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### Abstract

The author discusses the importance of passion for the translation profession and how it brought her to the critical work of Northrop Frye. Then she explains the main aspects of translating Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* and *The Great Code* and briefly outlines the effect the Czech translation of these works has had on the Czech academic world.

### Résumé

L'auteur discute l'importance de la passion pour le métier de la traduction et comment il l'amena vers le travail critique de Northrop Frye. Puis elle explique les principaux aspects de traduire *Anatomie de la critique* et *Le Grand Code* et elle décrit brièvement l'effet de la traduction tchèque de ces œuvres dans le monde académique tchèque.

## 1. How I encountered Northrop Frye

It all started with a rock band: I was 17 years old and I discovered The Doors. I loved the music, the lyrics and Jim Morrison's insistent voice. I tried to get or record as many songs by The Doors as possible – which wasn't very easy for a girl who was growing up behind the Iron Curtain. When I was a university student, I realised that The Doors took their name from *The Doors of Perception* by Aldous Huxley. I was a great fan of the beatniks at that time, read the book twice and found out that its title was a quote from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by William Blake. I read all the available Czech and Slovak translations of his works, only to learn they were either incomplete or not good enough. When I got to Leeds as an exchange-programme student, among the first books I borrowed at the university library were those by and about Blake. Suddenly I wanted Blake to be better known in my country and how else could that be done than by translating his poetry? One day I went to the library again to borrow some reference material for my "Blake studies". Hidden on a dusty shelf, there it was: *Fearful Symmetry* by Northrop Frye. I hadn't heard about Frye at that time but after several pages of his book, I knew I had to read more. I fell in love with his writing, his passion for words and images, and his passion for literature.

Northrop Frye has taught me not to be afraid of symbols and archetypes and he has shown me what I had already suspected: literature can be, and often is, passion. He has also taught me to read the Bible as both poetry and fiction, without the religious blinkers of dogmatic and



orthodox reading. I read all his major works and there it was again: I wanted him to be better known in Czech and how else can you make that happen than by ... translating his work. Being a systematic person myself (if I weren't a translator, I would probably be a librarian ordering books according to the Dewey decimal classification), I liked Frye's structuralist view of literature and especially his idea that criticism shouldn't be restricted to opinion and judgement. His statement that literature is "the place where our imaginations find the ideal that they try to pass on to belief and action, where they find the vision which is the source of both the dignity and the joy of life," resonated with me.

## 2. The main aspects of translating *Anatomy of Criticism* and *The Great Code*

The translation of books by Northrop Frye was also suggested by my university teacher, Don Sparling, who was the Chair of the English Department at Masaryk University in Brno at that time. The idea stuck in my mind and, when the editors from HOST, a small but growing publishing house in Brno, decided to start publishing a new series of works of literary theory, I mentioned Frye's name.

*The Great Code* was published in 2000, and the work on the translation taught me two translators' commandments: "thou shalt research properly" and "thou shalt not share thy translation with another translator". Northrop Frye's "preliminary investigation of Biblical structure and typology" required a great deal of research and study of etymology, art and especially Biblical resources and the Bible. The book, however, is written in an accessible and clear style; it was, therefore, necessary to find the appropriate voice to communicate Frye's concepts and ideas. The fact that Biblical studies and the Bible used to be taboo in Czechoslovakia until 1989, and that they did not have a great appeal to the Czech audience even in the democratic regime, made this even harder. To publish the book in a shorter span of time, the publisher decided to split the book into two parts between two translators, Alena Přibáňová and me. This solution was not ideal, but the final changes and editing were entrusted to me, so the voice of the translation could be unified and any lack of clarity caused by the different theoretical background of the other translator could be solved to the reader's satisfaction.

*Anatomy of Criticism* was published in 2003 by the same publisher, and required quite a different treatment. The literary approach of Northrop Frye was a completely new concept in the context of Czech literary theory and, although the work was not unknown to most literary critics and theorists, many of them had not read the original and had studied only the summaries in readers or journals. One of the main challenges the translator had to deal with was to find appropriate archetypal literary terms. The Czech equivalents of some of the terms, such as "fiction" or "mode", had to be translated literally to retain the connotation and meaning of the original – the established Czech equivalent of "fiction", for example, is "beletrie" (belles-lettres), which refers only to a certain literary genre and does not encompass the meaning used by Frye.

### 3. Northrop Frye in the Czech Lands

The seminal work *Anatomy of Criticism* was originally published in 1957, more than 30 years before the Velvet Revolution and 46 years before the Czech translation; the gap between the stale and limited literary criticism of the communist and early post-communist era and the development of literary criticism in the Western democratic countries was therefore too wide. Although the Czech translation was reviewed (or at least mentioned) in several literary magazines and journals, the influence of the work was certainly less than it would have been had it been published, for example, in the early 1960s. Despite the fact that archetypal literary criticism has not rooted itself in the Czech lands, *Anatomy of Criticism* has become one of the set books on the reading lists at university departments.

The reception of *The Great Code*, translated into Czech 18 years after the original work was published, was quite similar – the only difference being that it is now also used as a study text at theological faculties.

Both publications were financially supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, which enabled the translator(s) to fully concentrate on their research and work. Although the books, though now out of print, are still in demand with students, the publishing house has not republished them. Sadly, so far Frye's *Words with Power*, the "Second Study of the Bible and Literature", has neither been translated nor suggested for publication. We can only hope that the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye, one of the most influential literary theorists of the 20th century, will be appreciated by more and more students, who will be inspired to bring his ideas and approach into their own work.



