nefand, nasqué de Marina de Guerra, patí tacó a la carn, per la culata, fou esdernegat, escorxat i adobat, udolà com un infern, el tercer dia es despertà, entre els ports pilotà el vaixell, seu amb el dogal al coll fins a nova ordre, i des d'allí ha de venire a escarrassar-se entre els vius per un mos. (341.20)

The rhythm and rhymes reproduce or echo the *I believe* prayer: *vara – Pare, totpoderós- Totpoderós, creador de l'infern a la terra – de cel i terra, Jep Quitrà – Jesucrist, el qual fou concebut – el qual fou concebut*, and so on. It combines the lyrics about the British Empire with the tune of a prayer of the Catholic Church, Ireland's two masters.

10. *Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit
Doomed for a certain time to walk the earth. (8.67 /
Hamlet, d'aquell qui fou ton pare jo sóc l'ànima
Damnada per un temps a anar errabunda (160.1)*

I used what was the standard translation of *Hamlet* in Catalan, by Magí Morera i Galícia. In other Shakespearian quotations Josep M. de Sagarra was the chosen translator. When available I looked at the Catalan version of Dante, Homer, Keats, Milton, Yeats, for Joyce's parallels, or I translated the quotations myself if necessary. I also adapted opera bits (*Don Giovanni, Martha*), songs, and some parodies, acrostics, Stephen's poems, etc.

11. *a noun is the name of any person place or thing (18.1473) /
nom designa una persona un lloc o una cosa. (776.4)*

The definition of *noun* is shared by different school grammars.

12. *My bust developed four inches in three weeks, reports Mrs Gus Rublin with photo. (15.3258/ El meu bust ha crescut quatre dits en tres setmanes, comunica Mrs Gus Rublin, amb foto. (546.24)*

The language of an advertisement is typically reproduced. I adapted *inches* to colloquial measures in Catalan.

Many other aspects could be dealt with, but these will be enough, I hope, to illustrate the story of my translation of *Ulysses*, and of the strategies made clear by these few examples.

Notes

¹ “a personal approach to the translation of this novel whose difficulty is an excellent test to recognize the maturity of a language.” *My translation*.

² James Joyce, *Ulysses*, translated into Spanish by J. Salas Subirats (Buenos Aires: Santiago Rueda, 1962).

³ I consulted many collections of rhymes, games, tales, etc. Among others, Lina Eckenstein’s *Comparative Studies in Nursery Rhymes* (1906), Mc Luhan’s *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man*, several books by Iona and Peter Opie, Sebastià Serrano’s *Signes, llengua i cultura*, were illuminating in many ways.

⁴ English refers to the chapter and line number in Gabler’s edition, Catalan to the page and line of my translation of 1996 (Barcelona: Proa). When referring to translations in other languages, AM refers to A. Morel’s, (Gallimard, 1948), V to J.M. Valverde’s (Lumen, 1976); GA to Giulio de Angelis (Mondadori, 1991), followed by the page, and G & V to F. García Tortosa and M. Luisa Venegas (Càtedra, 1999), followed by chapter and line number.

⁵ My doctoral thesis was *Bases d’una traducció catalana. Ulisses de James Joyce* (1988), partly published as *Llengua de tribu i llengua de polis: bases d’una traducció literària* (Barcelona: Quaderns crema, 1991).

⁶ V. H. Collins: *A Book of English Idioms* (Longmans, 1958) 28.