

PAULO BRANCO PRESENTS



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2026 OFFICIAL SELECTION
CANNES PREMIERE

AQUÍ

A FILM BY **TIAGO GUEDES**

BASED ON THE "JESUS TRILOGY" BY

J.M. COETZEE

MANOLO
SOLO

PATRICIA
LÓPEZ ARNAIZ

INTRODUCING
ÁLEX
PELÁEZ

AND
HUGO
ENCUENTRA

DANIEL
ELÍAS

LAMBERT
WILSON

SERGI
LÓPEZ

SPECIAL PARTICIPATION OF
ÁNGELA
MOLINA

AND
FERNANDO
TRUEBA

SYNOPSIS

In a place where everyone starts over without a past, Simón takes responsibility for David, a child he met during the crossing to this new life. Moved by an inexplicable conviction, he looks for the child's mother and recognizes Inés as the right woman. She accepts, and between the three of them an unusual affective bond is formed, where the idea of family is reinvented with every gesture. But when society imposes norms and difference is perceived as a threat, David refuses to be shaped and affirms himself as the opposite: imagination and freedom, transforming parenthood into an uncertain crossing, a search without answers.

TECHNICAL SPECS

Portugal, France, 2026

Duration: 204'

Color

Language: Spanish

Genre: Drama



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Adapting J.M. Coetzee's trilogy wasn't a literary exercise, but a physical confrontation with my own "originary orphanhood". As a reader, the desolation of its characters has always echoed in me; as a director and a father, its existential questions became urgent. What do we do when faced with the new and the singular? What's left of us when we are stripped of the past? AQUÍ is born out of the necessity to film that emptiness: the realisation that, in the end, we are all alone.

Geography of forgetting

I was interested in materializing the "no-place" of Coetzee, a bureaucratized and mild world, insipid, where the individual will has been abolished in lieu of a sterile peace. I filmed this state of exile as post-modern historical amnesia. Simón and Inés try to anchor David in a world without models, but it is the child who, through a Quixotic figure, claims the power of inconsistency and myth. Where the system sees rules, David sees giants. His question: "*¿Por qué estoy aquí?*" (Why am I here?) is not a geographical question, it is the poetic and tragic driving force of the film.

The resistance of difference

David is an innovator, a Christ-like figure that refuses the mold we impose on him. The film focuses on the silent violence of education: our incapacity to accept what escapes the norm. To translate this incommunicability, I searched for a visual grammar that privileges silence and distance between bodies. In AQUÍ, parenthood is a blind crossing through imaginary worlds that adults no longer know how to inhabit. To love then becomes the radical act of accepting another's mystery.

In the end, AQUÍ does not seek to offer answers or consolation. It is a film that sides with mystery, recognizing that the only way to honor a child's freedom, or a film, for that matter, is to accept our inability to understand everything. I filmed it to insist on the existence of "other worlds", conscious that even if I cannot explain them, I try to ensure they are not forgotten.

Tiago Guedes

INTERVIEW WITH TIAGO GUEDES

How did you approach the challenge of adapting J. M. Coetzee's Jesus Trilogy into a single film?

I approached it with the awareness that the Jesus Trilogy is not a conventional narrative, but a philosophical territory. The adaptation could not be a simple transposition; it had to be a cinematic interpretation that preserved the enigma, the ambiguity, and the strangeness that Coetzee constructs. Bringing together three books of this density into a single film forced us to search for the emotional and existential core that runs through the work. Instead of trying to reproduce the entire narrative architecture, we focused on what we consider to be the essential movement: the relationship between Simón and David, the search for meaning in a world that does not offer clear answers, the idea of innocence in confrontation with systems that attempt to shape it. The greatest challenge was finding a balance between fidelity and freedom. We wanted to be faithful to the spirit (to the stillness, the tenderness, the ethical questioning), but cinema calls for different solutions, a different rhythm, a different materiality. By reducing, reorganizing, and condensing, we tried not to simplify the mystery of the work, but to bring it into the language of cinema. Ultimately, the adaptation is a personal reading, openly assumed. Coetzee always leaves room for interpretation; we tried to inhabit that space without stepping over the rest.





In recent years, Coetzee has considered the Spanish translation of his books as their original version. Was this also behind the decision to use Spanish as the film's language?

Yes, that position of Coetzee's did carry weight in the decision. When he assumes the Spanish version as the original, he is indicating a deliberate displacement, almost an aesthetic gesture: removing the work from English and placing it in a linguistic space that he feels is more suited to the universe of the trilogy. For me, that made Spanish the natural language of the film. It was not only a matter of respect for the author, but of following that movement of strangeness that he proposes. Spanish gives the story a certain geographical neutrality, a sense of a "displaced" place, which is very much aligned with the tone of the books. So yes, the choice of the language is also a continuation of that logic: following the work to where Coetzee himself has taken it.

You work with an international cast, mostly composed of major Spanish actors. How did you approach casting, starting with the discovery of these two extraordinary very young actors to play David?

The film required performers capable of inhabiting the strangeness of this world without underlining it. Coetzee's universe calls for restraint, ambiguities, small gestures that carry tension. This naturally led me to a group of great Spanish actors (and others), very accustomed to working within this register of emotional complexity without excess. As for David, it was probably the most delicate part of the process. The character holds a rare combination of purity, obstinacy, and unsettling intelligence. He could not be a prodigy trained to "perform"; he needed to be a child who brought something untamed, a way of looking at the world that was entirely his own. During the casting of our "Davids", I understood quite early that it would be these two, that I would choose Álex Peláez and Hugo Encuentra. What impressed me in them was their ability to be present, to listen, to react in an organic way, without artifice. And the strength of their silent gaze. I was not looking for a faithful replica of the literary character, but for someone who could embody that mystery. And with them, I felt that this was possible.

David is a child full of curiosity, who asks many questions, who seeks to know who he is and why he is there. He does not like impositions and wants to affirm his individual freedom. Simón is very patient, trying to explain things to him, sometimes as if he himself were also learning them, and at other, rarer moments, he becomes impatient. Could we say that the film also reflects on the difficulties of communication between adults and children, between parents and children?

Without a doubt. As a father, that was also what drew me to the work. The relationship between Simón and David is, in essence, a laboratory of the difficulties of communication between adults and children and, more broadly, between different ways of inhabiting the world. David carries an almost radical curiosity, an instinctive refusal of the norm, a desire to affirm his own identity even before knowing exactly what it is. Simón, in turn, tries to accompany him with patience, but also with the limitations of someone who does not have answers and is often just as lost as he is. What interested me was that friction between two logics: the open, untameable logic of the child, and the rational, socialized logic of the adult. There is tenderness and there is conflict. There are

moments when they communicate perfectly and others when they seem to inhabit different realities. I did not want to turn the film into a discourse on parenthood, but the truth is that their relationship reflects something very universal: the difficulty of truly listening to the other, especially when that other forces us to question what we take for granted.

David carries with him a small book, an illustrated edition for young readers of *Don Quixote*, by Cervantes, a foundational novel in modern narrative, where the boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred. What is its importance in the film?

For me, *Don Quixote* functions as a silent key within the film. It is not a rigid symbol, nor an explicit literary commentary. It is an object that opens layers. On one hand, there is a natural affinity between Coetzee's universe and that of Cervantes: both deal with that unstable boundary between reality and fiction, between what is lived and what is imagined. And David moves within that hybrid space. He reads the world as someone who invents it, and invents it as someone who reads it. The book accompanies this posture, as if it were a small mirror of his way of being. On the other hand, *Don Quixote* is also a marker





of displacement. A child in a strange world, holding on to a foundational classic of Western literature, in an illustrated edition for young readers, carries a tenderness and an irony that interested me. It is a book about someone who refuses to accept reality as it is presented. And David, in his own way, does the same. In the film, the small book does not explain anything. It accompanies. It suggests. It permeates. It is there as an echo of one of the central questions of the work: how does each of us construct meaning in a world that can be profoundly opaque?

There is in Coetzee’s writing a sobriety and economy that you brought into the film. How did you “materialize this universe”?

One of the things I most appreciate in Coetzee’s writing, particularly in his dialogues, is his unusual ability to say a lot with very little. There is a kind of “pruning” of everything that is excessive, and what remains is only the essence, the soul, the bone. What I tried, together with the whole team, was to preserve that. To do so, we looked for a world that would be a “non-place” and that would not evoke any specific geography.

There is no identifiable time – in the world of AQUÍ there is no past, nor memory. To build it, we created a kind of “collage” of different locations, distant from one another, but which seemed to belong to the same universe.

Beyond that, this universe exists mainly through the characters who inhabit it, and through their inner worlds. By choosing to film many close shots without large camera movements, we are trying to “listen” to those inner worlds, and in a certain way we project our own inner worlds onto theirs. That is why, in the editing, we chose to stay very close to David, and to his gaze. He sees the world in a particular way, even though the world remains the same. As with Cervantes and Quixote, there is a way of seeing the same world differently. And children carry that within them. We, as adults and as a society, are the ones who end up conditioning their singularity and trying to make them uniform.

And what is the importance of dance in the film (and in the books)?

In my interpretation, dance is connected to the question of language. It is no coincidence that Ana Magdalena says at a certain point in the film: *“Words are weak. That is why we dance.”* Clearly, when we translate everything into words, an entire dimension is lost. Dance appears in this world as something that connects us to the inexplicable, a special language that links us to something we do not fully understand but that we feel. Simón represents the point of view of someone who does not understand that dimension, because he cannot see it nor translate it into words. There is a scene where “Aunt Mercedes” tells him: *“Si David explicara su danza, no podría seguir bailando. Esa es la paradoja en que estamos atrapados los bailarines.”* (If David were to explain his dance, he would no longer be able to keep dancing. That is the paradox we dancers are trapped in) – which is another way of saying that we cannot understand everything. There is a kind of acceptance. And children, in their purest state, live very well with that.

TIAGO GUEDES

Director, Screenwriter, Stage Director

Tiago Guedes has established himself, film after film, as one of the most important filmmakers in Portuguese cinema over the past two decades. His films have been selected for some of the world's most prestigious film festivals, including Cannes, Venice, Rotterdam, San Sebastián and Toronto, and have reached audiences that few Portuguese filmmakers have achieved.

He has directed several projects for cinema, theatre and television, receiving awards across all these fields.

Among his work as a director, the following stand out: *Bad Blood* (2005), his first feature film, co-directed with Frederico Serra (Official Selection at festivals such as Sitges, Busan and Turin, among many other international festivals); the feature film *Noise* (2008), also co-directed with Frederico Serra (Official Competition at the San Sebastián Film Festival, in the "Zabaltegi-Tabakalera" section, as well as Official Selection at the Cartagena de Indias Film Festival, where it won the Best Art Film Award and Best



Tiago Guedes

Actor Award; it was also part of the Official Selection of the Turin Film Festival, where it received the Ciputti Award for Best Film; it was also screened at several other festivals).

The Domain (2019), one of his major successes, which competed at the Venice Film Festival and was part of the official selection at TIFF, was selected for more than thirty festivals worldwide, including Göteborg, Dublin, Cairo and the International Film Festival of India, and received several awards. It was Portugal's submission for the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film, and during its broadcast on ARTE it reached an audience of one million six hundred thousand viewers, remaining for several weeks among the most-watched programmes. It was widely acclaimed by both critics and audiences.

In 2021, he directed *Glória*, the first Portuguese original series for Netflix, an international espionage thriller set during the Cold War in 1960s Portugal.

Remains of the Wind (2022) had its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, in the Official Selection – Special Screenings. It won the Calpurnia Award for Best Film at the Ourense Film Festival and the Marcello Petrozziello Award at the Lucca Film Festival in Italy, among others.

The following year, Guedes surprised audiences with a rare and daring work, *Dialogues After the End*, based on *Dialogues with Leucò* by Italian writer Cesare Pavese. The film premiered at the Rotterdam Film Festival, and he also developed it into a 19-episode television series.

Aquí, an adaptation of the “Jesus Trilogy” by Nobel Prize-winning author J.M. Coetzee will have its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in 2026.

Theatre is another important part of Tiago Guedes' professional path. He has directed plays by Dennis Kelly, Henrik Ibsen, Peter Handke, David Harrower and Martin McDonagh, among others.

FILMOGRAPHY

- *Aquí*, 2026
- *Dialogues After the End*, 2023
- *Remains of the Wind*, 2022
- *Glória*, 2021 (TV series, streaming)
- *The Domain*, 2019
- *Sadness and Joy in the Life of Giraffes* 2019
- *Chorus* (short), 2014
- *Odisseia*, 2013 (TV series)
- *Noise*, 2008
- *Blood Curse*, 2005
- *Waking Up* (short), 2001
- *Alta Fidelidade*, 2000 (TV)
- *Sink* (short), 1999



CAST AND CREW

Manolo Solo - Simón

Patricia López Arnaiz - Inés

Álex Peláez - David 1

Hugo Encuentra - David 2

Daniel Elías - Dimitri

Lambert Wilson - Álvaro

Sergi López - Daga

Camille Decourtye - Ana Magdalena

With the special participation of

Ángela Molina - Mercedes

Itsaso Arana - Ana

Fernando Trueba - Dr. Ribeiro

Albano Jerónimo - Diego

Directed by **Tiago Guedes**

Screenplay by **Tiago Guedes, Luís Araújo**

Based on the "Jesus Trilogy" by **J.M. Coetzee**

Producer: **Paulo Branco**

Executive Producer: **Ana Pinhão Moura**

Associate Producer: **Carlos Bedran**

Cinematography: **Daniela Cajías**

Production Design: **Meral Aktan**

Sound Design: **Jean-Paul Mugel**

Editing: **Jackie Bastide, Tiago Augusto**

Choreographers: **Sofia Dias, Vítor Roriz**

A **Leopardo Filmes** (Portugal)

and **Alfama Films** (France) production

In co-production with

RTP Rádio e Televisão de Portugal (Portugal)

APM (Portugal)

Associate producers

Filmgalerie 451 (Germany)

CB Partners (France)

Belino Production (Spain)

Los Ilusos (Spain)

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Lisboa Film Commission

Município do Porto

Filmaporto Film Commission

Câmara Municipal de Viana do Castelo

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