

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.*