



by Milena Michiko Flašar
Verlag Klaus Wagenbach
January 2012 / 144pp
Fiction

 Bundesministerium
Kunst, Kultur,
öffentlicher Dienst und Sport

The Austrian Federal
Ministry for Arts, Culture, the
Civil Service and Sport
supported the English
translation of this book.

I Called Him Tie

Ich nannte ihn Krawatte

review

Flaşar's charged and affecting novel is predominantly a story of people talking about things usually kept quiet – of failure, illness and disability – and how they are shaped by society's pressures.

I Called Him Tie centres on a chance encounter in a park: Hiro, a twenty-year-old Japanese recluse (or *hikikomori*), meets a much older 'salaryman' (i.e. an office worker). The setting itself marks them as outsiders, unlike others of their kind who keep to their rooms or offices. Alongside their tentative, budding friendship, stories of what brought them there unfold. These are simultaneously stories of their bruised and damaged acquaintances and friends, in whose downfalls they are not entirely innocent parties – relationships that have ultimately taught them that what you don't do in life can take on far more significance than what you do. Common to each case is the pressure to succeed, to be perceived as average and not to stand out in the 'wrong' way.

Hiro's experiences have led to his current reclusive existence, while the salaryman cannot bring himself to tell his wife he has lost his job. Through his friendship with the salaryman, Hiro gradually becomes able not only to venture further afield but also to imagine 'entering society' again. Their last meeting ends with Hiro's promise to cut his hair and the salaryman's promise to tell his wife about his redundancy. Taking off the tie of the title which, for Hiro, 'wore him' and not vice versa, he leaves.

The novel has a delicately-woven, lyrical quality, and says a lot in a

few words, allowing the reader to complete the story arcs and the unfinished sentences that increase in number towards the end. While we know almost from the beginning that Hiro is a recluse and that the salaryman has lost his job, the narrative follows the notion that 'everyone is an accumulation of stories'. Everyday objects increasingly evoke the potential sadness of ordinary people's lives, and Flašar delivers her symbolism – such as the tie that comes to represent the salaryman's whole existence – with a light touch.

The novel's pared-back style and universal themes mark it out as the potential breakthrough novel for this talented young writer. *I Called Him Tie* is not only a tale of modern Japan but also, and perhaps above all, of ordinary lives.

press quotes

'For Flašar, the hikikomori is a metaphor for the distance between our desires and reality. It is a story about illusions.' – *Der Tagesspiegel*

'A deeply moving story of a gentle friendship.'
– *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

'Milena Michiko Flašar creates a deeply human and desirable world, where it makes sense for hikikomori to live their life again.' – *Norddeutscher Rundfunk*

'The ending is both conciliatory and moving. Even a hikikomori will find their way back into life sooner or later, if they find somebody who lends them an ear and a kind heart.' – *Der Tagesspiegel*

about the author

Milena Michiko Flašar was born in 1980 in St. Poelten (Austria) and studied Comparative Literature, German literature and Romance literatures in Vienna and Berlin. She lives as a writer in Vienna. In 2010 she was nominated for the Klaus-Michael-Kuehne-Prize.

Previous works include:

Okaasan – Meine unbekannte Mutter (2010); *Ich bin* (2008)

rights information

Verlag Klaus Wagenbach GmbH
Emser Straße 40/41

10719 Berlin Germany
Tel: +49 30 235151 10
E-mail: r.pohl@wagenbach.de
Contact: Rolf Pohl
www.wagenbach.de

Verlag Klaus Wagenbach is an independent publishing house founded in 1964 in Berlin. Its programme comprises contemporary and twentieth-century literature, cultural history, the history of art, and politics. A particular area of interest is Italian literature, alongside translations from the French, Spanish and English and original German-language works. Among its authors are A. L. Kennedy, Erich Fried, Sergio Pitol, Jorge Edwards, Andrea Camilleri, Natalia Ginzburg, Luigi Malerba, Manuel Vázquez Montalban, Michel Houellebecq, Peter Burke, Natalie Zemon Davies and Stephen Greenblatt. The house has been called 'the independent publisher for wild readers.'