**Podcast: Literaticast**

**Episode: 49: World Kid Lit Month with Translator and Author Lawrence Schimel**

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**Transcription by Keffy**

[00:00:00] Literaticast theme music plays.

Jenn: [00:00:06] Hello and welcome to the Literaticast. I'm Jennifer Laughran and I'm a senior agent at the Andrea Brown Literary Agency where I rep children's books, from baby books through YA and everything in between.

[00:00:18] As longtime listeners may know, I took a long hiatus this year. So many cool things happened while I was away and I've got to tell you about some of them. Several of my books won big awards at ALA this year, like I got two Caldecott Honors. Well, my authors and illustrators did, anyway. Cindy Derby's illustrations for *Outside In* by Deborah Underwood got a Caldecott honor. I also represented Zetta Elliott, the author of the beautiful *A Place Inside of Me*, illustrated by Noa Denmon, also a Caldecott Honor.

Raul the Third’s *Vamos! Let’s Go Eat!* Won a Pura Belpre award. And the next Vamos book. *Vamos! Let's Cross the Bridge!* comes out in October, next month. I’m so excited.

Oh, and also to spin off early readers from the Vamos! series came out in the spring that started the new *El Toro & Friends* series. Super fun early readers starring the Mexican wrestling team from the Vamos books. Oh, also, there's a new project by Raul the Third and Jason Reynolds that's going to be hitting shelves in late November. It's a totally fully illustrated middle grade. It's amazing. It's called *Stunt Boy in the Meantime*, and you really ought to preorder it now. So yeah, Raul has had a very busy year. And he's not the only one.

[00:01:39] I've had 30 books come out this year so far, and another 20 or so to go in the next three months. It's going to be around 50 books total for 2021. I'm not going to list them all but you can find them all in the news section of my website, arranged by month. And I add new ones every month.

[00:01:56] One story that I will tell, though. In winter, my client, Kate Messner let me know that in doing research for another book about scientists, she had reached out to Dr. Fauci’s office, and he’d agreed to an interview. It's kind of amazing because it was smack in the middle of a pandemic and he was possibly the busiest man in the world, literally. But he felt really strongly about making sure kids get knowledge about what was going on. He knew that Kate was a children's book writer, so he agreed. From that interview came a picture book, *Dr. Fauci How a Boy From Brooklyn Became America's Doctor.* Sold to Simon & Schuster. And because of the timeliness of the subject matter, the publisher did an amazing, extreme rush on it. It's called crashing a book when this happens. They basically dialed the machine up from, you know, normal five to an 11 and got the book onto the shelves in six months, rather than how long it normally takes a picture book, which is 18 to 24 months.

[00:03:02] The book came out absurdly gorgeous. It's got illustrations by Alexandra Bye, it's just really special. It's about Dr. Fauci’s life, of course, and a bit about the pandemic as well. But it's also about how scientists think, and how they team up to creatively solve problems, and how curious kids can make a difference in the world.

[00:03:23] And there's an afterword for kid scientists in the back by Dr. Fauci himself. It's really cool. The book debuted on the *New York Times* bestseller list. I was incredibly proud, you should check it out. It's a great book.

[00:03:36] Anyway, it's been quite a year. It's not over yet. I'm looking forward to talking to you more about all my books and all the things going on behind the scenes in the world of children's publishing. And whether you've been waiting for new episodes, or you're new to the podcast, welcome. I'm glad to be back.

[00:03:54] Before we get started, on this week's episode, I've been told that I need to start doing some housekeeping upfront instead of at the end. So if you like the podcast, please rate and review it on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Good reviews help folks find the show. And if you'd like to help support the show, we have a Patreon which I will link to also. Joining for even $1 a month is incredibly helpful to keep the show running. You'll be able to find the show notes with all the links and books we talk about today on my website, JenniferLaughran.com/Literaticast.

[00:04:29] With all that said, it's time for my first guest of 2021. This month, September, is World Kid Lit Month and Banned Books Week is at the end of this month. Today's guest knows a lot about both international publishing and banned books. He's a prolific author as well as the translator of countless books from English to Spanish and vice versa. He's one of the founders of World Kid Lit Month and his latest titles caused something of an international incident which we will dig into.

[00:05:01] We're gonna talk about all things international publishing, books in translation, and so much more. Lawrence Schimel truly is a renaissance man. Translator, children's book author, poet, publisher, and perhaps most importantly, my old friend. I'm so excited to get to talk to him today with you. Coming to you all the way from Madrid, Spain. Let me see if I can get Lawrence on the line.

[00:05:27] Hi, Lawrence.

Lawrence: [00:05:29] Hello there.

Jenn: [00:05:30] So I did introduce you in the intro. But could you introduce yourself to everyone?

Lawrence: [00:05:35] Sure, I identify as an author and a translator, primarily, I also run a small poetry press. I've been involved in making books for 20 something years. But reading books, which is, I identify probably as a reader more than anything else for 50 years.

Jenn: [00:05:55] Nice. You wear so many hats, can you give us the nutshell version of how you ended up in the world of kid lit.

Lawrence: [00:06:03] I started writing for older readers when I was still a teen. So my first stories actually I sold when I was in high school, and my parents had to sign the contracts because I was underage. I couldn't enter into a legally binding agreement. But I had always remained interested in kid lit. And I think a lot of people I knew from the science fiction world, which is where I started writing, also overlapped. And so I never really, you know, as I graduated from my teens, and I was already publishing, but I never sort of left behind the whole YA world, I guess.

[00:06:42] I did when—I'm been living in Madrid for over 20 years now. But when I was in New York still, I used to work at Books of Wonder, the children's specialty bookshop. And so, you know, I've been involved in kids’ books in lots of different ways for years and years and years.

Jenn: [00:06:58] Amazing. So September, which is where we are right now, September 2021, if you can believe that. September is World Kid Lit Month, which I understand you were instrumental in founding, obviously, as a translator and writer for many markets around the world, international children's books are really important to you. What is World Kid Lit Month, exactly?

Lawrence: [00:07:21] So World Kid Lit Month started, there were a few of us got together and we were looking at the success of women in translation month, which was another initiative that just passed the in the month of August, that was started by Meytal. And we were hoping to raise the visibility of translated children's books into English. So it's sort of a weird thing where I think that a lot of canonical books that are considered books for kids, especially, you know, older, young adult stuff, are in translation, but we don't think of them that way. You know, I mean, books like *Pinocchio* or *Pippi Longstocking*, or any of the Jules Vernes. You know, we don't think of them as translations from the French. So the idea was to, you know, create a social media interest to paying attention to books that come from other languages into English and the people who are making that happen. The translators, the editors, publishers, things like that.

Jenn: [00:08:19] Amazing. I literally, I knew that Jules Verne was not an English-speaking person. But it literally never occurred to me that those books were translated. I had forgotten, you're exactly right. I think in the US, we do tend to get tunnel vision about our books in a way like, so often books in translation, they're either hard to find here, or they're like old classics, or they're published by tiny publishers or not published here at all. So it's easy for us to forget, sometimes, I think, that there even is a world outside of our borders. The differences between what gets popular and what's published in the US versus other countries is really intriguing for me. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Lawrence: [00:09:02] Well, I mean, I think that it's, you know, one of the biggest problems in the Anglophone publishing world is that publishers hide that books are translated. I mean, very often, there was just a piece earlier this week in *The Guardian* by Jennifer Croft, who's the translator, among others of Nobel Prize winner, Olga, and I cannot pronounce her last name. So I'm not even going to try and butcher it. But, you know, she was pointing out that up the last six winners of the International Booker Prize, none of the books credited the translator on the cover.

[00:09:34] And so I mean, there are more translations, I think, than people realize, but the publishing world tries to hide the fact. I mean, there's this pervasive notion in publishing that English speakers are afraid of translations and as a result, they try and hide the fact when books are translated, and this has lots of detrimental effects all across the whole system. And especially for the translators who are translating these books. We don't get, when so much of what we do is hidden from everyone, we're not considered or included in so many different parts of the system, I guess.

Jenn: [00:10:15] Hmm. That's very true. Are there trends that you notice? For example, I've noticed that in France, for example, they seem to like darker themes or sort of stranger art. In Japan, they tend to gravitate towards either really graphic, highly design-y books or sort of wispy, beautiful art. But the cartoony look that often is US and UK titles doesn't seem to go over very well. These are really broad generalizations, obviously. But are there trends that you notice in publishing around the world?

Lawrence: [00:10:48] Definitely, there are things that happen like that, I mean, talking about kid lit, is there's so many different things. And you know, picture books work very differently than middle grade or young adult, and especially a lot of that has to do with the art and how expensive it is to print four color, picture books. And so a lot of times, many publishers will join an existing print run and just change the black plate. So if you print all of the blue, the red and the yellow together, and only change the black plate, but then you do all the binding together, you get lower price points than if you had to print just a small quantity on your own.

[00:11:24] And so, as a result, there's a lot of dominance, especially from US and UK, publishers, also French, do a lot of co-editions. And those styles then tend to dominate in a lot of other places. I do think also that the US and the UK markets very often get to get to be afraid of certain subjects. But if a publisher abroad publishes them well, and wins awards and stuff like that, that makes it easier for them to introduce them to the English speaking market, because of the awards and other things in the original country.

[00:12:01] So you know, I also think that a lot of other places outside the Anglophone sphere accept life and represent life much more naturally, in their kid lit, especially on a picture book level. I mean, I remember years ago talking to a publisher in the US about some picture book projects, and they just had this list of things that were forbidden. You could not have an adult, for instance, in bed with a child, they had to be seated next to the bed. There’s just all these different rules and regulations that no one was allowed to smoke. They couldn't have candy. They couldn't have soft drinks. They couldn't have. They were even at that time, forbidding bandanas, because I had, there was a scene in one of the books that the kids dressed up as pirates, and they said, no, we can have bandanas because of the gangs and if it's the wrong colors, and everything like that.

Jenn: [00:12:51] Wow.

Lawrence: [00:12:51] And so it was just amazing how restrictive things were. So, art styles definitely make a difference, though. I mean, especially picture books, I think that picture books travel on the art first, rather than the story. That definitely does happen.

Jenn: [00:13:06] So obviously, listeners are now going to want to celebrate World Kid Lit Month, if they didn't already know about it.

Lawrence: [00:13:15] That's great.

Jenn: [00:13:16] So can you give suggestions about where to start?

Lawrence: [00:13:19] There's a wonderful list of suggestions on the World Kid Lit website. So worldkidlit.wordpress.com. The World Kid Lit Month, we started that back in 2016 and it's been amazing to see how so many people have adopted it. And it's grown, you know, the great thing is that it's grown beyond us, and that people take it on and do their own things with it, which is wonderful. I mean, and it's great to see, on Instagram schools, posting the activities they're doing, or libraries that are creating things, or independent bookshops that have created special World Kid Lit Month displays at their bookstores, things like that. These are all some of the options on the World Kid Lit website. They have a lot of ideas, suggestions, things like that. And the other thing that's wonderful is that even the World Kid Lit Month started, as, you know, a month of celebrating translated children's books. The World Kid Lit website is active all year round. We have reviews. There's a section called translate this where translators write about books that are not yet translated into English, but that they think should be and so they give a pitch about why this book is wonderful and why it should be translated into English. So there's materials for publishers who might be interested and might not know how to look for books in other languages that they don't themselves speak. So, you know, these are some possibilities.

Jenn: [00:14:38] Super cool. And we're going to talk about specific books people might look for in a little bit. So as you know, obviously, but listeners would have no way of knowing, we've been internet buddies for a decade or more. But you and I got to know each other in real life because we have a long standing lunch date of the Bologna Book Fair where we gossip, eat gelato, talk about all things translation. This is seriously one of my favorite topics to hear about. I just find it fascinating. So can we talk about it?

Lawrence: [00:15:06] Sure. I mean, I love translation. I mean, as an avid reader, for me, translation, one of the things I love about it is if I fall in love with the book, and I say I want to share this with more readers, and so getting a chance to, you know, bring a story that I love to other readers is something that’s magical.

Jenn: [00:15:25] So I get inquiries all the time from readers. They're not professional translators, they're just readers in foreign countries, asking permission to translate one of my books, sometimes they just want to translate it to share with their classroom or something. And I don't have a problem with that. But sometimes they are thinking, they'll translate it, and it will get published in that country, in a foreign language. And that's not really how it works. So how does it work? Like how does one become a translator? Who hires you? When? How? Etc.

Lawrence: [00:15:56] So I think the most important thing to remember, so translation is a subsidiary copyright. So my translation of something is, the copyright to that translation automatically belongs to me, even though it's a subsidiary copyright, that I cannot publish my translation without permission from the rights holder of the underlying work.

[00:16:17] So if I translate a novel, I can translate a novel for my own pleasure, share it with a partner, read it to my kids in another language, whatever, but I'm not publishing it. That's all fine. But in order to publish something, you need both permissions. So I would need the permission of either the author directly, their agent, the publisher, depending on who controls the foreign rights in that language.

[00:16:40] At the same time, even though I've translated someone else's book, they cannot publish my translation without my permission. So the copyright protection goes both ways that neither one can use it without both parties, or their representatives, agreeing to the terms to allow for the publication. So at the same time, there are sometimes professional translators who are very instrumental in, they've read something and they bring it to the publishers that they work with. I've certainly done that. I've pitched books to publishers, as well as having publishers come to me, asking me to translate stuff.

[00:17:17] And books of mine have also been translated into various languages, because colleagues who are also translators have pitched it to publishers or things like that. So it does happen. That’s different than a fan translation or something like that, from just a reader who's interested in translating it. That's a different story.

[00:17:36] There is, on the World Kid Lit website, there are some resources for translators and some stuff about how to start as a translator. So I would suggest people take a look at the website that has more coherent and more direct resources that you can just click through to find stuff that's more relevant in each case.

Jenn: [00:17:55] That's really helpful. But typically, the publisher in the foreign, so like, let's say, I'm selling, or the publisher in the US is selling Spanish rights. Then they reach out to a publisher in Madrid or Mexico City or whatever. And then that publisher buys those rights, and then they hire a translator. Is that usually how it works?

Lawrence: [00:18:18] That's usually how it works. So and I mean, Spanish is an interesting case, because I mean, the same way with English where you might sell only North American rights to a work in English and then sell directly to Australia, or to Singapore in English as well. So Spanish also there are many Spanish language territories, they're not always the same. So I mean, very often, especially publishers from Spain want to have world Spanish language rights, even though they don't necessarily distribute everywhere. But publishers generally want all rights and they want, whether they're going to use them or not, they just, you know, they want to have them. You know, as an agent, I'm sure you've had to negotiate about that.

[00:19:02] But one other thing that's important to not overlook is that the US is an enormous Spanish speaking market. There are of course, differences in regional Spanish, different regional Spanish as you know, I tend to, you know, living in Madrid I might default Spanish as an Iberian Spanish. I do work in other Spanishes, you know, a sort of quote unquote “neutral Spanish” or you know, I just translated some picture books into Spanish for US publishers and they wanted to Mexican Spanish.

[00:19:31] And we can talk about some other details of that if we want to get into stuff but especially because one of the books had a Cuban character and I was like, you asked for Mexican Spanish, but in Cuba, for instance, they always say la guagua for the bus and everyone in the Spanish speaking world recognizes Cubans because that one word is something that only Cubans or in the islands of the Canary Islands in Spain, uses guagua for bus, instead of autobús, which is what Mexican Spanish was. And I said, because the story involves Cuban characters, I said it wouldn't be appropriate to use the Mexican term instead of the Cuban term in that case.

Jenn: [00:20:10] It must be a lot to have to think about all of those countries and dialects when you're translating. That's got to be, I don't know, I am in awe of how your mind works. Let's put it that way.

Lawrence: [00:20:25] It's also fun and exciting. And especially, I mean, you know, you can use things where, let's say you have a novel that uses or is contrasting dialogue, where you have a southern US and you have a New England character. And so they have different speech patterns. And so if I'm translating something like that, for a Spanish publisher into Spanish, I would use I could use like an Andalusian dialect versus a more canonical, Iberian Castilian. There are different ways of using that to good effect, or using, if it's for a publisher in Latin America, you know, you could have someone using Mexican vocabulary, or as we mentioned, Cuban vocabulary, and that, that automatically situates people differently.

[00:21:14] So, these are also the things though, that, why it's important to… Publishers need to pay attention to who they're asking for translations and also to make sure that they are broadening the people that they're referring to, to do translations to make sure that there's a good match between the person who's doing the translation and the subject of the translation.

[00:21:37] Especially if there's a lot of questions about race, gender, sexuality, different things like that, that a translator can make a lot of mistakes or make assumptions that are not faithful or true to the book then. So usually most of us as translators, we try very hard to do things correctly. And so just to give an example, from a translator into German of not my children stuff, some erotica that I had done. There was an erotic story that was in an anthology of Christmas erotica being published in Germany. And he was a heterosexual man, the story was a gay erotic piece, and he didn't know if there was gay slang for sex terms. So he called a chat line, a gay chat line that was announced in the back of the newspaper. And he asked on the chat line, you know, do you say it this way, or another term for that? And so I found out about this after at the Frankfurt Book for the editor was, you know, recounting this anecdote to me, and he said that he had actually paid extra to the translator to cover the costs of this, of all this homework he had done, of paying for this chat call.

[00:22:48] But that was something where he really did the homework to do it correctly.

Jenn: [00:22:52] Right.

Lawrence: [00:22:53] So, you know, I mean, that's a good case. You know, there been a lot of news recently about some of the translators for Amanda Gorman's work where they were wildly inappropriate. People who had been chosen because it was sloppy or easy for the publishers, or the publisher was thinking, this person is a famous person, even if they don't speak English, we'll put you know, Amanda Gorman, who's famous and this person who's famous, and that'll sell lots of copies, even if it's not the best thing for the book. And also, I mean, this case was one where a lot of people pointed out that it would be really a good chance to highlight a translator of color or give an opportunity to a translator of color who, you know, historically have been denied opportunities, and are still being denied opportunities. You know, constantly.

Jenn: [00:23:41] Translating, obviously, it's not just a matter of changing exact words from English to Spanish or whatever language, it's an art. You have to literally not just literally translate the words but also the meaning and significance of the words, deal with things like rhyme and rhythm and wordplay. Like, I just, I know, we've talked about *Harry Potter* before, because we have a friend who translated *Harry Potter* into Hebrew. And the way that you have to translate some of these magical words to make sure that Diagon Alley, not only it like still has the double meaning, or that you know, I am Lord Voldemort, or whatever the Tom Riddles anagram name works in another language. That's really complicated. Can you talk about some of the challenges you've come across in translating?

Lawrence: [00:24:37] Sure, I can talk about that. I mean, just one thing to mention about the *Harry Potter* thing. One of the other problems that happened with the translations was the success and that, because Warner Brothers owns the movie rights, there were a lot of terms that, and the merchandising rights. There were a lot of terms that the translators of the original books had done really wonderful, inventive, creative adaptations to make them work in those languages. And then everything had to be reverted back to the English because those were the copyright for the merchandise. So I mean, that's just one other thing.

[00:25:09] The other thing I mean, you mentioned translation is an art. And certainly, art makes a big difference when you're translating. So I mean, it's one thing to say, if you're translating pure text, you have a lot more liberties to recreate something or to change things so that it works in the target language than you do if you're doing let's say, a picture book. And let's say I was saying, crazy cat and I had to translate crazy cat into Spanish. So you have this alliteration. Crazy Cat in Spanish would be gato loco, so that doesn't work. So you could either do, if it was just pure text, or just a poem that didn't have illustrations, you could say, loro loco, a crazy parrot. Or you could say maybe gato gordo, which is a fat cat. But if you have a picture of a skinny cat, you can't do that. So sometimes what you have to do is to compensate the plays on words or things like that, you might wind up creating a new one, elsewhere in a poem or on another page or something like that. You try and keep as much as you can.

[00:26:08] There's a lot of challenges that come up. I mean, one book that I did recently, I translate in both directions, both Spanish into English and English into Spanish, and I write in both directions. But I had translated into Spanish for Orca Books in Canada. They have a book by First Nation creators, Richard Van Camp, who's the author, and Julie Flett was the illustrator. They have a lovely picture book called *Little You*. In Spanish, all diminutives are gendered and so one of the things that's, you know, especially lovely about *Little You* is that the baby being addressed in English is never gendered. And so, and it shows many First Nation families in different combinations of how many parents there are, and things like that.

[00:26:52] And so, to translate this into Spanish, there's like 80 words in the book. And it took me two weeks because I did a simple translation using the masculine as the neutral, but that made all of the babies boys. And then I did a rhyming version that was more, that took more liberties, but as a result was more faithful to the spirit of the book, which is the one that they did publish. So that changed the title right away. So the new title is *Tú eres tú* as a way of getting around using gendered language. And especially for a book for babies, for this age, a board book, you couldn't use, for instance, direct non-binary language or something like that, that you could use, for instance even in a young adult novel. I don't know that anyone's done that yet with young adult stuff. I've certainly done it occasionally with adult translations when it's appropriate. But, since babies are still just learning language, you can't break the rules yet until the language rules evolve. You know, language is evolving all the time.

Jenn: [00:27:53] Right.

[00:27:55] Is rhyme a particular difficulty, like I know, one of the reasons like, agents are always like, please don't write rhyming books. Stop querying us with rhyming books. Mostly, to be honest, because although there are very popular rhyming books, and if it's done well, they can be incredibly successful. We also get a lot of queries with just really bad rhyme. Like, doggerel rhyme. And because of that, it just automatically is something where a lot of agents will say, please don't. So we can just not have to read the really bad ones.

Lawrence: [00:28:36] Right.

Jenn: [00:28:37] But obviously, there's plenty of room in the market for really great rhyme. But how does that work in translation?

Lawrence: [00:28:43] It can be very tricky. I mean, and this is something where I mean, as an author, as well as a translator. So I think of the 120 books I've done, it's only been recently that I finally wrote, two rhyming board books, which we can talk about later, I think. And those had been my biggest success in terms of being translated into other languages. So that was a surprise, and I wrote them in part because I had been translating so much other writing material into Spanish or into English by other authors, and I said, well, why don't I try writing a book in rhyme myself, instead of only translating rhyme.

[00:29:23] So that was just a curious self imposed challenge. It does make it more difficult. And also, especially for illustrated books that are in rhyme, as I mentioned, you can't translate anything that doesn't match the art. And so what happens very often is if your art is very specific, and those words are not in the translation. I mean, if things change or the rhymes are different, or anything like that, that creates more difficulty. It's kind of like alphabet books.

[00:29:49] You know, Spanish has extra letters than English does. So you know, an ABC book in one language is not the same number of letters as in another language. We have the eñe and the double L. So right away, we have two extra letters that that are not used in English.

[00:30:08] So I had a book translated, one of my picture books was translated into Icelandic and they had to change the character's name from Cecilia because they don't use a C in Icelandic.

Jenn: [00:30:17] Wow.

Lawrence: [00:30:18] So that was just a sort of “Oh, cool.”

Jenn: [00:30:21] You said 120 books. So how many projects do you work on in a given year?

Lawrence: [00:30:26] Too many. I mean, this year between books of my own and books that I've translated by other people, I'm publishing around 90, ISBNs.

Jenn: [00:30:38] Holy what?

Lawrence: [00:30:39] [crosstalk]

Jenn: [00:30:40] What? This year?

Lawrence: [00:30:41] Just this year in 2021? It's an insane, an insane number of projects that I'm juggling. And, of course, I'm translating books that will be published in 2022, 23. And so I mean, I think 2024, I'm talking about a book right now. So publishing is a long, a long process, very often. So. Yeah.

Jenn: [00:31:05] Wow.

Lawrence: [00:31:05] And especially with the pandemic, a lot of books got bumped back. And so I mean, there are books that were supposed to come out last year that are coming out this year, and this year that are still being pushed back because of the pandemic.

Jenn: [00:31:15] Oh, yeah.

Lawrence: [00:31:17] In the book world, we're experiencing now also a huge problem with actually physically getting the books. And so you know, the chain of supply is in such chaos right now, between shipping snafus and not enough drivers and paper and printing and all sorts of things like that. And so, you know, there are books that are just being printed, and they've sold through their print run and they're just not going to be reprinted again this year, because there just isn't time in the holiday season for them to make it out into the world.

[00:31:48] So that's unfortunate. But you know that these are all things that influence what what gets published and what doesn't and things like that.

Jenn: [00:31:54] Totally. Well, we're not going to talk about all 90 ISBNs but I know you do have several new translator projects that have either just come out or about to. I've heard about some starred reviews. You want to tell us about a couple of those?

Lawrence: [00:32:06] Sure. One, which just got a starred review from Kirkus is a nonfiction picture book I translated *called One Million Oysters on Top of the Mountain*, written by Alex Nogués and illustrated by Miran Asiain Lora. And it's published by Eerdmans. This is a lovely book about geology by a professional scientist. He actually, there's a really cool moment in the book where you find out that he has, that there is a species named after him, because he's the one who discovered the fossil record of it. And so that's just like a really cool extra thing.

[00:32:47] So I mean, any kids who love science at all, this is the kind of this is a book that they'll love. And it's a book that is a translation. But since there's rocks all over the world, it's really universal. So that’s one.

[00:33:03] There was, earlier this year, the paperback of *The Wild Book*, which is a middle grade biblio fantasy by Juan Villoro, a Mexican author that was published by Restless Books under the Yonder imprint. And that's just a wonderful story about the magic of reading, and especially when you share reading with other people. And it was a lot of fun also to work on because all of the books in the library. So there's lots of great titles and puns and coming up with different puns in English was a fun challenge. So that was something fun to do.

[00:33:47] Recently, I translated into Spanish, George Takei’s *They Called Us Enemy*, his graphic novel memoir, from Top Shelf, which is US publisher as well. And that was also a fun and also sad, you know, it was one of the few books that I cried while I was working on it. And it's a very powerful book. And it was also tricky because there are certain tricky references that he, you know, like, “To boldly go where no one has gone before.” That's something that everyone in English recognizes as a Trekkie reference and I had to see how had that been done in Spanish. The different translations in Latin America and Spain to make sure that I use that same vocabulary so that it automatically signaled to readers that this is a Trekkie, a *Star Trek* reference.

[00:34:34] And also because that that also it originally was “To boldly go where no man has gone before.” And then it became more gender neutral in the later Star Trek series, “To boldly go where no one has gone before.” So that was also an interesting evolution of how language changes and adapts to respond to social realities.

[00:34:52] These are translation challenges or, I mean, if I'm translating something and it uses a quote from the Bible, I have to make sure that I use the same edition for all of my quotes. You know, so if I'm going to use the King James Version in English, I need to make sure that all of the bible quotes are using the King James Version. So you just have to be consistent in that way.

[00:35:16] And, I mean, these are the questions that come up when we're translating, whether we're localizing or whether we're preserving the culture of origin of the book. I mean, this was interesting in a case. I translated a picture book called *The Day Saida Arrived* by Susana Gómez Redondo and illustrated by Sonia Wimmer, which was published by Blue Dot last year. And this was actually a finalist, the only translated title that was a finalist for the Jane Addams Children's Peace Prize.

[00:35:42] And it's a lovely story about, originally, it was a girl who moves from Morocco to Spain, and about how language learning and culture sharing goes both ways. And so in the translation into English, we kept all of the Moroccan culture and all of the Arabic vocabulary and things like that in, we preserved all of that. But we adapted all the stuff from Spanish culture to the US.

[00:36:10] So when they go to each other's house, they may eat couscous at Saida’s house, that stayed the same. But that instead of having a tortilla española, they would have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. So you know, we localized for the American market. So that was a book where we did both of those things. There was one point when she reached to Saida one of her favorite poems, and in Spanish, it was by Gloria Fuertes, who was a really well known children's poet, and in English, it became Jackie Woodson. So, you know, that was a localization both a preservation and the localization challenge.

[00:36:45] Very often I flag things for my publishers, and we discuss with the editors what to do. I was translating a Latin American Book, and one of the examples it gave was about, and for Christmas presents. And I said, we can make this birthday presents to make it more universal and less religiously focused in a book that's not about religion. So it wasn't necessarily that it had to be a Christmas. It wasn't a Christmas story. And so that also, I think, in the book, there were 10 different examples. And they almost all, it was like only two had girls names. And I said, these are not gender specific things, we are going to want to make a better balance of gender balance. And also we're going to choose in English, a variety of names and ethnicities that those names represent to reflect the reality of the kids who are going to be reading it in English. But these are the kinds of things that I don't have the authority as the translator to change, but I discuss with my editors and say, “Here's a potential sensitivity issue. Let's talk about this.”

Jenn: [00:37:47] Right. So let's transition to your own work as an author, this has been something of a monumental year for you, you’ve got your 90 ISBNs. And I also know that you have a couple of board books that you wrote that caused quite a stir.

Lawrence: [00:37:58] Exactly.

Jenn: [00:38:00] Can you tell us about what they are?

Lawrence: [00:38:01] So these are the books that I mentioned earlier. These were the very first books that I wrote in rhyme in any language. I wrote them originally in Spanish. They're two books. There are lots of other or not lots. There are some other children's books that feature LGBT characters in them. But I thought that there still need to be more that are not about overcoming homophobia, or about being different or anything like that, that just are fun, celebratory books that just happened to have same sex characters or families in them. And so I wrote these two board books that are both illustrated Elina Braslina, who’s a friend of mine. She's a Latvian artist. And so the English titles are *Bedtime, Not Playtime!* and *Early One Morning*, so the books are just sweet stories about trying to go to bed, waking up in the morning. They’re about kids and their pets, and they just happen to have two moms and two dads. As you mentioned, the books have caused a lot of sort of international ruckus, stir. The two books were published in one volume in Hungary, and the Hungarian government has instituted a bunch of prohibitive laws. They now can't be sold within 200 meters of a school or a church. They have to be shrink wrapped. They cannot be displayed in bookstore windows, various things like that. So and the books were also recently published by an NGO in Russia, with an 18 Plus label on them. Because in Russia, the LGBT propaganda laws forbid any depiction of LGBT life for kids under 18. And so they're using it as part of a campaign to try and repeal that law showing how absurd it is to put this, to make these board books 18 And over when they're just the sweet stories that represent ordinary quotidian, everyday, daily life that just happened to have same sex families.

Jenn: [00:39:57] Have you found, I know that I represent a book that has been, like the number one most banned book in the United States for several years in a row. Which is *George* by Alex Gino. And it's problematic because on the one hand like, “Yay, stick it to ‘em, we're doing something right. If these terrible people want to ban this book.” But also, I want people to be able to read this book, I don't want kids to not be able to get their hands on this book. It's a problem. So sometimes we get like, “Congratulations, you're banned!” Like no, actually, it's not great. It's terrible.

Lawrence: [00:40:35] It's interesting. At my husband's work, so he works at the children's hospital here in Madrid and his colleagues when, I mean, because this has been such international news, and especially over here in Europe. It was a small piece on the TV about them, and also just stuff like that. So when his colleagues find out about the backlash against the books, almost all of the women ask how I'm holding up under all of this onslaught, and all of the men are like, “Oh, this is great publicity for the books.”

[00:41:04] So on the one hand, it has been good or, you know, the backlash has only made me want to fight more and to make these books to try and help them be available to more kids as possible. Because I think these two books are important, not just for kids who are themselves in same sex families, but it's important for all kids to have a chance to see same sex families, as just families like their own, or the families of their friends or their classmates. That’s the thing about these LGBT propaganda laws is the only people being hurt, the governments are hurting their own generations of kids. They’re now pretending that these people don't exist. And these kids are going to turn 18. And the governments are like, Oh, we've been lying to you for the last 18 years of your lives. Queer people exist, and they're in the world. And you know, now you have no experience or know how to deal with them or whatever. But you have to go out into this globalized world we live in, you know what I'm saying. Let's say once these people, once these kids, they're 18, let's say they travel, or they go to school somewhere else, or anything like that and they don't know how to… They're unprepared. So, they're books that are not only for kids who are themselves in same sex families, they're just books. In my case about going to bed and getting up in the morning.

Jenn: [00:42:22] So now, these two books have sold in how many countries and language?

Lawrence: [00:42:26] So there were 33 editions so far, and 27 languages, which is just an insane amount. I mean, I happen to sell lots of editions to other books of mine, but this is definitely the project that has been translated into more countries, more languages, and published in more countries than anything else that I've done. And also, as we were talking earlier, these are rhyming stories. So it's amazing that. I never suspected that when I wrote a rhyming board book in Spanish, to think we'd have this sort of international reach.

[00:43:02] But on the other hand, you know, I mean, while most of the international news has focused on the homophobia, the homophobia, of course, is just the governments. The Hungarian government is using it sort of the same way that in the US, they use this a lot with immigration, and they’re sort of using it as a bugaboo to sort of foster national fervor and things like that. And so they use the homosexuality as something foreign invading our country, that these are not our values and stuff like that.

[00:43:30] But it shows… The fact that these books are published in so many different places shows how much of a need there is for these joyful stories that feature queer families. It’s definitely also true that because of the backlash from some of the governments, other people in other countries have said, “Well, I'm going to publish these in my territory, because I want kids in my country to grew up not to be homophobic and these books will be a great tool for helping them to do that.” And so, that is a benefit that has happened as a result of all of this.

Jenn: [00:44:06] Good. So are there any other great new international titles that are not yours? That you have nothing to do with, but that are available in the United States that listeners should really get a hold of?

Lawrence: [00:44:18] Well, I mean, since we've just been talking about some LGBT material, there are two great young adult novels that were published recently in English. Both of them are translated by Larissa Helena. And one is a book called *Where We Go From Here* by Lucas Rocha and the other is *Here the Whole Time* by Vitor Martins.

[00:44:42] Both of which are, you know, really appropriate for just general YA readerships. But, you know, I mean, fans of *…* I'm blanking on the exact title [crosstalk]

Jenn: [00:44:52] *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*.

Lawrence: [00:44:55] Exactly. So I mean, the other thing is because there are some books that I know what the English was, but if I'm mostly used to seeing the Spanish my default is the Spanish. And so I have to, there’s also something in translation where I was just translating a novel that had a lot of film stuff, but it was in Mexican. So they were using all the Mexican titles, and they were making jokes off of words in the Mexican titles that weren't in the English. And so that was a conundrum for me.

[00:45:22] So but I mean, these are also, again, stories that could have been done in the in the US, but they’re stories that hadn't been, or the kinds of stories that haven't been being dealt with. So one is about fat shaming in the queer community, and the other is about HIV in teens. So they're both great topical stories, age appropriate. And also just good, good reads. But they're the kind of things that if they hadn't been published abroad, and had success abroad, and then were brought in, I think that they may have gotten more pushback from Anglophone editors of, “I don't know if this is quite right.”

Jenn: [00:45:59] Right. Absolutely.

Lawrence: [00:46:00] I mean, that's one of the things with the board books that I did was, it's very tricky to have… Beause the books are very quiet, the books are not about bullying, or overcoming homophobia or anything like that. So they just happen to have two moms and two dads, and that's something that gets push back. There aren't always a lot of publishers that are willing to, to include that. In the same way that, as you mentioned earlier, that often a lot of, certainly in the US, a lot of the books that get translated from other countries happen to be by more independent presses, rather than by the big publishers and things like that.

[00:46:40] Some of it, I think, is editors not knowing how to buy books from abroad. You have two things, how books are sold, and how books are actually bought in. And so if you don't have editors who read other languages, and are able to, if they don't know translators that they trust to either do a reader’s report or to do a sample translation that they commission, things like that. Those can all be obstacles.

[00:47:05] And at the same time, you know, a lot of foreign publishers are needing to learn to. The books that do get translated very often are from countries where there is money spent by the government to support translation, support [unclear] translations, or to offer translation support.

[00:47:21] You know, I'm in Spain, Spain happens to be the guest of honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair next year. And as a result, there's a lot of money for translations of Spanish books into other languages, and in particular, English is one of the languages that they're very much promoting. So now's a good time, to be pitching projects from Spain, because there's translation support. So that just makes it that the excuse of translations being expensive or more expensive than other titles, then goes away if there's that extra support.

Jenn: [00:47:51] Awesome. This has been so fascinating, but we're running out of time.

Lawrence: [00:47:54] Okay.

Jenn: [00:47:56] And I do want to get to the part of the podcast that everybody loves the most, for some reason. I will go first so that you have time to think, but this is the what are you obsessed with section. This does not have to be bookish, but it can be. So mine is very silly, I think. What I'm obsessed with right now is the show. It's a reality competition show on Netflix. The first two seasons are on Netflix. And then there's more seasons on Paramount Plus, which I'm already well into. It's called *Ink Masters*. It is about tattoo artists.

[00:48:36] Now I don't have any tattoos because I'm a chicken and also I'm indecisive. But I do appreciate art. And this show is kind of bonkers. So it's a bunch of great tattoo artists, going head to head on various challenges, as you would imagine, like *Top Chef* or anything like that. But the goal is to find somebody to find the Ink Master, as they say, who is somebody who can do any kind of tattoo, who is completely well rounded. But most tattoo artists, of course, specialize. They either really do black and gray tattoos or they do full color, very modern, cartoony tattoos, or they do you know, very delicate portraits or something like that. Most people don't do everything.

Lawrence: [00:49:19] Right.

Jenn: [00:49:19] But they want the person who can. So the other thing about this show is it's kind of bonkers because the tattoo artists themselves tend to be wild egomaniacs. I mean, I guess if you think your art is good enough to permanently put on somebody else and charge them for it, you'd have to be sort of egomaniacal, right?

Lawrence: [00:49:39] Right.

Jenn: [00:49:41] So that makes for good TV. And also the judges are so harsh. But actually, they're totally fair because if you do a lousy tattoo on somebody, that person literally has to wear your ugly art for the rest of their lives. So the judges are very clear like, mistakes are not to be tolerated. And it's fun watching them really get into it with people and like knock these egomaniacs down a peg. But the artists who actually take the criticism, who listen, who improve, who like broaden their abilities, they're really exciting to watch and I'm having a lot of fun with it. It is very much out of my normal world, but I am enjoying it. *Ink Masters*. You can watch it on Netflix, a little bit or Paramount Plus a lot.

[00:50:25] Lawrence, what are you obsessed with?

Lawrence: [00:50:27] I would be a little too squeamish, I think, for that. You know, I don't watch a lot of TV or series or anything like that. I mean, I am a voracious reader. And especially, I mean, with the pandemic. And because of the pandemic, I've had a lot less work. I mean, I maybe shouldn't be saying this as someone who's publishing 90 ISBNs this year, but you know, last year I read over 400 books. So yeah, I mean, reading is still my obsessive thing. And I guess, you know, maybe an author or series that I'm obsessive about lately is Alyssa Cole, who's an adult writer.

Jenn: [00:51:03] Yes.

Lawrence: [00:51:03] She has a amazing romance series called *Runaway Royals*, and then she has a new spin off series, and I just am absolutely in awe of her. And I love them to death. And I recommend them all the time.

[00:51:18] The other thing that I would maybe be obsessed about, especially, you know, now that we're, I haven't traveled in so long. I mean, I'm used to traveling very often to the international book fairs where rights get bought and sold, but also to festivals where I get to meet readers and stuff like that. But the other thing that happens when I travel a lot, is that I get to buy gluten-free vegan foods that I don't get here in Spain. And so, there's like, sweets and snacks and things like that, that I haven't had access to. And I mean, just last night, my husband and I, we were just nostalgically remembering Trader Joe's snickerdoodles, you know, gluten-free cookies and things like that. And little things like that, that we just haven't had a chance to get.

[00:52:03] I'm not obsessed about them. But I wouldn't mind having a bunch of my gluten-free sweets that, because I'm not traveling, I haven't had a chance to. And unfortunately, also, there's, there's new regulations, as of July, where Spain is charging for every package that comes in, even if it's sent by an individual. And so as a result, I can't even ask friends to send me stuff because I'm getting hit by an extra 20 Euro fee, just for getting, you know, whatever it cost. So it's just been, I'm feeling isolated. And so.

Jenn: [00:52:37] You're going to have to learn to cook them.

Lawrence: [00:52:39] Or I mean, hopefully the virus will get under control enough that we resume some travel.

Jenn: [00:52:45] Well, that too.

Lawrence: [00:52:44] Because I don't think cooking them is gonna be my. I'm a good eater, but I'm not a—

Jenn: [00:52:55] Well, I too. I too am obsessed with Alyssa Cole books and I will link to them in the show notes. And I will link to all the books we talked about in the show notes, as well as some of these articles.

[00:53:04] It's been such a pleasure talking to you, Lawrence, thank you so much for joining me.

[00:53:08] Literaticast theme music plays.

Lawrence: [00:53:08] Thank you. And thank you especially for highlighting the role that translators play in getting books to readers all around the world.

Jenn: [00:53:16] Thank you all so much for listening to the podcast today. And thanks especially to Lawrence Schimel for joining me. His latest books are inclusive board books for the youngest kids. *Bedtime not Playtime* and *Early One Morning*. They're coming out this week, September 14th, 2021. And should be available or orderable anywhere that fine books are sold.

[00:53:38] As Lawrence mentioned during the interview, and as you have probably heard me mention or read in the newspaper, supply chains are messed up right now for real. So this is a little public service announcement. It's going to be harder to get the books that you want around Christmas time this year. So if there are books that you know you want to buy in time for gift giving, please order them now. I cannot stress that enough. Books, if they sell out, will be very difficult to get back in and may not come back in this whole year. So in all seriousness, I'm begging you, order your books ahead of time. And if bookstores are all sold out, just, you can't get mad about it. You had warning, I don't know what to tell you. We're all doing our best. It's really hard for authors as well because all these books are being delayed and delayed or you know selling out and not being able to get them back again. It's really tough. So I beg for your patience and also for your pre-orders.

[00:54:45] All of the books that we talked about will be linked to in the show notes and my website. JenniferLaughran.com/Literaticast. Those show notes do contain affiliate links to bookshop.org. If you buy any of the books through those links, a portion of the proceeds goes toward the podcast. But all those books are also available at any indie bookstore pretty much anywhere you can order books, as well.

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