



FILM: **NERUDA**

FDG RATING: 2.2



Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Pablo Larrain: *Director*

Gael García Bernal: *Actor, police inspector*

Luis Gnecco: *Actor, Neruda*

DATE: October 22, 2017

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **NERUDA**

"Love is so short, forgetting is so long." — Pablo Neruda, Love: Ten Poems

"I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where. I love you simply, without problems or pride: I love you in this way because I do not know any other way of loving but this, in which there is no I or you, so intimate that your hand upon my chest is my hand, so intimate that when I fall asleep your eyes close." — Pablo Neruda, 100 Love Sonnets

For those familiar with some of Neruda's poetry (possibly remembering him as the kind poet in the 1994 Italian movie, *Il Postino*) and hoped the film would provide a rich immersion into the lyrical prose of Chile's beloved poet, the experience was probably disappointing.

The (anti-)biopic, film noir story was more about a determined, preening police inspector's (Gael García Bernal as Oscar Peluchonneau) obsessive search for the hot-blooded Chilean Communist politician, Pablo Neruda (Luis Gnecco), when he goes into hiding in 1948 after clashing with the emerging dictatorship. At the time, Neruda was a literary celebrity as well as a prominent leftist politician in the Senate who goes from a controversial opposition figure to a hunted fugitive when President Videla bans the Communist Party. (Background note: Neruda had witnessed Franco's brutality – and the murder of his friend and fellow poet, Federico García Lorca – while Chilean consul in Madrid in 1936.) Mustached, fedora-wearing, Peluchonneau, a fictionalized amalgamation of shadowing detectives populating those dark and stormy night crime stories, is simultaneously fixated with capturing the Communist and haunted by the poet's larger than life mystique.

Historically, Neruda was deprived of his parliamentary immunity because of his courageous outspokenness and forced in hiding. He rushed from one safe house to another, sometimes in the middle of the night, to avoid being captured. Had he been, he might well have been taken to the concentration camp at Pisagua, in the northern Atacama desert, where the commandant was Augusto Pinochet, 25 years before he led the military coup against president Salvador Allende. In Larrain's fictionalized version: Accompanied by his adoring wife Delia, Neruda, in pompous, self-adoration, swashbuckling manner stays steps ahead of his pursuer, managing ingenious just-in-time escapes as he hides in the streets of Santiago to the snowy mountains of the Andes. Neruda seems to be enthralled by the cat and mouse chase with the inspector, almost seeing it as a stage that is giving more visibility to his political views. In one scene, Delia tells Peluchonneau that he is not real, he is a "supporting character created by Neruda himself, to make the story of Neruda's escape from Chile that much more thrilling." This line underscores the feeling of artificiality in the film, amplified by the exaggerated caricatures and the immersive saturated technicolor cinematography.

Some of our resident reviewers didn't get past the surreal opening scene that shows post-WWII Chilean politics literally in the toilet as the politicians converse pedantically in the gigantic opulent gilded men's lavatory of the Senate building. Those who did, knew not to expect realism in this pseudo biopic. Others either liked, tolerated or disengaged from the film as a result of Peluchonneau's voice over narration.

From a historical-political perspective we see how Neruda has far reaching influence over the country's workers, whose love for him grows as his poems are circulated by underground allies like a literary resistance movement. The government's attempts to humiliate Neruda and discredit him with the populace are unsuccessful.

Thematically, the film stylistically paints the struggle between the voice of creative thinkers versus the more powerful who try to exert authority to silence and control those voices. According to a published film critic, the director makes the point that "in the end, to give voice to the powerless, and arouse the senses, is the ultimate gift to the masses." True poetic justice at the end of this film, the narrator, who basically narrated himself into Neruda's story, is killed.

Outstanding acting, interesting story handled unconventionally, good staging, and ambitious, but ultimately not completely successful. Tedious and slow to others. 2.2 is Neruda's unenthusiastic score on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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[Film Discussion Group](#) (FDG) organizer