

Kazuo Ishiguro's Speech

Your Majesties, your Royal Highnesses, ladies and gentlemen.

I remember vividly the large face of a foreigner, a Western man, illustrated in rich colours, dominating the whole page of my book. Behind this looming face, to one side, was smoke and dust from an explosion. On the other side, rising from the explosion, white birds climbing to the sky. I was five years old, lying on my front on a traditional Japanese *tatami* mat. Perhaps this moment left an impression because my mother's voice, somewhere behind me, was filled with a special emotion as she told the story about a man who'd invented dynamite, then concerned about its applications, had created the *Nobel Sho* – I first heard of it by its Japanese name. The *Nobel Sho*, she said, was to promote *heiwa* – meaning peace or harmony. This was just fourteen years after our city, Nagasaki, had been devastated by the atomic bomb, and young as I was, I knew *heiwa* was something important; that without it fearful things might invade my world.

The Nobel Prize, like many great ideas, is a simple one – something a child can grasp – and that is perhaps why it continues to have such a powerful hold on the world's imagination. The pride we feel when someone from our nation wins a Nobel Prize is different from the one we feel witnessing one of our athletes winning an Olympic medal. We don't feel the pride of our tribe demonstrating superiority over other tribes. Rather, it's the pride that comes from knowing that one of *us* has made a significant contribution to our common human endeavour. The emotion aroused is a larger one, a unifying one.

We live today in a time of growing tribal enmities, of communities fracturing into bitterly opposed groups. Like literature, my own field, the Nobel Prize is an idea that, in times like these, helps us to think beyond our dividing walls, that reminds us of what we must struggle for together as human beings. It's the sort of idea mothers will tell their small children, as they always have, all around the world, to inspire them and to give themselves hope. Am I happy to receive this honour? Yes, I am. I am happy to receive the *Nobel Sho*, as I instinctively called it when, minutes after receiving my astounding news I telephoned my mother, now 91 years old. I more or less grasped its meaning back then in Nagasaki, and I believe I do so now. I stand here awed that I've been allowed to become part of its story. Thank you.