

*Clandestine Childhood (Argentina, 2011)*, Director: Benjamin Avila



### **Synopsis:**

Clandestine Childhood is a gripping story about a young boy who navigates his pre-teen years while simultaneously dealing with his parents being revolutionaries and the effects that has on his outlook in life.

### **Content Notes:**

- Violent scenes through the movie (guns/blood)

### **Director:**

Benjamin Avila was born in 1972 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He has written and directed many award-winning films including Clandestine Childhood, La gotera, and Nietos. For his film Clandestine Childhood, he drew on his personal experiences from his childhood. Both him and his brother were forced to use alternative names due to the unrest in Argentina at the time. Avila

incorporated many of his childhood experiences into more than one of his films and was able to turn a hard childhood into a successful career.

**Historical context:** The film takes place during a point of political unrest in Argentina.

Clandestine Childhood is placed in 1979 Argentina, three years after the military forcefully took over the government. Juan's parents, Horacio and Cristina were members of the Montoneros which was a left-wing, Peronist guerilla organization based in Argentina during the 1970's and 1980's. The Montoneros main goal was to overthrow the military dictatorship that was controlling Argentina during this time period and reinstate Juan Peron as Argentina's leader.

### **Film's reception:**

The reception of this film was largely lukewarm. With some critics applauding Ávila's use of mix-media, along with his ability to recount a historical and personal event. While some of the more critical critics critiqued his use of animated scenes claiming they slowed the pacing of the movie, and the most critical critic even implied that his closeness to the events prevented him from telling a complete story. The film was ranked as the 8th most viewed film in Argentina at the premiere of the film. Also, as of September 2012, the film was distributed and sold to 20 different countries. Furthermore, the film was submitted by the Argentine Academy of Cinematography Arts and Sciences to contend for the Best Foreign Language Oscar at the 85<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards. The film also won the "Colon de Oro Award" and the "Silver Condor Award for Best Film".

## **Characters:**

**Horacio:** A wanted Argentine political revolutionary and the father of Juan.

**Cristina:** A wanted Argentine political revolutionary and the mother of Juan.

**Juan “Ernesto”:** Child of political revolutionaries who is navigating his childhood along with his parents beliefs.

**Uncle Beto:** The brother of Horacio and also a political revolutionary who supports Juan and helps him to keep his childhood as close to normal as possible.

**Amalia:** Mother to Cristina and grandmother to Juan, is concerned for the safety of her grandchildren and tries to convince Horacio and Cristina to let them live with her instead.

**Maria:** Love interest and source of normalcy for Juan.

## **Questions:**

Do you think Horacio and Cristina should have sent Juan and his sister to live with Amalia?

How did Juan’s reaction to his classmate calling him a coward demonstrate his parent’s influence?

What does the side story of Juan and Maria illustrate about the story as a whole? Aside from being a love interest, what does Maria represent?

What is the effect of the director switching to animation during difficult scenes of the film?

How does Juan’s relationship with his uncle Beto contribute to his growth and maturity?

How do you think Juan handles the challenges of changing his identity, constantly having to move, and not living the life of a normal kid?

Do you think Horacio and Cristina put their revolutionary ideas and actions before the safety of their kids?

Throughout the movie, we see Juan develop his own identity and mature into a young man. How does his family's circumstances contribute to this?

Do you think Juan would follow in his parents' footsteps or would he choose to live a normal life?

How does Juan's school portray the values and the beliefs held in Argentina during the time period?

How does the death of Uncle Beto affect Juan's maturity?

### **Outside Sources:**

"Clandestine Childhood Revealed: An in Depth Interview with Writer/Director Benjamin Avila." *Reviewbrain's Blog*, 4 Nov. 2012, <https://reviewbrain.wordpress.com/2012/11/03/clandestine-childhood-revealed-an-in-depth-interview-with-writerdirector-benjamin-avila/>.

Pinto, Vitor. "Clandestine Childhood: An Idealised, Family Version of Resistance." *Cineuropa*, 21 May 2012, <https://cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/221076/>.

"Montoneros. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Montonero>.