

ladies and gentlemen my name is saya Daniels

and I am permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy I have a very pleasant task this evening and it is to introduce our writer the Nobel Prize laureate of mr. Kazuo Ishiguro was sitting here in front of me and let me say how great spin for the Swedish Academy all the members of the Swedish Academy to discuss your novels and your great short stories it's taught us a great deal and we're extremely pleased that you want to be here with us today ladies and gentlemen please join me in welcoming kasev

oh you should go [Applause] the doors that Sarah Daniels and I came through just now over there I am told are only open twice every year once when the Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy announces the winner of the Nobel Prize and the second time when the literature laureate comes in to deliver the lecture so I feel really honored to be only one of two people to come through this door this year I'm now wondering when I leave if I try to go out the same way I'll find the doors locked and so I'm not quite sure how I get out of here but um but it's one but it's a terrific wonderful honor to be here and thank you all for coming I know some of you have come a long way if you'd come across me in the autumn of you might have had some difficulty placing me socially and even racially I was then years old my features would have looked Japanese but unlike most Japanese men seen in Britain in those days I had hair down to my shoulders and the drooping bandit style mustache the only accent discernible in my speech was that as someone brought up in the southern counties of England inflected at times by the language already dated vernacular of the hippie era if we'd got talking we might have discussed the total footballers of Holland or Bob Dylan's latest album or perhaps the year I just spent working with homeless people in London had you mentioned Japan asked me about its culture you might even have detected a trace of impatience into my manner as I declared my ignorance on the grounds that I hadn't set foot in that country not even for a Holiday since leaving it at the age of five that autumn I'd arrived with a rucksack a guitar and a portable typewriter in Buxton Norfolk a small English village with an old water mill and flat farm fields all around it I'd come to this place because I've been accepted on a one-year postgraduate creative writing course at the University of East Anglia the university was ten miles away in the Cathedral town of Norwich but I had no car and my only way of getting there was by means of a bus service that operated just once in the morning once at lunchtime and once in the evening but this I was soon to discover was no great hardship I was rarely required at the university more than twice a week I'd rented a room in a small house owned by a man in his s his wife had just left him no doubt for him the house was filled with the ghosts of his wrecked dreams or perhaps he just wanted to avoid me in any case I didn't set eyes on him for days on end in other words after the frenetic life I'd been leading in London here I was faced with an unusual amount of quiet and solitude in which to transform myself into a writer in fact my little room was not unlike the classic

writers garret the ceilings sloped claustrophobic Lee though if I stood on tiptoes I had a view from one of my windows of ploughed fields stretching away into the distance there was a small table the surface of which my typewriter and a desk lamp took up almost entirely on the floor instead of a bed there was a large rectangular piece of industrial foam that were caused me to sweat in my sleep even during the bitterly cold Norfolk nights it was in this room that I carefully examined the two short stories I'd written over the summer wondering if they were good enough to submit to my new classmates we were I knew a class of six meeting once every two weeks at that point in my life I'd written little else of notes in the way of prose fiction having earned my place on the course with a radio play rejected by the BBC in fact having previously made firm plans to become a rock star by the time I was my literary ambitions had only recently made themselves known to me the two stories I was now scrutinizing had been written in something of a panic in response to the news that I'd been accepted on the university course one was about a macabre suicide pact the other about street fights in Scotland where I'd spent some time as a community worker they were not so good I started another story about an adolescent who poisons his cat set like the others in present-day Britain then one night during my third or fourth week in that little room I found myself writing with new and urgent intensity about Japan about Nagasaki the city of my birth during the last days of the Second World War this I should point out came as something of a surprise to me today the pervading atmosphere is such that it's virtually an instinct for an aspiring young writer with mixed cultural heritage to explore his roots in his work but that was far from the case then we were still a few years away from the explosion of multicultural literature in Britain Salman Rushdie was an unknown with one out of print novel asked to name the leading young British novelist of the day people might have mentioned Margaret Drabble of older writers Iris Murdoch Kingsley Amos William Golding Anthony Burgess John Fowles foreigners like Gabriel Garcia Marquez Milan Kundera or bore hairs but only in tiny numbers their names meaningless even to keen readers such was the literary climate of the day that when I finished that first Japanese story for all my sense of having discovered an important new direction I began immediately to wonder if this departure shouldn't be viewed as a self-indulgence if I shouldn't quickly return to more normal subject matter it was only after considerable hesitation that I began to show the story around and I remained to this day profoundly grateful to my fellow students my tutors Malcolm Bradbury and Angela Carter and to the novelist Paul Bailey that year the university's writer in residence for their determinedly encouraging response had they been less positive I would probably never again have written about Japan as it was I returned to my room and wrote and wrote throughout the winter of and web into the spring I spoke to virtually no one aside from the other five students in my class the village grocer from whom I bought the breakfast cereals and lamb kidneys

on which I existed and my girlfriend Lorna today my wife who had come to visit me every second weekend it wasn't a balanced life but in those four or five months I managed to complete one half of my first novel a pair view of hills set also in Nagasaki in the years of recovery after the dropping of the atomic bomb I can remember occasionally during this period tinkering with some ideas for short stories not set in Japan only to find my interest waning rapidly those months but crucial for me insofar as without them I probably never have become a writer since then I've often looked back and asked what was going on with me what was all this peculiar energy my conclusion has been that just that that in my life I'd become engaged in an urgent act of preservation to explain this I'll need to go back a little I had come to England aged five with my parents and sister in April the town of Guildford Surrey in the affluent stockbroker belt miles south of London my father was a research scientist an oceanographer who'd come to work for the British government the Machine he went on to invent incidentally is today part of the permanent collection at the Science Museum in London the photographs taken shortly after our arrival show an England from a vanished era men wear wooden v-neck pullovers with ties cars still have running boards and a spare wheel on the back The Beatles the sexual revolution student protests multiculturalism were all around the corner but it's hard to believe the England our family first encountered even suspected it to meet a foreigner from France or Italy was remarkable enough never mind one from Japan our family lived in a quarter sack of twelve houses just where the paved roads ended and the countryside began it was less than a five-minute stroll to the local farm and the laying down which rows of cows trudged back and forth between fields milk was delivered by horse and cart a common sight I remember vividly from my first days in England was that of hedgehogs the cute spiky nocturnal creatures there numerous in that country squashed by car wheels during the night left in the morning dew' tucked neatly by the roadside awaiting collection by the refugees men all our neighbours went to church and I'm well and when I went to play with their children I noticed they said a small prayer before eating I attended Sunday school and before long was singing in the church choir becoming aged the first Japanese head chorister seen in Guildford I went to the local primary school where I was the only non English child quite possibly in the entire history of that school and from when I was I traveled by train to my grammar school in a neighboring town sharing the carriage each morning with ranks of men in pinstripe suits and bowler hats on their way to their offices in London by this stage I had become thoroughly trained in the manners

expected of middle-class boys in those days when visiting a friend's house I knew I should stand to attention the instant an adult wandered into the room I learned that during a meal I had to ask permission before getting down from the table as the only foreign boy in the neighborhood a kind of local Fame followed me around other children knew who I was before I met them adults who were total strangers to me sometimes addressed me by name in the street or in the local store when I look back to this period and remember that it was less than years from the end of a World War in which the Japanese had been bitter enemies I'm amazed by the openness and instinctive generosity with which our family was accepted by this ordinary English community the affection respect and curiosity I retained to this day for that generation of Britons who came through the Second World War and built a remarkable new welfare state in its aftermath derived significantly from my personal experiences from those years but all this time I was leading another life at home with my Japanese parents at home there were different rules different expectations a different language by parents original intention had been that we returned to Japan after a year perhaps two if for our first years in England we were in a perpetual state of going back next year as a result my parents outlook remained that of visitors not of immigrants they'd often exchange observations about the curious customs of the natives without feeling any onus to adopt them and for a long time the assumption remained that I would return to this my adult life in Japan and efforts were made to keep up the Japanese side of my education each vantage parcel arrived from Japan containing the previous month's comics magazines educational digests all of which I devoured eagerly these parcels stopped arriving sometime in my teens perhaps after my grandfather's death but my parents talked of old friends relatives episodes from their lives in Japan all kept up a steady supply of images and impressions and then I always had my own store of memories surprisingly vast and clear of my grandparents or favorite toys I'd left behind the traditional Japanese house we'd lived in which I can even today reconstruct in my mind room by room my kindergarten the local tram stop the fierce dog that lived by the bridge the chair in the barber's shop specially adapted for small boys with a car steering wheel fixed in front of the big mirror what all this amounted to was that as I was growing up long before I'd ever thought to create fictional worlds in prose I was busily constructing in my mind a rich detailed place called Japan a place to which I in some way belonged from which I drew a certain sense of my identity and my confidence the fact that I'd never physically returned to Japan during that time only served to make my own vision of the country more vivid and personal hence

the need for preservation for by the time I reach my mid-twenties though I never clearly articulated this at the time I was coming to realize certain things I was starting to accept that my Japan perhaps did it much correspond to any place I could go to on the plane that the way of life of which my parents talked that I remembered from my early childhood had largely vanished during the s and s that in any case the Japan that existed in my head might always have been an emotional construct put together by a child out of memory imagination and speculation and perhaps most significantly I had come to realize that with each year I grew older this Japan of mine this precious place I'd grown up with was getting fainter and fainter I'm now sure that it was this feeling that my Japan was unique and at the same time terribly fragile something not open to verification from outside that drove me on to work in that small room in Norfolk what I was doing was getting down on paper that world's special colors morays etiquettes its dignity its shortcomings everything I'd ever thought about the place before they faded forever from my mind it was my wish to rebuild my Japan in fiction to make it safe so that I could thereafter point to a book and say yes there's my Japan inside there

Spring three and a half years later Lorna and I were now in London lodging in two rooms at the top of a tall narrow house which itself stood on a hill at one of the highest points of the city there was a television mass nearby and when we tried to listen to records on our turntable ghostly broadcasting voices would intermittently invade our speakers our living room had no sofa or armchair but two mattresses on the floor covered with cushions there was also a large table on which I wrote during the day and where we had dinner at night it wasn't luxurious but we liked living there

I'd published my first novel the year before and I'd also written a screenplay for a short film soon to be broadcast on British television I'd been for a time reasonably proud of my first novel but by that spring a nigging sense of dissatisfaction had set in here was the problem my first novel and my first TV screenplay were too similar not in subject matter but in method and style the more I looked at it the more my novel resembled a screenplay dialogue plus directions this was okay up to a point but my wish now was to write fiction that could work properly only on the page why write a novel if it was going to offer more or less the same experience someone could get by turning on the television how could written fiction hope to survive against the might of cinema and television if it didn't offer something unique something the other forms

couldn't do around this time I came down with a virus and spent a few days in bed when I came out of the worst of it and I didn't feel like sleeping all the time I discovered that the heavy object whose presence amidst my bed clothes had been annoying me for some time was in fact a copy of the first volume of Marcel Proust remembrance of things past as the title was then translated there it was so I started to read it my still fevered condition was perhaps a factor but I became completely riveted by the overture and complete sections I read them over and over quite aside from the sheer beauty of these passages

I became thrilled by the means by which Proust got one episode to lead into the next the authoring of events and scenes didn't seem to follow the usual demands of chronology nor those of a linear plot instead tangential thought associations or the vagaries of memory seemed to move the writing from one episode to the next sometimes I found myself wondering why had these two seemingly unrelated moments been placed side by side in the narrator's mind I could suddenly see an exciting freer way of composing my second novel one that could produce richness on the page and offer inner movements impossible to capture on any screen if I could go from one passage to the next according to the narrator's thought associations and drifting memories I could compose in something like the way an abstract painter might choose to place shapes and colors around the canvas I could place a scene from two days ago right beside one from years earlier and ask the reader to ponder the relationship between the two in such a way I began to think I might suggest a many layers of self-deception and denial that shrouded any person's view of their own self and of their past March I was 21 years old we now had a sofa and I was lying across it listening to a Tom Waits album the previous year Lorna and I had bought our own house in an unfashionable but pleasant part of South London and in this house for the first time I had my own study it was small and didn't have a door but I was thrilled to spread my papers around and not have to clear them away at the end of each day and in that study or so I believed I just finished my third novel it was my first not to have a Japanese setting my personal Japan having been made less fragile by the writing of my previous novels in fact my new book to be called the remains of the day seemed English in the extreme though not I hoped in the manner of many British authors of the older generation I'd been careful not to assume as I felt many of them did that my readers were all English with native familiarity of English nuances and preoccupations by then writers like Salman Rushdie and VS Naipaul had forged the way for a more international outward looking British literature one that didn't claim any centrality or automatic importance for

Britain their writing was post-colonial in the widest sense I wanted like them to write international fiction that could easily cross cultural and linguistic boundaries even while writing a story set in what seemed a peculiarly

English world my version of England would be a kind of mythical one whose outlines I believed were already present in the imaginations of many people around the world including those who had never visited the country the story I just finished was about an English Butler who realizes too late in his life that he has lived his life by the wrong values that he's given his best years to serving a Nazi sympathizer that by failing to take moral and political responsibility for his life he has in some profound sense wasted that life and more that in his bid to become the perfect servant he has forbidden himself to love or be loved by the one woman he cares for I read through my manuscript several times and I've been reasonably satisfied still there was a nagging feeling that something was missing then as I say there I was in our house one evening on our sofa listening to Tom Waits and Tom Waits began to sing a song called Ruby's arms perhaps some of you know it I even thought about singing singing it to you at this point but I've changed my mind it's a ballad about a man possibly a soldier leaving his lover asleep in bed it's the early morning he goes down the road gets on the train nothing unusual in that but the song is delivered in the voice of a gruff American hobo utter the unaccustomed to revealing his deeper emotions and there comes a moment midway through the song when the singer tells us that his heart is breaking the moment is almost unbearably moving because of the tension between the sentiment itself and the huge resistance that's obviously been overcome to declare it Tom Waits sings the line with cathartic magnificence and you feel a lifetime of tough-guy stoicism crumbling in the face of overwhelming sadness as I listen to Tom Waits I realize what I'd still have to do I done thinking Lea made a decision somewhere way back that my English Butler would maintain his emotional defenses that he'd managed to hide behind them from himself and his reader to the very end now I saw I had to reverse that decision just for one moment towards the end of my story a moment I'd have to choose carefully I had to make his armor crack I had to allow a vast and tragic yearning to be glimpsed underneath I should say here that I have on a number of other occasions learned crucial lessons when the voices of singers I refer her I refer here des to the lyrics being sung and more to the actual singing as we know a human voice in song is capable of expressing an unfathomably complex blend of feelings over the years specific aspects of my writing have been

influenced by an others Bob Dylan Nina Simone Emmylou Harris Ray Charles Bruce Springsteen Gillian Welch and my friend and collaborator Stacy Kent catching something in their voices I've said to myself oh yes that's it that's what I need to capture in that scene something very close to that it's it's often an emotion I can't quite put into words but there it is in the singer's voice and now I've been given something to aim for in October I was invited by the German poet Kristoff hi blur on behalf of the International outfits committee to spend a few days visiting the former concentration camp my accommodation was at the Auschwitz youth meeting center on the road between the first Alfred's camp and the Bur Canal death camp two miles away I was shown around these sites and met informally three survivors I felt I'd come close geographically at least to the heart of the dark force under whose shadow my generation had grown up at Birkenau on the wet afternoon I stood before the rubble remains of the gas chambers now strangely neglected and unattended left much as the Germans had left them after blowing them up and fleeing the Red Army they were now just damp broken slabs exposed to the harsh polish climate deteriorating year by year my hosts talked about their dilemma should these remains be protected should perspex domes be built to cover them over to preserve them for the eyes of succeeding generations or should they be allowed slowly and naturally to rot away to nothing it seemed to me a powerful metaphor for a larger dilemma how was such memories to be preserved with the glass domes transform these Redax of evil and suffering entertainment what should we choose to remember when is it better to forget and move on I was years old until then I'd considered the second world war its horrors and its triumphs as belonging to my parents generation but now it occurred to me that before too long many who had witnessed those huge events at first hand would not be alive and what then did the burden of remembering fall to my own generation we hadn't experienced the war years but we'd at least been brought up by parents whose lives have been indelibly shaped by them did I now as a public teller of stories have a duty I did achieve been unaware of a duty to pass on as best I could these memories and lessons from our parents generation to the one after our own and it's a while later I was speaking before an audience in Tokyo and a question from the floor asked as is common what I might work on next more specifically the questioner pointed out that my books had often concerned individuals who had lived through times of great social and political upheaval and who then looked back over their lives and struggled to come to terms were their darker more shameful memories with my future books she asked continue to cover a similar territory I found myself giving a quite unprepared answer



yes I said I'd often written about such individuals struggling between forgetting and remembering but in the future what I really wished to do was to write a story about how a nation or a community face these same questions does a nation remember and forget in much the same way as an individual does or are there important differences what exactly are the memories of a nation where are they kept how are they shaped and controlled are there times when forgetting is the only way to stop cycles of violence or to stop a society disintegrating into chaos or war on the other hand can stable free nations really be built on foundations of willful amnesia and frustrated justice I heard myself telling the questioner that I wanted to find a way to write about these things but that for the moment unfortunately I couldn't think of how I do it one evening in early in the darkened front room of our house in North London where we were by then living lorna and i began to watch on a reasonable quality VHS tape a Howard Hawks film called th century the film's title we soon discovered referred not to the century we then just left behind but to a famous luxury train of the era connecting New York and Chicago as some of you will know the film is a fast paced comedy set largely on the train concerning a Broadway producer who with increasing desperation tries to prevent his leading actress going to Hollywood to become a movie star the film is built around the huge comic performance by John Barrymore one of the great actors of his day his facial expressions his gestures almost every line he utters come layered with ironies contradictions the grotesque grease of a man drowning in egocentricity and self-dramatization it is in many ways a brilliant performance yet as the film continued to unfold I found myself curiously uninvolved this puzzled me at first I usually like to bury more and was a big enthusiast for Howard horses other films on this era such as his girl Friday or only angels have wings then around the film's hour mark a simple striking idea came into my head the reason why so many vivid undeniably convincing characters in novels films in place so often failed to touch me was because these characters didn't connect in any to any of the other characters in an interesting human relationship and immediately this next thought came regarding my work what if I stopped worrying about my characters and worried instead about my relationships as a train rattled farther west and John Barrymore became ever more hysterical I thought about Ian foresters famous distinction between three dimensional and two dimensional characters a character in a story became

three-dimensional he'd said by virtue of the fact that they surprised us convincingly it was in so doing that they became rounded but what I now

wondered if a character was three-dimensional while all his or her relationships were not elsewhere in that same lecture series Forster had used a humorous image of extracting the story line out of a novel with a pair of forceps and holding it up like a wriggling worm for examination under the light couldn't I perform a similar exercise and hold up to the light the very various relationships that crisscross any story could I do this to my own work two stories I'd completed and once I was planning I could look at say this mentor pupil relationship does it say something insightful and fresh or now that I was staring at it does it become obvious it's a tired stereotype identical to those found in hundreds of mediocre stories or this relationship between two competitive friends is it dynamic does it have emotional resonance does it evolve does it surprise convincingly is it three-dimensional I suddenly felt I understood better why in the past various aspects of my work had failed despite my applying desperate remedies the thought came to me as I continued to stare at John Barrymore but all good stories

nevermind how radical or traditional their mode of telling had to contain relationships that are important to us that move us amuse us anger us surprise us perhaps in future if I attended more to my relationships my characters will take care of themselves it occurs to me as I say this that I might be making a point here that has always been plainly obvious to you but what i can say is that it was an idea that came to me surprisingly late in my writing life and i see it now as a turning point comparable with the others i've been describing to you today from then on i began to build my stories in a different way when writing my novel never let me go for instance i set off from the start by thinking about its central relationships triangle and then the other relationships that found out from it important turning points in the writers career perhaps in many kinds of career and i Cleese often they are small scruffy moments they are quiet private sparks of revelation they don't come often and when they do they may well come without fanfare unendorsed by mentors or colleagues they must often compete for attention with louder seemingly more urgent demands sometimes what they reveal may go against the grain of pervading wisdom but when they come it's important to be able to recognize them for what they were or they'll slip through your hands I've been emphasizing here the small and the private because essentially that's what my work is about one person writing in a quiet room trying to connect with another person reading in another quiet or maybe not so quiet room stories can entertain sometimes teach or argue a point but for me the essential thing is

that they communicate feelings that they appeal to what we share as human beings across our borders and divides there are large glamorous industries around stories the book industry the movie industry the television industry the theatre industry but in the end stories are about one person saying to another this is the way it feels to me can you understand what I'm saying does it also feel this way to you so we come to the present I woke up recently to the realization I've been living for some years in a bubble that I'd fail to notice the frustration and anxieties of many people around me I saw that my world a civilized stimulating place filled with ironic liberal minded people was in fact much smaller than I'd ever imagined a year of surprising and for me depressing political events in Europe and in America and her sickening acts of terrorism all around the globe forced me to acknowledge that the unstoppable advance of liberal humanist values I taken for granted since childhood may have been an illusion I am part of a generation inclined to optimism and why not we watched our elders successfully transform Europe from a place of totalitarian genocide and historically unprecedented carnage to a much envied region of liberal democracies living in near borderless friendship we watched the old colonial empires crumble around the world together with the reprehensible assumptions that underpin them we saw significant progress in feminism gay rights and the battles on several fronts against racism we grew up against a backdrop of the great clash ideological and military between capitalism and communism and witnessed what many of us believe to be a happy conclusion 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 for the moment we seem to lack any progressive cause to unite us instead even in the wealthy democracies of the West we are fracturing into rival camps from which to compete bitterly for resources or power and around the corner or have we already turned this corner like the challenges posed by the stunning breakthroughs in science technology and medicine new genetic technologies such as the gene editing technique CRISPR and advances in artificial intelligence and robots we'll bring us amazing life-saving benefits but may also create savage meritocracies that resemble apartheid and massive unemployment including to

those in the current professional elites so here I am a man in my sixties rubbing my eyes and trying to discern the outlines out there in the mist to this world I didn't suspect even existed until yesterday can I a tired author from an intellectually tired generation now find the energy to look at this unfamiliar place do I have something left that might help to provide perspective to bring emotional layers to the arguments fights and Wars that will come a society struggle to adjust to huge changes I'd have to carry on and do the best I can but because I still believe that literature is important and will be particularly so as we cross this difficult terrain but I'll be looking to the writers from the younger generations to inspire and lead us this is their era and they will have the knowledge and instinct about it that I will lack in the worlds of books cinema TV and theater I see today adventurous exciting tannins women and men in their sixties and seventies so I am optimistic why shouldn't I be but let me finish by making an appeal if you like my Nobel appeal it's hard to put the whole world to rights but let us at least think about how we can prepare our own small corner of it this corner of literature where we read write publish recommend denounce and give awards to books if we are to play an important role in this uncertain future if we are to get the best from the writers of today and tomorrow I believe we must become more diverse I mean this in two particular senses firstly we must widen our common literary world to include many more voices from beyond our comfort zones of the elite first world cultures we must search more energetically to discover the gems from what remain today unknown literary cultures whether the writers live in faraway countries or within our own communities second we must take great care not to set too narrowly or conservatively our definitions of what constitutes good literature the next generation will come with all sorts of new sometimes bewildering ways to tell important and wonderful stories we must keep our minds open to them especially regarding genre and form so that we can nurture and celebrate the best of them in a time of dangerously increasing division we must listen good writing and good reading will break down barriers we may even find a new idea a great humane vision around which to rally to the Swedish Academy the Noble Foundation and to the people of Sweden who down the years have made a Nobel Prize a shining symbol for the good we humans strive for I give my thanks [Applause] you