

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

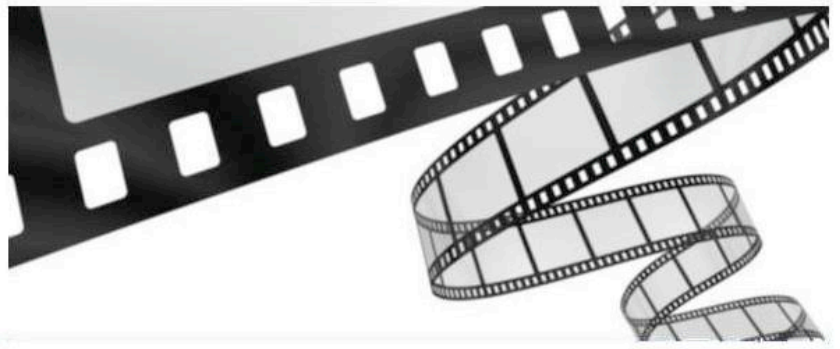
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No

(Chile, 2012)

Written by: **Pedro Peirano** (based on the unpublished play, *El Plebiscito*, by [Antonio Skármeta](#))

Directed by: **Pablo Larraín**

Cinematography: **Sergio Armstrong**

Cast:

Gael García Bernal	(René Saavedra)
Alfredo Castro	(Lucho Guzmán)
Luis Gnecco	(José Tomás Urrutia)
Néstor Cantillana	(Fernando)
Antonia Zegers	(Verónica Carvajal)
Marcial Tagle	(Alberto Arancibia)
Pascal Montero	(Simón Saavedra)
Jaime Vadell	(Minister Fernández)
Elsa Poblete	(Carmen)



No is the third of Pablo Larraín's narrative films about Pinochet-era Chile, a series that might be called "The No Redemption Trilogy" for the bitter irony which underlies each of its stories. In the first, **Tony Manero** (2008), set in the darkest days of the dictator's 15-year reign, Alfredo Castro plays a psychopath who hopes to become Chile's best John Travolta impersonator. The second, **Post Mortem** (2010), follows characters employed at a morgue during the 1973 coup d'état that killed President Salvador Allende and, later, placed Pinochet in power. Its protagonist, Mario, also played by Castro, is obsessive and delusional; in the end, he murders his neighbors, knowing that their deaths, like those of hundreds of others in the days following the coup, will never be investigated. *No* is about the campaign that promised Chileans freedom and affluence, and Pinochet's peaceful political demise.

In *Tony Manero* and *Post Mortem*, the mental and moral breakdowns of the main characters are a microcosm of the deterioration of probity under Pinochet. In *No*, Larraín illustrates the practiced emotional detachment of Chile's survivors—those who went into exile after the coup, or who stayed and were allied with Pinochet, or escaped notice because they were apolitical. It is 1988, and René (Gael García Bernal), Larraín's ad-man protagonist, is emblematic of the younger generation of survivors who grew up in exile. He lacks any nationalistic sentiments, and harbors no political attachments. A composite of two men who in real life designed the "No" campaign for the national referendum that year—"Yes" was to keep Pinochet in office—René convinces Chileans that voting "no" will lead to a newfound contentment. His boss, Lucho (Castro), who owns the advertising firm and is old enough to be his father, remained in Chile. He is an advisor to a Pinochet government minister.

Since 1990, shortly after Pinochet relinquished his presidency, Chile has been a left-leaning democracy with a capitalist underpinning. The economic system is a Pinochet legacy. With the support of the U.S. who viewed Allende as a Cold War threat, the despot quickly reversed the nationalization of resources and industry that had taken place under Allende's

Socialist government. By 1988, Chile had private enterprise. René and his ilk in *No*, who are pushing a Coca-Cola-like product at the beginning of the film, are as much a product of the Pinochet regime as their predecessors in the trilogy. The celebrated ad man agrees to work for the coalition of leftist parties that oppose Pinochet because it presents an advertising challenge, one that becomes even more attractive when Lucho heads the "Yes" campaign.

The "No" campaign hinges on getting Chilean voters to take the referendum seriously; like René's estranged wife Veronica (Antonia Zegers from *Post Mortem*), a committed activist, most think the referendum is fixed in Pinochet's favor. Each side gets 15 minutes of TV time in the evening to sell their vision of Chile. Many of those segments, by turns thoughtful and disturbingly trite, are seen in their original form. With a wonderful cast and an excellent script by Pedro Peirano (**The Maid**), *No* is clever, entertaining and cynical, in the manner of a Preston Sturges satire. René, who approaches a coalition candidate in the same way he does the toy rockets and microwave ovens he peddles, convinces his Socialist clients to accept a silly jingle that fits the "social context." Actually, it is René who best represents the social context, the fruition of Chile's capitalism, which rather than ensuring freedom, protects the "free" market.

Larraín and cinematographer Sergio Armstrong used 1980s-era cameras to shoot *No* [the Ikegama HL-79E, recording to U-matic video-tape], giving it an unmistakable period texture. Thirty percent of the movie is drawn from archival footage, yet the mix of film stocks and broadcast tapes is remarkably consistent. While the light and low-resolution color fix us in time, the dance music of the score, mostly waltz rhythms, suggests movement and timelessness. That music also ties *No* to the previous movies in the trilogy, both of which feature characters who dance. One of Mario's victims in *Post Mortem*, the object of his amorous obsession, is a pretty dancer played by Zegers. In *Tony Manero*, Raúl dances for a ticket to

freedom but is overshadowed by a younger man. Larrain's dance leitmotif is not lighthearted—in each case, it represents a danse macabre, a waltz to doom.

No marks the beginning of the end for Pinochet, yet the score signals the ascendance in 1988 of a different, nascent threat, that of oligarchy. Unlike the disco sounds of *Tony Manero* and the can-can at the start of *Post Mortem*, the waltz is a circular dance. Just ten years after the plebiscite, a senator named Sebastián Piñera opposed Pinochet's arrest for war crimes.



Piñera was elected president in 2010, a little more than a decade later. At the beginning of *No*, and at the end, there are long tracking shots of René on a skateboard, sometimes with no Foley, only waltz music. In another movie, he would have been radicalized by his experiences, the child-like skateboard reflective of rebirth, of the carefree independence he helped to forge. Here, René is merely circling back around to what he was doing before the referendum. And Chile, Larrain suggests, is doing the same.

Maria Garcia, *Film Journal International*

Background:

Chilean director Pablo Larrain and Mexican star Gael Garcia Bernal talked about the relationship between the film and their political views, the massive success of the film in its native Chile, and the challenges in creating a film with such a distinct visual style.

How does the film resonate with your own political sensibilities?

Gael Garcia Bernal: "There is always a chance to disassociate politics from any social interaction, any exchange of ideas involves politics, so it's very difficult to disassociate from that. And also in Latin America we live with different semantics perhaps, where politics are very much on the surface all the time. The reason why I mention this is because, in the United States, politics seems like something separate from daily life, and in Latin America you are always dealing with politics. I think all these stories carry that; especially this one *No* is a very political story, perhaps one of the most full-on political stories that I've ever had a chance to participate in.

This was a great chance to play around with brainstorming, and investigation, and introspection on what "democracy" means, or what happened in those days in Chile, or how it shaped the Chile that we live in now, and also the world in a way. This was an interesting shift of perspective to see how it resonates in Latin America. To jump into it was also interesting because I was invited to this story that Pablo had in mind, and to the filmmaking family he has in Chile, I was very cordially and cheerfully invited to be part of it."

Do you think the character, Rene Saavedra, it's a product of its time, or is he a hero in his own right?

Dir. Pablo Larrain: Yes, I think that is a mixture of these things. In general I think that the character is the result of a social and ideological process that the country had. Pinochet imposed a social and economic model, and this model brought with it marketing, the same tool



searched for; the political platform of the *No* knew that they needed someone to elaborate a narrative to convince people to vote. The other is that he was

power, so in a way Pinochet created his own poison. This character comes from this country under a dictatorship, he is force into exile, he has a life in Mexico, and then he returns to Chile and instead of putting all the pain in his work, he has this calmness that no one else has.

Gael Garcia Bernal: "There are also two other important reasons. One is that he was

exiled; like in all classic literature there is always this idea that one day someone from the outside will come to occupy the power."

What was the idea behind the very specific look of the film?

Pablo Larrain: "One third of the film is stock footage, and we wanted to connect all the material, so we just started to realize that the best was just to shoot in the same format they did in the 80's. I'd lie to you if I tell you I wasn't scared, there was a lot of doubt, but once we started shooting it just felt so right. Not only because it would match perfectly, it was also because it created an atmosphere of its own."

What was the most difficult thing about portraying this role?

Gael Garcia Bernal: "First of all, the accent. The Chilean accent was a big challenge. Also getting into the skin of the people, the time, and what happened. The challenges that the character has, this foreignness in his own country, which has to do not only with exile, but it has also something to do with him working in publicity, and looking at things that are more childish and technical"

Is there an added pressure when your character is based on real people?

Gael Garcia Bernal: "Playing Ernesto Guevara for example, that was more pressure especially because of who he is, and the mythology everyone has around him, but that's another story. For this one, the characters are very much alive, and they are the first ones to know that this is a fable. Pablo had a lot of involvement, and investigation trying to find out what the story is. Ultimately this film was made by the heroic feat of the Chilean people, this is out there to be interpreted. I think Pablo did a fantastic job, and also risking a lot at getting in the body of something that has to do with our recent history"

What does this film mean to the people of Chile?

Gael Garcia Bernal: "I think this one of the best exercises of memory that I've seen, and I think only Chile could do it, because in any other country it would much more complicated. Pablo has done a great job in re-conciling, not with history, not with a political past, but for the people that participated reconciling with themselves through the story. It doesn't have this messianic thing, like "from now on, after doing this film, we are gonna have a fresh start, or fully understand what happened". No, I think it's more of an experience for all the Chileans that lived that, to experience that again within themselves, and now see where we are standing.

"Also it is for kids that didn't live this to understand, in a way, what happened, and let them be part of that exercise of memory, which is something that is so necessary not only in Latin America, but everywhere in the world, to be aware of what happened, to interpret it, to reflect on that, and what better way to do it than fiction. If this was a documentary or exactly how it happened, which is close because one third of the film is archive footage, it would be different, but its fiction, and I think the film can speak to more angles in that way."

Our previous presentation:

Based on the 28 feedback slips returned on the night, you rated **Paris-Manhattan**, screened Tuesday, December 3rd, **3.57** stars out of 5. Please visit the current season page at www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk/2013/12/04/ to read all the feedback comments.

You can still give [feedback](#) on this, or our other films, by visiting the Discussions page: www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk/discussion/.

Our next presentation:

Thursday, 23rd January at 8pm: **The Place Beyond the Pines** (USA, 2012, dir. Derek Cianfrance)

Upcoming Cramphorn Films:

Friday 10 th January:	Wadja (PG), Saudi Arabia, 2013,	dir. Haifaa Al-Mansour
Monday, 13 th January:	Blue Jasmine (12A), UK, 2013,	dir. Woody Allen
Wednesday, 15 th January:	Sunshine On Leith (PG), UK, 2012,	dir. Dexter Fletcher
Sunday, 19 th January:	Jewels , live from Moscow,	Bolshoi Ballet
Tuesday, 21 st January:	Frances Ha (15), USA, 2012,	dir. Noah Baumbach

Please come to our Film Discussion Meeting, Tuesday, February 11th: Moulsham Mill, 8pm