

Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards*

Karen Long (00:19):

Hello, I'm Karen Long. And you're listening to The Asterisk*, a production of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards. An asterisk is a reference mark indicating an omission. Today we're figuring out some of the holes in our knowledge with novelist and translator, Laird Hunt.

Karen Long (00:39):

Professor Hunt won the 2013 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for "Kind One," a haunting novel that explores the uncanny intimate horror between a person in bondage and the one keeping her there. The story, a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, tells of two sisters who turn tables on their owner and take her captive after her Kentucky pig farmer husband dies. Booker Prize winner, Michael Ondaatje said, "There is always a surprise in the voice and in the heart of Laird Hunt's stories, with its echoes of habit caught in a timeless dialect, so we see the world he gives us as if new. 'You hear something like that and it walks out the door with you.'"

Professor Hunt lives in Providence, Rhode Island, where he teaches literary arts at Brown University. A former United Nations press officer, he was born in Singapore and educated at Indiana University. And The Sorbonne in Paris. Professor Hunt is a good friend to the Anisfield-Wolf project. Welcome professor.

Laird Hunt (01:58):

Good to be here. Thank you.

Karen Long (02:01):

We are so lucky to have you at the 10-year mark from "Kind One." And I would love to start there putting your art into the podcast with maybe the preamble.

Laird Hunt (02:14):

Fabulous.

Laird Hunt (02:14):

"In the evening she would tell it. In the dusk light, when the candles were lit and the fire was low, she would clear her throat. When the windows were closed and the curtains drawn and the children tucked, she would set into speak. When we had all gathered close, when our shoulders had touched, when we had taken her hands, when we had drawn in our breath. When we had shut tight our eyes, when we had thought of our days, the years of our suffering, our joy in the sunshine, that time by the water, cool drops on our foreheads, warm bread in our mouths. When we had all been spared, when our crops had come in, when the storm had stepped past, when we had said all our prayers. When the night stretched before us, she would open her tale."

Karen Long (03:01):

Thank you. Oh my heavens. "When the storm had stepped past..." Do you remember writing that?

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Laird Hunt (03:09):

I don't remember writing that particular line, but it feels familiar to me. Like one of those moments where just a little bit of a nudge to the language, whether it's conscious or unconscious, kind of brings the thing to life.

Karen Long (03:24):

It's so evocative. Who doesn't remember warm bread in their mouth and their prayers said, and storms being passed and opening up to the ancient thing that is telling our stories, which is such an active part of "Kind One." Let's start with that title. I am still scratching and wondering about it.

Laird Hunt (03:51):

The title came almost at the same time as the initial idea for the story. It came as a, almost like a sort of gift, sort of deeply ironic, given a large part of what this story has to tell. There's a deeply ironic quality to the title. But then there are also acts of deep kindness, fundamental kindness within the story as well. And so the title came fully birthed and it took sort of the writing of the book to understand the different dimensions of it for me.

Karen Long (04:32):

And for the different characters, I find rereading it now that I had glossed Ginny Lancaster, whose voice occupies the first four-fifths of the book, that she was a child through the formative trauma of being brought into a pig farm as a 14-year-old, and leaving it just a handful of years later, utterly damaged. In that place I think you've described between victim and oppressor.

Laird Hunt (05:11):

Yeah, she's a sort of complex, tragic, fascinating, furious figure who continues to occupy a part of my mind and my sort of vision I suppose, of the world and the complexities that we find ourselves constantly in. You know, the book starts, and that was another gift, the first line of the book, this notion of being complicit in a system that is so damaging, so destructive, so sadly central to the history of this country, the institution of slavery. And that recognition on the part of Ginny Lancaster that she was there, and she was part of this even if part of her story was to find herself in difficult circumstances, contextually it pales in comparison to this system that she was a part of, even if unwillingly as you say, she's effectively a child when she's thrust into it. But nonetheless, she recognizes her own guilt and that's a big part of why she feels, she has to tell this story

Karen Long (06:34):

And in the end to send it, send it off to the people, she was both, she was still living with the intimate horror.

Laird Hunt (06:47):

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Yeah. Absolutely. It was a story that once told then had to be transmitted. And that sort of goes back to that invocation to the novel, that idea that there are these stories there have to be listeners as well. And that's what completes the circuit and makes something possible, something that might come out of it for better or worse.

Karen Long (07:16):

You have a line toward the end, too, when we're on to Prosper and his aunt in her older age, where she mentions a man at church, who when he looks down, he still sees the chains. And I've never thought about that psychological space that your book is so evocative of. That there isn't a leaving of some of what our country has done and the corporal effects on individuals, or learning, of course, that generational trauma passes. But I'd like you to speak for a minute about what fiction offers us here in a way of knowing.

Laird Hunt (08:01):

Early on, I got the transmission from writers, like you mentioned Ondaatje, writers like Paul Auster, Toni Morrison, and other great heroes of mine. Great shining lights for so many of us, who over and over again, whether explicitly in interviews or in the work that they put on the page really illuminated this notion of inwardness, of the possibility that fiction offers for us to access those inner struggles, that inner space that really no other art form is so usefully construed to put us in contact with. All of that deep adventuring, spelunking that happens in our magical marvelous, sometimes horrible brain pans where we spend so much of our time. And perhaps it's spending so much of our time there that makes us long so deeply to be in company, to be with others, to share condition, to share this dispensation. But it seems to me at any rate, it's sort of my hope in my own work, but certainly what I've seen in the work of those who are heroes to me, important to me as writers. It is that extraordinary inner country that fiction can get us to, and to help us perhaps make a little tiny bit of sense of, but it's tough.

Karen Long (09:38):

I love that notion. And somebody framed it once to me as the art form, so unlike cinema, where the reader is co-creating. I looked down at my legs when I got to that part of the man in church, you know, it's so close because it's so activating. And you mentioned Paul Auster, who said such a beautiful thing about your writing, Laird. He said, "Your sentences seem to rise up out of the earth itself." Ooh, that's a good one.

Laird Hunt (10:14):

That was a nice thing to say.

Karen Long (10:17):

And I want to speak to that because as I imagine you, as a boy at 12 or 13, you're in London, you have a global persona. Your father and stepmother make a decision to send you to rural Indiana to his mom. And so much is sourced in that decision. So much of your creativity, so much of your insight, so much of

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your ability to see farther as one of your readers, partly because of this five-foot woman who took you in and loved you fiercely

Laird Hunt (10:57):

I didn't realize it at the time, but it was when I sort of came awake to the world. As you say, I'd spent time abroad. I'd certainly lived. I'm not unaware that I was the age that some of my characters find themselves thrust into terrifying circumstances, challenging circumstances. But that, you know, that age of...you start to see the world a little bit differently. And I found myself transported almost if, sort of felt that way, from London, great. One of the great cities of the world, to truly rural Indiana. It's central Indiana flat country, the country that the glacier scoured flat, left behind all that fertile soil. And I found myself on the family farm with the grandmother that you alluded to, this five-foot tall when she was in her Sunday heels, let's be clear. But just sort of an enormous person as she would come to be in my mind and my imagination as well. This figure who was a kind of gateway to a world I had glimpsed from afar, but when I went to live with her, I started to understand kind of had the seeds for everything...that landscape. I was able to start to make sense of things in a way I hadn't before, perhaps in the gigantic chaos of a city like London or, or the Hague or other places I had lived.

Karen Long (12:33):

What an argument for quieting.

Laird Hunt (12:37):

There was a lot of quiet. I spent a lot of time by myself in silence reading, I became an obsessive reader. And then it was absolutely shot through with my grandmother's monologues. She was an extraordinary person, had had many experiences from raising chickens so that she could go to college during the depression, to traveling abroad, to living in Greece when she was fairly newly-married just after World War II. When my grandfather was stationed there. She'd had all these experiences and she told me about them. And she told me about them over and over again. So it was an interesting existence when I was at home and not at school. It was either very quiet or it was my grandmother talking and me listening. And for a long time I didn't have a lot to say. But my voice started to emerge out of that, into the cracks of that dispensation.

Karen Long (13:36):

Do you remember being lonely? Do you remember how you thought about what had befallen you?

Laird Hunt (13:43):

That first year certainly was a strange year. It was when I was in eighth grade. And I hadn't made many friends at first. I had trouble fitting into that community, even though over and over again, I was told how I belonged there by my grandmother. It was a farm that's now been in the family for 150 years, not much by the standards of the country where there are much deeper, older in many ways, richer histories. But nonetheless there was that sense of this family farm being a place where I could put down roots. I

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was told that, but it took a while to sink in. And there was loneliness. There was a feeling of, of being taken away from what I had understood to be my life and put into something else. And, you know, the truth is I was under the impression that I hadn't come by innocently, but this was going to be a temporary move that I would be there for a year. But in fact, I ended up never really living with either of my parents again. And putting those roots down in Indiana that I'm still contending with all these years later.

Karen Long (14:56):

The land clearly has its hook in you. I also love knowing that the first thing you wrote, but didn't submit, was called "Old Woman," and it is connected to the book you've been most recently celebrated for the National Book Award finalist, "Zorrie." So I love that this Zorrie Underwood, the first name you found on a gravestone in Clinton County, has been with you since 1990 in some form.

Laird Hunt (15:37):

In a way, it's the first story, it's the oldest story for me. And curiously enough, I've been doing some work recently related to some of this material. So I have a copy of the story. "Old Woman" sitting on the desk in front of me right now, and the date is 11/28/1990. I was teaching English in Japan, which is where I really set into being a writer. Which sort of, you know, it makes a kind of sense to me that I would need to go very far away from this thing that had become so central to me, to find the way to write about it. I needed that perspective and I found it in Japan and I wrote that story. And I was able to read it to my grandmother who came to visit me in Japan, that world traveler who had those deep roots in Indiana. And I read this story to her. And at the end of it she had a little bit of a smile on her face and she said, that's kind of about me, isn't it? She was most pleased by this. So I like to think that all the evolutions of the original story have her somewhere in the central DNA.

Karen Long (16:50):

This is a very random question, but one book that I've been returning to is new like "Zorrie," and it's called "Small Things Like These," by Claire Keegan. Have you happened to cross it yet?

Laird Hunt (17:03):

Yes, I read it. I thought it was fabulous.

Karen Long (17:05):

Me too.

Laird Hunt (17:06):

Yeah.

Karen Long (17:11):

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And like you, Claire Keegan spent decades with Bill Furlong, the protagonist of her book, who came to her when she was reading a report from an Irish county on church sexual abuse, and church abuse generally, where a lumber and coal man found a child in a coal shed. And she thought about that man, as a man who used back doors and kept his eyes down. And lived with him for about 20 years before she started to write. And she said he kind of agitated. Did Zorrie agitate?

Laird Hunt (17:56):

You know, "Zorrie" was actually first drafted under the title "Old Woman" soon after my second novel, which was called "Indiana, Indiana." And she had a very tiny role in that earlier novel. But I was intrigued by this character who sort of appears in her, she's put on a nice dress and, and she's come to speak to the protagonist of "Indiana, Indiana" under a crab apple tree. And you know, it doesn't go particularly well. But Noah remains very interested in her. And I remained interested in her and felt like, you know what, I need to do a little bit more with this character, even if just for myself. And so I fairly quickly wrote the first draft of a short novel called "Old Woman," which was about Zorrie Underwood.

Laird Hunt (18:51):

And for years it lived under that title. And her name is almost never mentioned within the text. She's an old woman throughout, just as in the original story, the character's name is Old Woman. And I would set it aside for two or three years and then I'd realize, oh, that, that second section is all wrong. And I rewrote the second section and later I found this story of radium girls, right. And I built that into the novel. And so it kept coming back to me and agitating is, is maybe not a bad way to put it. As in the Claire Keegan story, Zorrie's needed to be heard. And again, for a long time, I thought maybe this is, she just needs to be heard clearly by me. But at a certain juncture, I shared it and there was a sense that, oh, actually, there's, there's really something here. This needs to come out. And so, you know it was almost a novel that stayed in the drawer forever. And I'm glad that Zorrie got to come out into the light.

Karen Long (19:56):

Thank you for liberating her. She will travel with me. I find her recognizable of some and reminiscent of some of my elders. It was so human of you to describe her sleep patterns, how they had stayed steady, and then how they changed toward the end of her life. And how she experienced the coming of mortality through something that is so every day.

I want to read the National Book Award citation for "Zorrie," because people should hear it. And it itself is well written. "'Zorrie,' by Laird Hunt, is a satisfying orb of a novel, fully contained, perfectly calibrated with love and disappointment, grief, and transcendence. Each sentence has the clarity of crystal. In its Midwestern way, it reminds us that life doesn't have to be all mountain peaks and canyons and drama. There is beauty and fulfillment in the quiet of the plains, on an Indiana farm in a singular, small life. It is a quiet and exquisitely crafted ballad of a book."

Laird Hunt (21:20):

That's very moving to me to hear that description and I'm grateful to the committee for that.

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Karen Long (21:26):

And now we'll pause for a short break. The Asterisk* is a project of the Cleveland Foundation to bring more readers and listeners into conversation with the best writers in English, in this case, recipients of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. We'll now return to the conversation.

Karen Long (21:53):

And there's such a close attention to your craft, which, like all great craft, you tuck the seams away. And the use of the word orb struck me because it's a circle, it's a life. And the honor you pay Zorrie by your close attention is girded by the structure that you found for this. Does that come to you organically? I know you spend a lot of time revising.

Laird Hunt (22:30):

Yeah. Well, this was another sort of a gift. I knew from the start that whatever I did with this story, whether it was called "Old Woman" or "Zorrie," it was going to have to deal with things really pared down that this wasn't going to be an occasion for literary extravagance that I really had to keep my eye on this character. She seemed to call for it. And so something that was elegant but efficient in terms of structure seemed important to settle on and fairly early on, I recalled that beautiful structure used by Gustave Flaubert in his really, it's a long short story called a "Simple Heart," in which we begin near the end of the life of the protagonist. We go back to the beginning, march forward, chronologically catch where it started, go a little bit farther and that's it. And so that's what I borrowed and have always been very clear that it's a borrowing from, from Gustave Flaubert, who said, incidentally, that it's really, really not easy at all to tell a simple thing. That simplicity requires great resourcefulness to honor, to pay tribute to, to signal effectively. And that sort of stuck with me as well.

Karen Long (23:58):

Well, you are a master of economy. I think your first published bit was a haiku?

Laird Hunt (24:08):

This is true. I still have the check I was sent from Cicada magazine for \$1 for that haiku. I never cashed it.

Karen Long (24:17):

I love it. And you have that haiku memorized?

Laird Hunt (24:23):

Silence / in the bamboo / of butterflies

Karen Long (24:27):

Again about structure.

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Laird Hunt (24:29):

And I should point out that that was knowing full well that a haiku takes a 5, 7, 5 beat syllable in the original Japanese, but registering that a Japanese syllable is always the same short length. I don't follow that syllable count. But I try to go after the compression that haiku requires.

Karen Long (24:55):

And you married a poet and your beautiful poet intersects so often with your creative life, did your grandmother get to meet her?

Laird Hunt (25:06):

Absolutely, yes. They did get to meet and very importantly Eleni was able to attend church one Sunday with my grandmother. And that was very important to my grandmother who kept those traditions and her faith very close to her to the very end.

Karen Long (25:27):

Did they also talk of Greece?

Laird Hunt (25:30):

Absolutely, yes. That experience that not so many people, let's be honest, could empathize with, share memories of in the Clinton County that my grandmother had surrounded herself with so willingly. So when she had someone of Greek descent like Eleni, my wife, to talk about it, well she even came out with some ancient Greek phrases that had survived the years. And it's funny that you mention that because my aunt, my grandmother's daughter, recently sent me a memoir that my grandfather wrote. He was the one who was stationed in Greece after World War II doing relief work. He was of Quaker stock and wanted to serve, didn't want to fight. And so he did relief work and he was in charge of child welfare. And so I'm reading about these adventures of my grandmother's, which had really become boiled down over the years. And they were really extraordinary going to...seeing the Corinth Canal and, you know, wandering the temple at Sounion in the wake of World War II was a big deal for young people from rural Indiana.

Karen Long (26:37):

And it must have made your heart brim to see these two foundational women see one another.

Laird Hunt (26:44):

Absolutely, yeah. Recognize...recognize something in each other - kind of spark a desire for adventure, and also to think about and discuss and mull over those adventures once had.

Karen Long (26:58):

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One of your better known novels is "Neverhome." It's set in the Civil War. And you have said that its first sentence was also a gift that arrived. Go ahead and tell us that sentence. We love to hear it in your voice.

Laird Hunt (27:17):

"I was strong and he was not, so it was me went to war to defend the Republic."

Laird Hunt (27:24):

And that one, I should say, "Kind One's" first sentence was ever so slightly changed, but that one never changed- not even a syllable. So for whatever reason, it came to me and the whole novel sort of came out of that first sentence in a way.

Karen Long (27:42):

And Eleni gave you a book written by a woman who had fought in the Civil War as hundreds of women did.

Laird Hunt (27:51):

Yeah, that was one of those key gifts that took a while for me to realize I needed to try and do something with, to wrestle with in some way. But it's called "An Uncommon Soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman." This was a young woman who fought under the name Lyons Wakeman, who was working, actually already disguising her gender as a boatsman before the outbreak of the civil war. And when a recruiter came along and said there was better money to be made down the road, if they just signed up for a brief tour of duty. Lyons Wakeman immediately signed up. And it's an interesting story in that so many of the letters sent by Lyons Wakeman home to the family survived. And sometimes they're signed Lyons and sometimes they're signed Sarah. And there's a full, huge adventure that happens two years, and then Lyons Wakeman dies of disease, not on the battlefield - never makes it home. But that story really stayed with me about this person who, whose motivations seem largely to be about adventure and money more than anything else, that weren't necessarily easily possible for a young woman in America at that time. Not easy at all.

Karen Long (29:26):

This one was optioned for a film version back in 2014. Is there an update?

Laird Hunt (29:35):

The film is not gonna happen, at least not in that original incarnation. After years of trying, as these things sometimes go, it just didn't quite come together. But I made quite a good friend of the person who was going to direct, Lenny Abrahamson, who's just a wonderful, brilliant director and a very nice person as well. So a friendship came out of it, and that seems pretty good to me.

Karen Long (30:05):

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That is generous. And doesn't surprise me. I think you pick up friends along your routes, pretty assiduously. I imagine you there in Providence teaching, and I'm wondering if the proximity to young people is a balm for you or an aggravation or both?

Laird Hunt (30:25):

Oh, it's absolutely both. I love my students. They're amazing. They're inspiring. And then they're also, just as I was, just as we all were, tremendously aggravating at times. But one recognizes that it always comes out of a deep hunger for life, for art, for experience. And so it's like having a bunch of kids in all the best and the worst ways. And I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Karen Long (31:00):

Oh, that's good to hear. Is there something that you set out to impart to them, or are you more interested in creating an environment where they can reveal things to one another and learn as a cohort?

Laird Hunt (31:17):

I think of it as collaborative. I've come to think of it that way. On the other hand, I don't go fully in the direction of "I have nothing to say. I'm just there to sort of facilitate your experience." Because I don't think that's quite what they want, to be honest, even though there's a fair amount of rhetoric about this idea of leveling and we're all just, you know, I've just been at it for a little bit longer. I don't think that makes me particularly special, but I have a thing or two to say, let's be honest about it. But nonetheless, it really is about a kind of collaborative enterprise that we engage in together. And it's when we're all contributing in whatever way it is on that particular day. In some way that that is, you know, intriguing, that is inspiring, that is enlivening.

Laird Hunt (32:06):

It's on those kinds of days when things really crackle, things happen for me, and I hope also for the participants in the class. But it is an enterprise that we lock arms together and engage in. And that's when it works best. So for me, it's not about some sort of top-down experience. On the other hand, you know, there is this idea that, you know, I've written a few books, I've had a few thoughts, not necessarily the best thoughts, not necessarily best books, but nonetheless, I've done that thing that they're interested in. And so, you know, I can say a few things about that as we go along as well, and hopefully that's worthwhile and in some way, rewarding,

Karen Long (32:51):

Does it matter that the department is called Literary Arts instead of English?

Laird Hunt (32:56):

I really like that. For years, I taught in an English department that housed a creative writing program and sort of towards the end, curiously enough, inspired by Brown, if I remember the conversations correctly,

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at the University of Denver, the department was changed to the department of English and Literary Arts. Well, what I like about it is it embraces these different genres and these different ways of working with literature, including translation, for example, it folds very nicely into literary arts. And translation is, its signal practitioners have a lot to say about this, but it is a great literary art as well. As the the standard poetry, the standard fiction, but we also have cross-disciplinary studies at Brown, hybrid enterprises. And so literary arts folds a lot in. And you know, if it were called English, I would be fine with that. I think there's plenty to be said for that good term as well, but I'm happy that we've got Literary Arts. It feels like there's room to maneuver within that.

Karen Long (34:05):

I think your background as a multi-linguist just emerged and good to see it. Do you cross paths with Karan Mahajan, who also won Anisfield-Wolf for his "Association of Small Bombs"?

Laird Hunt (34:20):

Yeah, he's a colleague and a friend. And as a matter of fact, I was meant to have drinks with Karan just last night. I wasn't able to go, but Eleni went, and Karan's doing really well. No, we're delighted that he's on board at Brown. He came, I guess just a year after I started, so it's, we sort of started at the same time. He's an amazing writer and he's working on a fantastic new novel that's gonna hit the world, I think, in the next year or two. So world be ready.

Karen Long (34:51):

That's wonderful to know. The first chapter of the "Association of Small Bombs" came to him all in a piece, you know, in the themes that we're speaking to of these gifts. And I have never read anything like it anywhere else. It's from the perspective of a device exploding.

Laird Hunt (35:14):

Yeah. It's an amazing opening. Can't recommend that book enough - and really all of Karan's writing. But it's true that those, the opening pages of that particular book are really quite something. You don't read that sort of thing every day, that's for sure.

Karen Long (35:30):

When you look at "Kind One" now Laird, do you see flaws? Does it feel like it belongs to your past?

Laird Hunt (35:39):

I do. I certainly do see flaws. There is a sense that I, you know, I wish I had done this or that a little bit differently. But I see them maybe more in other of my books, I've written a number of them now, and some of them have held up. It seems to me at least by, you know, my own sense of things, better than others. And "Kind One" is in that category of better than others. It still feels like it has something to say. It still feels like it has something to offer in a way, sure. Are there things I would want to tidy up or maybe even reconstrue a little bit? Yeah, absolutely. But I'm not sure that this older incarnation of myself is

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wiser and better at it in some way than the younger one. So even if someone said, Hey, you know, crack it open, let's do a new version of it. I don't think I would, I don't think I would go Walt Whitman on this thing, and start writing multiple versions.

Karen Long (36:40):

I was just thinking about that. And he strayed in the process, at least by the evaluations of a lot of readers.

Laird Hunt (36:48):

Absolutely. That's the risk, right? You're not necessarily better at it.

Karen Long (36:53):

Right. You know, sort of honoring those gifts that arrive, and not straying too far from the instruments at hand with self-doubt. It's so important to think about "Kind One" and the act of naming. Ginny is called Sue for the last half of her life. The last chapter is about the man who loved her, but loved someone else before. And his name, talk a little bit about that biblical thing about what we call one another.

Laird Hunt (37:31):

Finding the right name says...is something that I keep alive and open through the entire course of any book that I'm working on. So very often the right name only comes at the end of things. There's a character in "Kind One" whose name is Zinnia, who gets called Aunt Z most lovingly towards the end. She's a central figure in so many ways in this book. She had a different name until just about the very last iteration. And I realized that it had to be Zinnia. A name like Aloucius, she alluded to, that came right away. That was one that came early on and had really helped me shape the character, see the character. Right naming, it seems to me, really helps illuminate.

Laird Hunt (38:28):

And sometimes I can't see all the facets of a character until that name has been accorded. And thinking of a book like "Zorrie," in which the character was for so long was called Old Woman, even though I knew what her name was. I knew she was Zorrie Underwood. But it was really when I started to let that name be a living, breathing part of the novel that I saw different things about the character. And she got to inhabit that name in a much more satisfying way. And that's been the case just that I could, you know, just about every book I've written. As a matter of fact, the one I'm writing now, getting the names right is bedeviling. But it's also really satisfying when you hit it. And I'm not there yet with this new one, but I'm hopeful.

Karen Long (39:16):

What is its working title?

Laird Hunt (39:18):

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It's called the "Candy Cycle."

Karen Long (39:20):

Oh.

Laird Hunt (39:22):

With foreknowledge and apologies to the recent Jennifer Egan book called "The Candy House." So we'll see. That's a pretty loud, big book in the literary landscape - the Egan book. But nonetheless, there's a central character from "Zorrie" who's the initiate, who has the initiating story in this collection of stories. Her name is Candy Wilson from "Zorrie." And like Zorrie with "Indiana, Indiana," I realized that I wanted to spend a little bit more time with Candy. Though she didn't get a whole novel, other characters get to have 15 or 20 pages. And so it's a number of characters, some from "Zorrie" and then some who have grown up out of this soil that I'm tilling.

Karen Long (40:14):

I love that agricultural gesture, because the becoming, and the anticipation and the cyclical, feel right to the landscape that has its hooks in you. Would you please give our listeners a notion of what you're reading before we conclude today?

Laird Hunt (40:36):

Absolutely. It's been a pretty good reading period just lately. Maybe it's the fact that it's summer, but I've got a few books that have been percolating nearby. One of them, which I really love is "Dark Neighbourhood" by Vanessa Onwumezi, a newer London-based writer. Can't recommend her work highly enough - it's out on Fitzcarraldo Editions. The book I'm almost done with that I think is quite terrific, New Directions put out "Cold Enough for Snow," by Jessica Au, who's an Australian writer. Really deceptively...one of these deceptively quiet, really rich books. And then finally, a great classic that I'm working my way through that I've always been meaning to read, called "Radetzky March" by Joseph Roth. About the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire. So I'm really all over the place.

Karen Long (41:36):

You are.

Laird Hunt (41:37):

That's kind of my recommendations.

Karen Long (41:39):

I love those recommendations, which I wouldn't have guessed, and now I have to pursue. It's been a joy to be with you Laird. Thank you for your continued creativity and your kindness toward the Anisfield-Wolf project, which we will continue to celebrate going forward.

Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards*

Laird Hunt (41:59):

Thank you so much for having me. Being awarded the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award was really one of the great, great highlights of my life. And I'll always be grateful to the foundation, and to all the judges, and to you, Karen.

Karen Long (42:16):

Well, it spawned our friendship and for that I am most grateful. Have a wonderful weekend.

Laird Hunt (42:24):

Thank you, Karen.

Karen Long (42:27):

The Asterisk* is brought to you by the Cleveland Foundation. The executive producer is Alan Ashby, with help from producer Tara Pringle Jefferson. Cleveland Public School students, working with the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society, wrote and performed our original score. I'm Karen Long, manager of the prizes. Visit anisfield-wolf.org to learn more on the history of the award, about previous winners, and upcoming events. And thank you for listening.