

# GOETHE MEDAL 2024

## LAUDATORY SPEECH FOR CLAUDIA CABRERA

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WEIMAR, 28 AUGUST 2024

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The profession of literary translator is a quiet, modest, and unfortunately all too often invisible one. All the more reason to respect this choice of a career, which is not about ego or fame, but solely about the love of language and literature. It is also a profession that demands extraordinary skill; not only knowledge of both languages, both cultures, both countries, but also the magical ability to render a literary work with all its uniqueness into another language and another cultural area while remaining as faithful as possible to the original. It is important not only to keep up with the latest changes in culture and language, but also those in literature, whether German, Mexican, or international. One undertakes all this effort although one's name, the translator's name, won't appear on the cover, although it is no less important than that of the author. Some publishers are already trying to replace this work with AI, not because the AI could do it better, but to reduce the already low fees. Yet translators are recognised far too rarely, which makes it all the more wonderful and important that Claudia Cabrera is here with us today to be awarded the Goethe Medal.

Claudia Cabrera is an exceptional translator and interpreter. She builds bridges between the two cultures. She is also a wonderful literary mediator and dialogue partner, and not just at book presentations. Thanks to her, numerous works have been translated into Mexican Spanish and found new readers. She not only translates classics such as Anna Seghers, Heiner Müller, and Franz Kafka, but also contemporary authors such as Julia Frank and Cornelia Funke into Spanish.

Claudia Cabrera not only concentrates on prose, however, but also translates contemporary plays, over 23 of them, all of which have been produced in the respective translation. I would like to emphasise how extraordinary it is, because working in prose and drama demand completely different talents. Most writers and translators only master one genre; translating a play requires a different craft and feel than translating a novel or a non-fiction book. Pretty much everything in these two genres is different, the language and the timing, the structure of the text and the working method. It takes two completely different approaches and Claudia Cabrera is capable of both.

Claudia Cabrera is also a gifted cultural manager, organising numerous events, readings, and translation workshops. In this way, she brings literature closer to people and inspires them with numerous works, themes, and languages. Because even if people speak the same language, they don't necessarily understand each other. We can observe this in politics or even in families. Sigrid Nunez writes in her novel *What Are You Going Through*:

What if all this time we have misunderstood the story of the Tower of Babel? What if it was not just to different tribes but to each individual human being that a separate language was given, unique as fingerprints. And, step two, to make life among humans even more strife-filled and confounding, he beclouded their perception of this. So that while we might understand that there are many peoples speaking many different languages, we are fooled into thinking that everyone in our own tribe speaks the same language we do.

This is why it's so important to talk about literature, culture, and theatre: so that we can truly understand each other and the translated works.

The Goethe Medal honours people who have rendered outstanding services to the teaching of the German language and international cultural exchange. I believe Claudia Cabrera has achieved even more: she has made an enormous range of German-language poetics and voices accessible in another language area, and has made a significant contribution to ensuring that we all understand each other and don't just persist in *our own* languages.