

C H I L E

PABLO NERUDA

*Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) is considered one of the great poets of the twentieth century, one whose subjects ranged from the personal and erotic to the historical and political. He is best known as a literary spokesman for the aspirations of the common people of the Third World. Born Ricardo Eliezer Neftali Reyes y Basoalto in Parral, Chile, he took a pseudonym because his father, a railway worker, did not want him to be a poet. Neruda began writing when he was a student at the University of Chile. During this period, he joined with Bohemian poets who were promoting free love, anarchism, and experimental poetry. In 1927, he began a long career as a diplomat. Initially posted to Burma, Ceylon, and Singapore, he underwent significant changes as a person and writer. Exposed to the harsh realities of imperialism and reading widely in French and English poetry, he adopted via Rimbaud and Whitman the concept of poet as seer. Returning to Chile in 1932, he published the first part of his collection of poetry *Residence on Earth*, which revolutionized Hispanic verse with its dazzling combination of symbolism and surrealism. By the late 1930s Neruda was a committed leftist, and increasingly his poetry depicted sociopolitical themes. During the 1940s he joined the Communist Party, was elected to the Chilean senate, and was forced to flee his country as a political exile. He returned to Chile in 1953. After a trip to Peru, where he visited the ancient Inca ruins of Machu Picchu, he wrote one of his most successful collections of poems, *The General Song* (1968). Following the tradition of celebrating the grandeur of Latin America's land and history, Neruda included a sobering portrait of the continent's harsh sociopolitical and economic reality and paid tribute to the emerging consciousness of the downtrodden, who were positioning themselves for liberation. To the end of his life, Neruda remained an optimist. He continued writing politically committed poetry, but he also wrote simple, humorous verse about everyday living. In 1971 he won the Nobel Prize in Literature. He died in 1973 just after his close friend, President Salvador Allende, was overthrown by the Chilean military. "The United Fruit Co." and "Poet's Obligation" are typical of Neruda's socially conscious poetry.*

The United Fruit Co.

When the trumpets had sounded and all
was in readiness on the face of the earth,
Jehovah divided his universe:
Anaconda, Ford Motors,
Coca-Cola Inc., and similar entities:
the most succulent item of all,
The United Fruit Company Incorporated
reserved for itself: the heartland
and coasts of my country,
the delectable waist of America.
They rechristened their properties:
the "Banana Republics"—
and over the languishing dead,
the uneasy repose of the heroes
who harried that greatness,
their flags and their freedoms,
they established an *opéra bouffe*:
they ravished all enterprise,
awarded the laurels like Caesars,
unleashed all the covetous, and contrived
the tyrannical Reign of the Flies—
Trujillo the fly, and Tacho the fly,
the flies called Carias, Martinez,
Ubico—all of them flies, flies
dank with the blood of their marmalade
vassalage, flies buzzing drunkenly
on the populous middens:
the fly-circus fly and the scholarly
kind, case-hardened in tyranny.
Then in the bloody domain of the flies
The United Fruit Company Incorporated
sailed off with a booty of coffee and fruits
brimming its cargo boats, gliding
like trays with the spoils
of our drowning dominions.
And all the while, somewhere in the sugary
hells of our seaports,
smothered by gases, an Indian
fell in the morning:
a body spun off, an anonymous
chattel, some numeral tumbling,

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a branch with its death running out of it
in the vat of the carrion, fruit laden and foul.

Translated from the Spanish by Ben Belitt

Poet's Obligation

To whoever is not listening to the sea
this Friday morning, to whoever is cooped up
in house or office, factory or woman
or street or mine or harsh prison cell:
to him I come, and, without speaking or looking, 5
I arrive and open the door of his prison,
and a vibration starts up, vague and insistent,
a great fragment of thunder sets in motion
the rumble of the planet and the foam,
the raucous rivers of the ocean flood, 10
the star vibrates swiftly in its corona,
and the sea is beating, dying and continuing.

So, drawn on by my destiny,
I ceaselessly must listen to and keep
the sea's lamenting in my awareness, 15
I must feel the crash of the hard water
and gather it up in a perpetual cup
so that, wherever those in prison may be,
wherever they suffer the autumn's castigation,
I may be there with an errant wave, 20
I may move, passing through windows,
and hearing me, eyes will glance upward
saying 'How can I reach the sea?'
And I shall broadcast, saying nothing,
the starry echoes of the wave, 25
a breaking up of foam and of quicksand,
a rustling of salt withdrawing,
the grey cry of sea-birds on the coast.

So, through me, freedom and the sea 30
will make their answer to the shuttered heart.

Translated from the Spanish by Alastair Reid

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How and to what effect is religious and insect imagery used in "The United Fruit Co."?
2. Where in "The United Fruit Co." is irony used?
3. How does the poet define the role of the United Fruit Co.?
4. How does the author view the poet's responsibility in "Poet's Obligation"?
5. Discuss the use of nature imagery in "Poet's Obligation."



ISABEL ALLENDE

*Isabel Allende (b. 1942) is one of Latin America's leading writers. Born in Peru of Chilean diplomats, she has lived in several countries in Latin America and currently resides in the San Francisco Bay area. She has worked for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and was for many years a journalist. She only began to write fiction in the early 1980s. Since then, her novels, *The House of the Spirits*, *Of Love and Shadows*, and *Eva Luna*, have become international best-sellers. Influenced by the "magic realism" of an older generation of writers, Allende's lyric voice skillfully mingles the personal and the political.*

Phantom Palace

When five centuries earlier the bold renegades from Spain with their bone-weary horses and armor candescent beneath an American sun stepped upon the shores of Quinaroo, Indians had been living and dying in that same place for several thousand years. The conquistadors announced with heralds and banners the "discovery" of a new land, declared it a possession of a remote emperor, set in place the first cross, and named the place San Jerónimo, a name unpronounceable to the natives. The Indians observed these arrogant ceremonies with some amazement, but the news had already reached them of the bearded warriors who advanced across the world with their thunder of iron and powder; they had heard that wherever these men went they sowed sorrow and that no known people had been capable of opposing them: all armies had succumbed before that handful of centaurs. These Indians were an ancient tribe, so