



Kazuo Ishiguro...

The Nobel Laureate Who Uses Dream Techniques in Writing

“When is the best time to actually start the real writing? How do we write the words that become a book? When do you know that you have started the proper writing? If you start too early, you cannot write certain kinds of books,” wondered Kazuo Ishiguro, the British-Japanese novelist, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017.

Above: Kazuo Ishiguro reads his speech at the Nobel Prize ceremony

“You cannot write that very carefully structured novel where something that happens on page 28 is picked up again on page 94 and there is a tremendous reverberation. You cannot set things up in that way. You are kind of improvising. However, you can get some kind of strange force out of that kind of serendipity and improvisation, and you can bypass your own senses in a way and surprise yourself, even shock

yourself with what comes out. However, as I say, you do not have the same kind of control,” Ishiguro said.

In an interview published on the Nobel Prize’s website, Ishiguro continued: “I can say I’ve never been able to settle on a consistent rule about this question of how much should you—as a writer—know about your story, how much research should you have done—I don’t just mean into the historical background, I

mean research into the characters, the relationship your fictional world would have to everyday reality. Generally, as a process, the act of writing is complicated. I write quickly—I finished *The Remains of the Day* within four weeks—even if publishing is slower. Sometimes I spend years working on a book.”

Literature and politics

In his speech at the Nobel Prize ceremony, Ishiguro discussed connections between literature, politics, and everyday life. “I’m part of a generation inclined to optimism, and why not?” he said. “We watched our elders successfully transform Europe from a place of totalitarian regimes, genocide, and historically unprecedented carnage to a much-envied region of liberal democracies. But now, looking back, the era since the fall of the Berlin Wall seems like one of complacency, of opportunities lost. Enormous inequalities of wealth and opportunity have been allowed to grow, between nations and within nations. In particular the disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the long years of austerity policies imposed on ordinary people following the scandalous economic crash of 2008, have brought us to a present in which Far Right ideologies and tribal nationalisms proliferate. Racism, in its traditional forms and in its modernised, better-marketed versions, is once again on the rise, stirring beneath our civilised streets like a buried monster awakening.”

In an article published by The American Academy of Achievement, a non-profit foundation, he said: “The important thing about the literature is that it emphasizes the human experience, and the emotions, that we need to decide what we do with the knowledge that we discover.” He added that “this is, of course, at the heart of the Nobel story because, as almost everybody knows, it was started by Alfred Nobel because he invented dynamite, and then there was immediately this question, how do you use dynamite? What do you use it for? It can be used for terrible destruction, or it can be used for great progress. So, immediately, in the idea of the Nobel Prize, there is the understanding that, of course, it’s very important to further knowledge, make scientific discoveries, and so on, but there is another very important dimension to this: we have to decide how we use these discoveries. I think you can only do that if there is some understanding between different cultures and people about emotions, human experience, how it feels to go through changes.”

Unpublished works

Referring to his unpublished works, he said: “After university, when I was working with homeless people in west London, I wrote a half-hour radio play

Who is Kazuo Ishiguro?

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on November 5, 1954. Aged five, he moved with his family to live in the southern English town of Guildford. Besides being a renowned British novelist, Ishiguro is a screenwriter and short story writer. He is one of the most celebrated contemporary fiction authors in the English-speaking world. His Japanese, he says, is “awful,” adding that he owes a lot to the creative writing program and workshops he attended. He says he uses ‘dream techniques’ in writing since it provides him with a flow of words and ideas.

His novel *Remains of the Day* won The Booker Prize for Fiction in 1989. Later, the American filmmaker James Ivory adapted it to the eponymous 1993 movie starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson. His 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go* was named novel of the year by Time and included in the magazine’s list of 100 best English-language novels published between 1923 and 2005. Ishiguro expresses that besides his novel translated into various languages, he still believes, with a critic’s sense, that some of his novels, like *When We Were Orphans* (2000) are not as good as others. Most of his novels are about the past but some have science fiction elements like *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) or futuristic such as *Never Let Me Go* (2005). The pinnacle of his career was receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017.

and sent it to the BBC. It was rejected but I got an encouraging response. It was kind of in bad taste, but it’s the first piece of juvenilia I wouldn’t mind other people seeing. It was called ‘Potatoes and Lovers.’ When I submitted the manuscript, I spelled potatoes incorrectly. It was about two young people who work in a fish-and-chips cafe. They are both severely cross-eyed, and they fall in love with each other but they never acknowledge the fact that they are cross-eyed. It is the unspoken thing between them. At the end of the story, they decide not to marry, after the narrator has a strange dream where he sees a family coming toward him on the seaside pier. The parents are cross-eyed, the children are cross-eyed, the dog is cross-eyed, and he says, ‘all right, we are not going to marry.’ It was a time when I was starting to think about what my career was going to be. I had failed to make it as a musician. I had many appointments with music people. After two seconds, they would say, ‘it is not going to happen.’ Therefore, I thought I would have a go at a radio play.”