

Many people in this country have spent the better part of today listening to and scrupulously analyzing the words of one man in an attempt to glean from them some indication of the direction in which the country is heading.

Meanwhile, another man, one who has been entrusted with the highest office in the land and whose job it is to give the country direction, has spent the past 140 odd days since he took office talking gibberish.

Whether it is calculated gibberish or the ramblings of a semi-literate boor is yet to be determined, but several consequences of this man's propensity for gibberish are already evident: in the eyes of the international community, it has discredited the United States as a world leader more swiftly, but not permanently, one hopes, than any other of America's shenanigans over the past decades; and, it has confused America's own citizens, leaving them feeling rudderless and lost.

But there have also been some potentially positive developments from all of this. The importance of language is clearer to us today than it has been in a long time; even those whose daily work is not with language are more fully aware today than they have been for a long time of language's creative power and its destructive force; its ability to mislead, to obfuscate, to enrage; and its ability to influence, to catalyze, and to inspire.

Yet another consequence, potentially a good one, is that Americans, feeling themselves without adequate leadership, are increasingly looking abroad for meaningful examples of leadership, cultural excellence, and world views that can serve as alternatives to those they have at their disposal here at home.

What does any of this have to do with tonight's auspicious occasion? To my mind, everything.

Nobody understands and appreciates the importance, the awesome power, and the nuances of language like writers, poets, and translators. Language is their stock-in-trade, their raw material; we entrust them with language, our most powerful innovation, the very thing that most makes us human. And of these three -- writers, poets, and translators -- only translators are given custody of two or more languages, bridging, in their work, cultures, societies, ideas, readerships, experiences and visions of life and how it is and can be lived.

The role of translators is more central and vital to this country today than it has been for a long while; translators are defenders of language at a time when it is under attack, and they are the messengers via which alternative visions of life's possibilities are knowable to most of us.

So I would like to acknowledge the Goethe Institute and the Friends of Goethe New York for the important role they play, in so many different ways, in allowing these messages to arrive and in supporting the work of the messengers who bring them to

us. Specifically, I would like to thank the Goethe Institute for founding a prize that supports the work of emerging translators, without whom the future of translations from the German would be less assured. I am grateful for having been invited to participate as a member of the jury for the past few years and am honored to be associated with the luminaries for whom this prize is named, Frederick and Grace Gutekunst.

Finally, we are here to celebrate the achievement of one emerging translator in particular.

To quote from the jury statement: “this translator’s work stood out from a host of excellent candidates for its technical proficiency, for the expertise with which the translator solved specific dilemmas and avoided certain traps, and for the translation’s overall quality. My fellow jurors and I were impressed by the vivacity and tightness of the English and the accuracy with which the original German text was rendered, both tonally and semantically, in English. What most impressed us, and I think this quality is essential in a competition for a prize that celebrates translators who are at the start of their careers, was the vivid potential of the translator who entered the winning translation.”

On behalf of my fellow jurors, Tess Lewis and Shelley Frisch, both renowned translators themselves, I am very pleased to extend our congratulations to Amanda Olsen for her Gutekunst Prize-winning translation of an excerpt from *Weil wir längst woanders sind* by Rasha Khayat.