

# STUDY GUIDE



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## NERUDA (NERUDA)

a Film by PABLO LARRAÍN

ARGENTINA, CHILE, FRANCE, SPAIN / 2016 / 107 MIN  
Spanish with English subtitles

With Gael García Bernal, Luis Gnecco, Mercedes Morán, Alfredo Castro

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

With the onset of the Cold War, Latin America underwent notable changes regarding its political stances. These changes were prevalent even outside of politics, such as the arts. Pablo Neruda's work was a prime example of this Latin American, politically motivated literature. Not only was he one of the most recited Latin American poets of the twentieth century<sup>1</sup>, but he also transformed himself into a symbol in Chilean politics:

“Neruda held a series of diplomatic posts, serving as consul in Asia, Europe, and the Americas between 1927 and 1945...Neruda's heart was with “the people,” which meant, in mid-twentieth-century Latin America, siding with the revolutionaries. After World War II, he returned to Chile and devoted himself to revolutionary politics. In 1945, Neruda was elected senator for Chile's Communist Party. The great poet's reputation was at its height as the Cold War settled over Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>2</sup>

However, shortly after being elected to the Senate, he was removed from his position and sent into exile after openly criticizing President Videla, who turned to the ‘right’ shortly after his leftist-based campaign for election.<sup>3</sup> During this time period, Communist Parties around Latin American were being persecuted by right-wing administrations, which were covertly backed by the United States government.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chasteen, John Charles. *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*. 4th ed. W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> González Echevarría, Roberto, and Manuel E. Duran. “Pablo Neruda.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Last modified January 9, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pablo-Neruda>

<sup>4</sup> Chasteen, John Charles. *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*. 4th ed. W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle edition.

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## INTRODUCING THE FILM

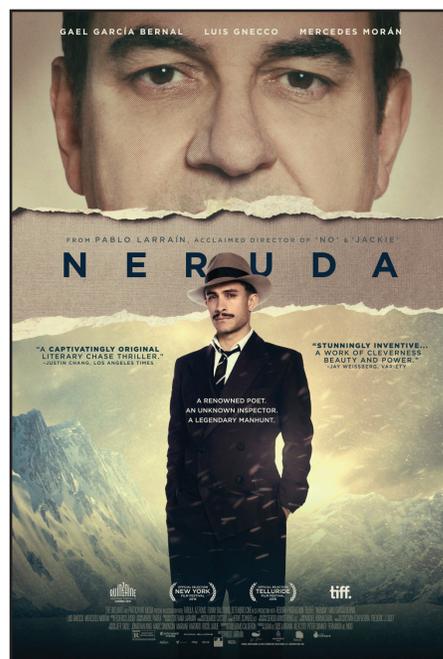
A film **synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for **NERUDA**:

### CHILE'S OFFICIAL ENTRY TO THE ACADEMY AWARDS®

Gael García Bernal joins award winning Chilean director, Pablo Larraín, in this a noir-infused reimagining of the Nobel Prize-winning poet and politician's struggle with the state.

It's 1948 and the Cold War has reached Chile. In congress, Senator Pablo Neruda accuses the government of betraying the Communist Party and is swiftly impeached by President Gonzalez Videla. Police Prefect Oscar Peluchonneau is assigned to arrest the poet. Neruda tries to flee the country with his wife, the painter Delia del Carril, but they are forced into hiding. Inspired by the dramatic events of his new life as a fugitive, Neruda writes his epic collection of poems, “Canto General.”

Meanwhile, in Europe, the legend of the poet hounded by the policeman grows, and artists led by Pablo Picasso clamor for Neruda's freedom. Neruda, however, sees this struggle with his nemesis Peluchonneau as an opportunity to reinvent himself. He plays with the inspector, leaving clues designed to make their game of cat-and-mouse more dangerous, more intimate. In this story of a persecuted poet and his implacable adversary, Neruda recognizes his own heroic possibilities: a chance to become both a symbol for liberty and a literary legend.



- From the text, identify the key plot and main characters as well as the historical background to the film.
- How does the trailer, poster, and image stills encourage you to watch the film in the cinema?
- Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing (i.e. trailer, poster, and image stills)?

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## CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ What clues give away that this is a time period piece in the beginning few minutes of the film? Think about the costumes, set, dialogue/behavior, etc.
- ❑ Keeping in mind costumes, dialogue, and any behaviors, how are the characters introduced to us at the start of the film?
- ❑ The entertainment industry journal, *Variety*, states “...voice-over is one of the most overused elements in contemporary cinema, rarely asking the audience to question the narrator’s reliability, but Larraín demands our skepticism from the moment the voice’s identity is revealed.”<sup>5</sup> Do you find the narrator a critical, unreliable source, or simply a matter-of-fact observer? Do you find that the narrator’s tone regarding Neruda changes throughout the film?
- ❑ Many times throughout the film, the editor continues one conversation in several different shots, usually putting the characters in a different location than the last (for an example, observe the scene 9:36-11:50). What do you think this technique is trying to illustrate? Do you find it effective for adding something to the narrative, or do you believe it to be purely for aesthetic reasons?
- ❑ Notice the use of inserting a photograph at minute 12:51. After examining the photo, explain how this still frame is important to the narrative. How can we characterize the relationship between Neruda and Delia del Carril? Look at the word resistance in capital letters and then the facial expressions of both of the characters to determine how they view the communist revolution. Use other scenes in the film to develop your response.
- ❑ Think about the director’s choice to show workers and communists being sent away in mass (13:13-13:40) right before a scene where Neruda is strolling leisurely in the park (13:41-14:06). Why do you think Larraín (director) makes this choice? When developing your response, think about the speech given by the drunk woman during the party scene (48:52-51:20).



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<sup>5</sup> Chasteen, John Charles. *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*. 4th ed. W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle edition.

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## LANGUAGE

- ❑ Does the language difference present a barrier to your viewing experience? What about the subtitles?
- ❑ The movie makes it clear that Delia del Carril is an educated aristocrat from Argentina. Did you notice a difference between the way Neruda and Delia del Carril talk? Listen closely and notice her cadence and pronunciation to determine if she talks differently from the rest of the characters.



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## NARRATIVE

- ❑ Judging from the first few minutes of the film, what do you think this movie is about? What assumptions can you make?
- ❑ What is the significance of the book *The Woman at the Zoo*? What does the “zoo” mean for Neruda (21:06-22:47)? What does the “zoo” mean for Peluchonneau (34:03-34:53)?
- ❑ What’s the significance of the scene where Neruda finds Peluchonneau lying in the snow? Think back to the scene where the man in drag talks about Neruda (43:22-45:54). What are the similarities in the emotions evoked in both scenes?
- ❑ What are the similarities between the narrative of the people of the “pueblo” and the narrative of Peluchonneau?
- ❑ Think about your reactions to the characters (Neruda, Peluchonneau, Delia del Carril, Álvaro Jara). What did you think of them? Did your opinions change throughout the development of the film?
- ❑ Does Peluchonneau’s stance on Neruda and Neruda’s politics change in the last scene (1:39:56-1:41:20)?
- ❑ How do you think Neruda’s character develops throughout the film? Keep in mind the scene in the Paris cafe (1:37:48-1:39:55) when writing your response.
- ❑ The audience gets a good inside look at Neruda’s private life. Why do you think it’s important that Larrain depicts how Neruda spends his free time? Why do you think there is an emphasis on Neruda’s relationships in his private life?
- ❑ How did you find the ending minutes of the film? Did the film give a clear resolution to the narrative?
- ❑ Neruda and Peluchonneau only meet once throughout the entire film, yet it is clear that a relationship blossoms between them. What changes? Explain what scene is fundamental to this change in their relationship.
- ❑ The last line in this film repeats the first line of one of Neruda’s most famous poems: “Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.” (“Tonight I can write the saddest lines.”) What do you believe the significance of this line is? What tone does it leave the audience with?
- ❑ What do you think is the point of the narrative? What is the overall message being relayed?



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## THEMES

- ❑ How does the first scene (1:06-3:10) highlight the ongoing tensions of the time period?
- ❑ Peluchonneau seems to be a critic of both the left and the right elite. How does the critique of the left wing elite differ from the right? What does this rejection of the entire elite say about Peluchonneau?
- ❑ How does this film depict the complex relationship between North and South America? How is North America and Europe considered both ideal and deplorable in the eyes of Chileans in this film? Give examples.
- ❑ What are some sentiments that come to mind when you think of communism? Do you think these associations or sentiments are portrayed in the film?
- ❑ After watching this film, explain whether or not the narrative makes a political statement. Are there any principles and values that are championed or abandoned? Does the film choose a side: communism or fascism? Is there anything being said regarding Chilean politics?
- ❑ How does the woman's speech at the party scene (48:52-51:20) depict the divide within the communist party in Chile?
- ❑ There is an obvious divide among socio-economic classes in this film. How does this film critique the hierarchy of classes? How is this a read of Chilean society during that time?
- ❑ Voice becomes a particularly important theme in this narrative. The right to speak for oneself, or even the controversy of having someone speak on behalf of someone else are issues that come up repeatedly in this film. Go through the film and analyze scenes you think exemplify this theme.
- ❑ This film delves into the topic of human rights on various levels. The right to freedom of thought and speech are addressed, as well as the right to humane treatment, no matter one's socio-economic status. Give two examples that address these different levels of human rights in the film. What political thesis do you believe the film relays in your chosen scenes?

