



# An Interview with Spanish Author Jesús Carrasco



By [Olivia Snaije](#)

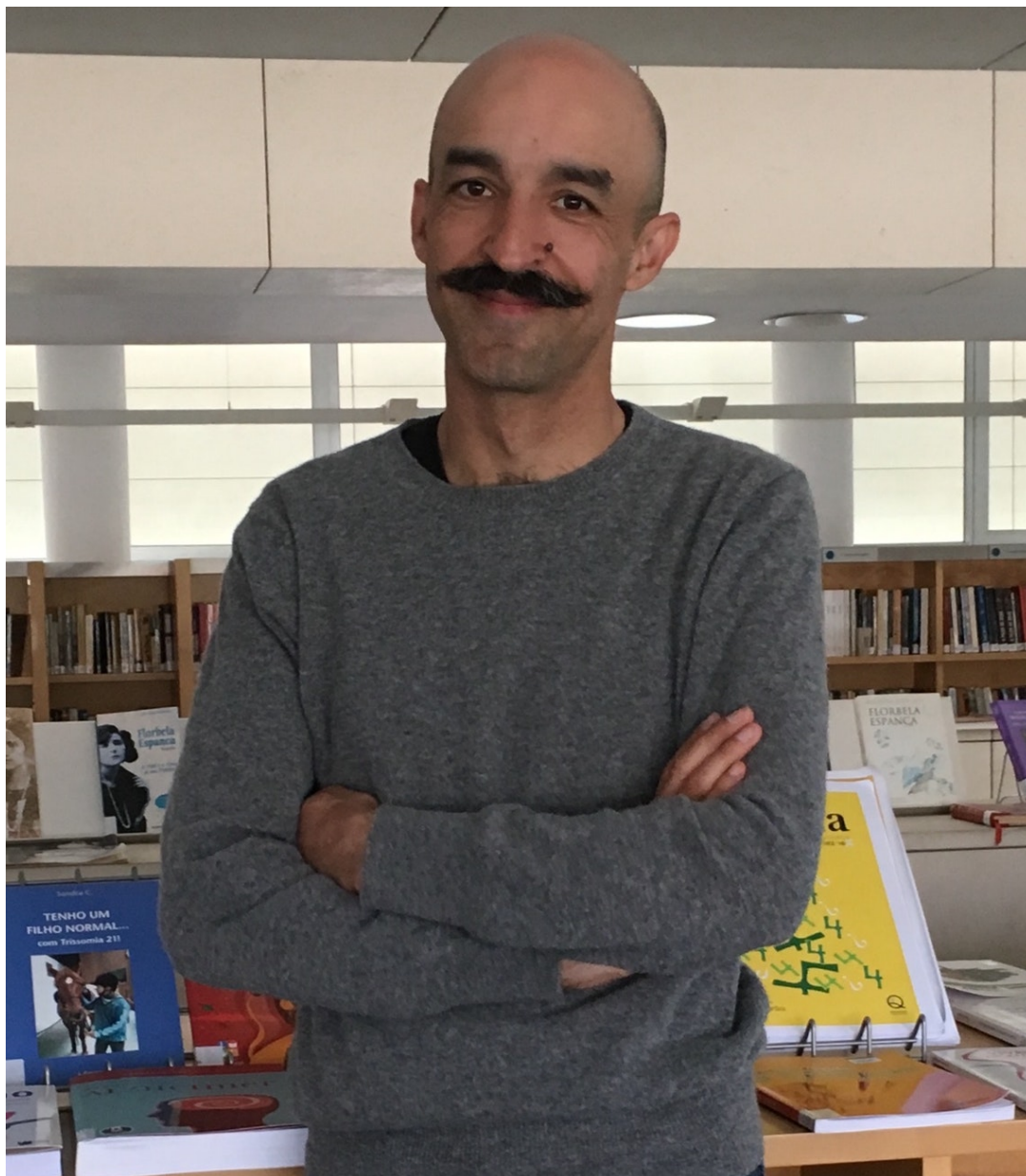
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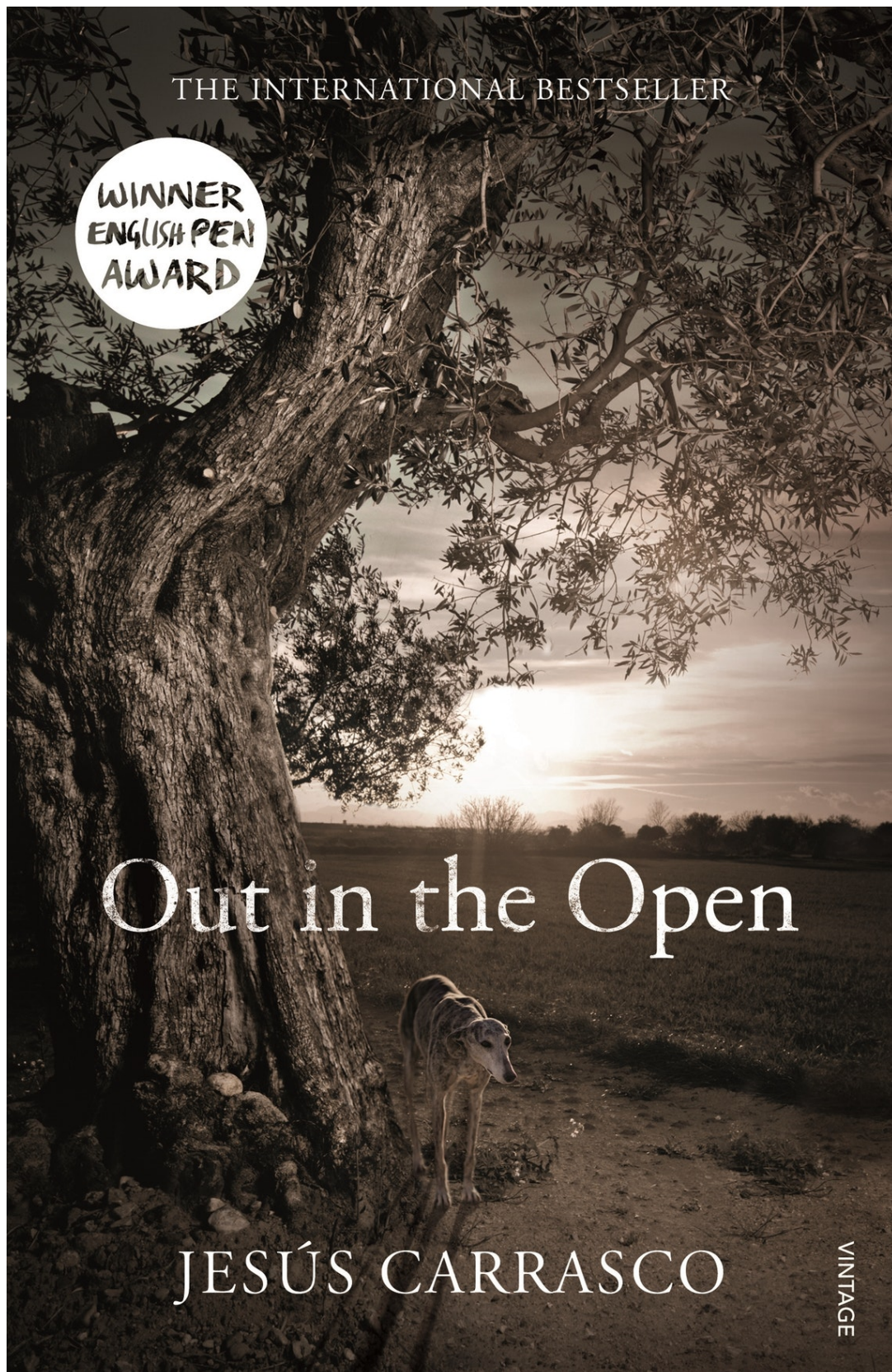


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Jesús Carrasco was born in Badajoz, Spain, near the Portuguese border and as a boy lived in the town of Torrijos, smack in the center of the country where Don Quixote wandered. As an adult, he moved to Madrid where he studied Physical Education and went on to live in Seville, where his wife is from; he now lives in Edinburgh, Scotland, with his family. In 2013 his debut novel, *Intemperie* (Out in the Open), was published to international acclaim, and went on to be translated into 25 languages. Film rights were bought and last November a graphic novel adaptation of the book was released in Spanish. His second novel, *La Tierra que Pisamos* (The Earth We Tread) was published in 2016 and won the [European Union Prize for Literature](#). Bookwitty caught up with him at the [Literatura em Viagem](#) literary festival in northern Portugal, where *La Tierra que Pisamos* is just out in Portuguese. His novel *Out in the Open*, translated by Margaret Jull Costa, which begins with a very dramatic description of a

boy hiding in a hole in the earth, was published in the UK in 2016, the US edition will be published this July.



**You have been writing for 20 years but your first novel was published in 2013. What was it that made this novel, *Out in the Open*, such a success?**

I have no recipe, no particular explanation. I think the book's success is because readers could engage with human feelings, and understand a boy's suffering. I used universal archetypes to build the novel; a boy, a shepherd and a bailiff, and anyone can identify with these.

### **How is it different to be published for the first time at age 40?**

At 40 you're at a very different stage of maturity; you are grounded, you have a family. Attempting to publish my novel was like using my last bullet. I was working full-time to pay my bills, I used my holidays and unpaid leave to write, it was my last chance, and I got lucky—[the Spanish publisher] Seix Barral spread the novel across the world.

### **You wrote a novel before *Out in the Open*?**

Yes, but it's not suitable for publication; it's a bad novel but it was useful to me to learn how to write one. I had written short stories for a long time as well as stories for children and at a certain point I decided to tackle the novel form. I didn't know how difficult it was to write one, it was a real challenge; at first the idea was to simply complete it. In those years I had started to write *Out in the Open* which began by describing the village, the family, the house, and when the boy started to flee until he found somewhere to hide I didn't know how to go on from there. I started a new novel, and drew a very complex, beautiful plot. It's set in Australia and Scotland but there is nothing of me in the novel. But I acquired new skills, and was patient enough to sit for three years and finish it. Then I went back to [the manuscript] *Out in the Open*, I got rid of 60 pages and started again. In the end, the novel begins where the boy is hiding.

### **You grew up in a village similar to the one in the novel?**

It is my village. I don't name it but you can recognize it. There is even a tourist route in the village now that follows the places in the novel. It's Torrijos in [the province of] Toledo. The story of the boy who decides to flee from his family is a common one, and a common dream for kids in villages especially where the natural landscape is so

close by. I thought about it many times when I was a boy, if, for example, I didn't like my lunch or if I got angry with my parents. The point of departure of the novel is why and what are the causes for a boy to flee and not return.

### **Was the landscape and nature a big part of your childhood?**

This landscape is an essential part of who I became and how I am. The smells, the sensations—I tried to describe the weather, the dryness, the cold, and how you can feel the power of the sun on your skin. The weather is very extreme, there are scorching, dry summers and very cold winters. When I was a boy the water was cut off at 10 in the morning and it went back on at 10 at night. Spain didn't have modern infrastructures at the time. The well wasn't deep enough. This lack of water was imprinted in my cells. It really had a big influence on me and I am very sensitive to environmental issues, even in Scotland where there is plenty of water I'm always very careful to turn off the tap.

### **Your novel, *La Tierra que Pisamos* is not yet available in English. What is it about?**

It's about a fictitious invasion of Spain by a powerful nation, and the consequences suffered by the main character. It's about how he is deported and then tries to get back to his village, similar to what drives an elephant to go back home to die.

There are three themes running through the novel, the Second World War, colonization—the way Europe occupied Africa, and the Spanish Civil War in the area of Badajoz where the war was especially cruel. Members of my family were victims like many other Spaniards. My grandfather was shot trying to help his sister in August 1936. My father was one year old. My whole life I was educated by a man who had lost his father when he was one year old. They say that every war lasts at least 100 years, because it affects generations after it. My grandmother was forced to deal with several kids during the war and no food to go around. My father would tell me that my grandmother would go to get cooking oil and would come back with one or two spoonfuls of oil. Then the period of dictatorship that followed the war was very long and very tough. It wasn't fun at all.

## **The book you are working on currently is less dark—did these somber novels tire you out?**

It's really tough to write these kinds of stories. The second novel is really the opposite of a comedy. In one scene the father finds the body of his dead daughter and tries to hug her. It was so hard for me to write that because I'm a father. I need to write about something brighter, the other side of the human being. Love, for example, my life is full of love. But I needed to write these two novels first.

## **What are some of the subjects you'd like to focus on in your future books?**

Nature is always an important subject for me, our relationship with nature.

I would also like to talk about something more focused on current events, for example refugees. I'd like to put myself in the shoes of someone who had to flee from a place nearby, like Syria. Unfortunately we are not able to be as sensitive to people who are very different from us, but when I watch the terrible images of Syrians in tiny boats I recognize them perfectly, they could be my friends or my family. I would like to write about this moment, to try to understand it, to have a record of what was happening when I was 45 years old. The role of literature is to talk about the particular problems of people who are suffering, their intimacy; and what is happening within the body and soul of regular people during our lifetime.

## **Did your move to Edinburgh allow you to be freer, it's a place where you can walk down the street and still be anonymous?**

I can do that in Spain too, I'm not Justin Bieber. What is interesting though, is to be free of commitments. When I'm in Spain I have to accept commitments; there are my friends, and the literary world. When you live in Scotland you can say, "Sorry, I live in Scotland." You lose a lot of great opportunities, but on the other hand you have a long period of time to write. I need that; I need at least five months ahead of me just to write.

### **Tags**

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