

MANEUVERING TIME AND PLACE:

THE POETRY OF
MANUEL MAPLES ARCE

BY DIANE J. FORBES



2022

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Introduction

2021 marks the one-hundredth anniversary of Estridentismo, Manuel Maples Arce's avant-garde movement in Mexico, an energetic rupture from the past, which brought the Mexican Revolution to all of the arts and brought the Mexican literary community into the 20th century. Manuel Maples Arce was a driving force in the modernization of Mexican poetry in the 1920s, and his complete work, spanning more than six decades, is of a value that should create for him a respected place among the most prominent Latin American poets of the twentieth century. Although a thorough reading of his work confirms this evaluation, the literary world and academia have yet to consider Maples Arce's complete work as a whole, rather than concentrating only on his vanguardista period, Estridentismo. Much was written about Maples and Estridentismo in the 1920s, followed by a carry-over of period polemics after his 1940 anthology of modern Mexican poetry. All of this has been discussed again in recent criticism, with a more contemporary point of view. The 1947 publication of *Memorial de la Sangre* brought many reviews from international friends. Luis Mario Schneider and Kenneth C. Monahan wrote their important studies in the 1970s. The 1981 publication of Maples' complete poetry as *Las semillas del tiempo* brought a bit more attention, as did the reprint in 2013, along with several anniversary retrospectives. More recently, quite a lot has been

written (mainly in Mexico and mainly in Spanish) about Estridentismo, mostly about the manifestos, the people, and the aims of the movement. These are from refreshingly new perspectives, but constitute quite a lot of repetition. Still needed is a serious textual analysis of Maples Arce's complete poetry, a close look at the poems themselves, from 1922 to 1981, and how they all fit together. The goal of the present study is to provide that analysis and, through such, to demonstrate the transcendence and lasting value of Maples Arce's poetry.

In this study, historical literary references and connections are made to aid the reader in placing Maples Arce's work in relevant context to gauge Maples Arce's merit and to justify his place in Hispanic letters. An introduction to the historical avant-garde is given to provide the necessary background and context, especially for the English-language readership, and an overview of *Estridentismo* is included both for the sake of information and to rectify errors and omissions in some past criticism. It is the aim of this study to illustrate the cohesiveness and the trajectory of Maples Arce's complete poetry.

Chapter One presents an introduction to *Estridentismo* in the context of the historical avant-garde and modern poetry. Chapter Two analyzes Maples' first volume of poetry in the Estridentismo period, *Andamios Interiores* (1922), in which Maples Arce shows us his style and outlook and presents the basic problem dealt with in all of his poetry. The persona in these poems, the "yo," appears to be a poet, and may or may not be an autobiographical representation of Maples Arce. I will use the terms "protagonist" and "persona" throughout the study to refer to this voice. In a world where nothing seems to

last, where everything seems to slip through his hands, the protagonist of the poems strives to overcome separation and transitoriness, to achieve union and permanence: this is the main issue in Maples Arce's poetry. The poems present in a variety of ways the protagonist's situations of loneliness and separation from a loved one, and often a sense of dissociation from some ideal harmonious world, even in the midst of exciting modernity. By merging elements of content and form (e.g. the exhilaration he feels from the new "modern" inventions, plus formal manipulation of the structure of the poem to support and reflect that content) and the act of recording images and emotions in the form of a poem, union and permanence are achieved, not in the "story" of the poem but in the poem itself. These Cubist poems involve the reader, who has to reconstruct the puzzle of shattered images in the poems, which together tell of the death of postmodernismo and the arrival of the jazz age and how it affects the protagonist's life.

Chapter Three discusses *Urbe* (1924), in which Maples Arce gives the urban techno-socio-political context of the problem of separation vs. union and transitoriness vs. permanence (workers' rights struggles, industrialization, the lingering violence of the Revolution, political corruption, amid the dynamism of the city alive with new inventions). The poet observes this city in revolution, as if from his balcony. Chapter Four shows Maples Arce explaining the poet's place in that context and in the world in general, in *Poemas Interdictos* (1927), the protagonist now going out into that world and participating. Examining *Memorial de la Sangre* (1947), Chapter Five illustrates how Maples Arce delves into the eternal crux

Manuel Maples Arce: Biographical Information

Manuel Maples Arce was born May 1, 1900 in Papantla, Veracruz, Mexico, son of Manuel Maples (lawyer and poet) and Adela Arce. He spent his childhood in Tuxpan, Veracruz, where he attended the Escuela Cantonal Miguel Lerdo. He later attended the Preparatoria (after one year of study in Jalapa) in the city of Veracruz, followed by the Escuela Libre de Derecho in Mexico City, from which he received his law degree in 1925. In 1930-31 he studied French literature and Art History at the Sorbonne in Paris. He began writing poetry as a teenager and published his first poem in 1919.

In his native state of Veracruz, Maples Arce held several judicial and political posts: judge (*Juez Primero de Primera Instancia*) and Secretary General of the Government of the State of Veracruz (both in Jalapa and beginning in 1925), Interim Governor, and representative to the state legislature (1928). He was also consulting attorney for the State Departments of the Treasury and Government, technical consultant for the State Department of Education, and Head of the Editorial Department of same.

In 1932 Maples Arce was elected representative to the Federal Congress in Mexico City and in 1935 he joined the Mexican Foreign Service as Secretary of the Embassy in Belgium, where he was also *Encargado de Negocios*. In Warsaw and Rome he was *Encargado de Negocios* until the

outbreak of World War II, when he was sent to London (with duties also in Lisbon) as Consul General and representative of Mexico to the governments in exile of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Norway and Poland. In 1944 he was appointed Ambassador to Panama, later to Chile (1950) and then Colombia (1951). In 1952, Maples Arce was sent to renew diplomatic relations with Japan as the first Ambassador from Mexico to Japan, after which he was Ambassador in Canada (1956), Norway (1959), Lebanon and Pakistan (1962). Some of the diplomatic appointments stated here also included minor representation in other countries. For professional reasons and as a tourist, Maples traveled over most of the world.

Though an energetic and untiring representative of Mexico in the diplomatic corps and champion of Mexican cultural promotion, Maples Arce considered his main profession to be that of poet. He had an avid interest in literature from an early age, and wrote poetry from his teens to the year of his death. Poetry was his way of life and it, along with his appreciation of art, profoundly influenced his work as cultural ambassador.

Maples Arce was a contributing author to most of Mexico's major periodicals, as well as to those of several foreign countries. Maples' work has received critical commentary in numerous periodicals and other publications in Mexico and throughout the world, including countries where he served in the diplomatic corps and in the United States.

Maples Arce married Blanche Vermeersch in Belgium on August 12, 1936, and they had two children, Manuel and Mireya. Upon retirement from the diplomatic corps in 1967, Maples returned to Mexico and continued to write poetry and essays, in addition to his three volumes of autobiography. He died on June 26, 1981 in Mexico City.

Works by Manuel Maples Arce*

POETRY:

Andamios Interiores, México: Editorial Cultura, 1922.

Urbe, México: Andrés Botas e Hijo, 1924.

Poemas Interdictos, Jalapa, Veracruz: Ediciones de Horizonte, 1927.

Memorial de la Sangre, México: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1947.

Las semillas del tiempo: obra poética 1919-1980, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981.

EDITORIAL/CRITICISM:

Antología de la Poesía Mexicana Moderna, Rome: Poligráfica Tiberina, 1940.

Siete Cuentos Mexicanos, Panamá: Biblioteca Selecta, 1946.

ESSAY:

Modern Mexican Art (El Arte Mexicano Moderno). London: A. Zwemmer, 1943.

El Paisaje en la Literatura Mexicana. México: Librería Porrúa Hnos. y Cía., 1944.

Peregrinación por el Arte de México. Buenos Aires, 1951.

Incitaciones y Valoraciones. México: Cuadernos Americanos, 1956.

* Maples Arce dismissed his early modernista book, *Rag, tintas de abanico* (1920), written when he was young, and asked that it not be included in his complete poetry. I have honored that request, the same for his teenage poems.

Ensayos Japoneses. México: Editorial Cultura, 1959.
Leopoldo Méndez. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1970.

MEMOIRS:

A la orilla de este río. Madrid: Editorial Plenitud, 1964.
Soberana juventud. Madrid: Editorial Plenitud, 1967.
Mi vida por el mundo. Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, 1983.

LITERARY MAGAZINES:

Collaboration on many literary magazines, including:
 Zig-Zag, Revista de Revistas, El Universal Ilustrado, Ir-radiador, Horizonte.

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Chapter One: Estridentismo and the Avant-Garde

“¡CHOPIN A LA SILLA ELÉCTRICA!”

“¡VIVA EL MOLE DE GUAJOLOTE!”

ESTRIDENTISTA MANIFESTOS 1 & 2

The historical avant-garde, or *vanguardismo*,¹ as it is known in Spanish, was an artistic phenomenon that occurred roughly between 1907 and the end of the 1920s in virtually all of Western art and literature. The avant-garde was composed of a series of movements that worked to renovate artistic and literary expression in order better to reflect life in the twentieth century and modern sensibility. The avant-garde's proponents intended to shock the public into awareness, and attempted to destroy tradition and the bourgeois concept of art. This revolution consisted of a series of expressions. Pablo Picasso's first Cubist painting, “Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,” dates from 1907. Italian Futurism began in 1909, Dadaism in 1916 and Surrealism in 1924 (though it was building from 1919), dates corresponding to their first manifestos. These avant-garde “-isms” flourished in the teens and twenties in Europe and had similar expression in the Americas, though starting later there. The avant-garde was most prolific in the Americas in the twenties, with a few important works from the late teens (e.g. T. S. Eliot's *Love Song of J. Alfred*

1 Please note that the term *vanguardismo* (or avant-garde) is used here in its specific sense, denoting a particular historical period in the arts, rather than solely in its general sense of that which is always in the forefront, revolutionary, unorthodox, experimental work in any period.

Prufrock, 1915; Vicente Huidobro’s *El espejo de agua*, 1916, *Ecuatorial*, 1918, *Poemas árticos*, 1918, and some of his volumes in French). It is important to note that Latin American vanguardismo is, for the most part, a mixture of the tendencies which found separate (though not mutually exclusive) expression in Europe—Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, followed later by Surrealism.²

Some sources generalize that the avant-garde covers the

2 These four movements will be discussed in detail later. When addressing the international avant-garde, there is a possibility for confusion in the terminology regarding poetry movements. The following chart shows approximate correspondences in vertical columns, in both time period and style.

Spanish America	Modernismo (Darío, et al)	Post-modernismo	Vanguardismo (various -ismos)	Postvanguardismo
Brazil	Simbolismo Parnasianismo		Modernismo (Mário Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, et al)	Postmodernismo Surrealismo
Europe in general (excluding Spain)	Symbolism Parnassianism Impressionism		Avant-garde (Cubism, Italian Futurism, Dada, Russian Futurism, German Expressionism)	Surrealism
Spain	Modernismo (J.R. Jiménez, M. Machado, F. Villa-Espesa, Valle-Inclán)		Ultraísmo Creacionismo (G. Diego) Catalán avant- garde	Postvanguardismo Surrealismo Gen. '27
United States	formative stage of Modernism		Modernism (many indepen- dent writers: Pound, Eliot, Hart Crane, W.C. Williams, W. Stevens, e.e. cummings)	Late Modernism (late Eliot, late W.C. Williams, Frost, Roethke, Lowell) (Post-modernism is later)
Great Britain	Decadents (Wilde, Pater, Symons)	Hardy, Yeats	Vorticism (Pound, Eliot, W. Lewis, Gaudier-Brzeska	30s Left (Spender, Auden, C. Day Lewis, MacNiece)

years between the two World Wars, but by the 1930s Surrealism dominates and the mood is different, more appropriately termed *postvanguardismo* in Latin America. In a sense, the poetry of the avant-garde accomplished its mission in the twenties, and in the thirties and forties, poetry was ready to continue evolving and progressing along with the changing world. The avant-garde is revolutionary and violent in its mission—a new vision that abruptly opens the door to new possibilities for all literature that follows. From its accomplishments emerges the great freedom of expression that has produced the 20th century's masterpieces. The literary avant-garde is a transitional stage, but one with significant worth in its own right. The same is true for the corresponding work in painting, sculpture and music.

Ezra Pound's phrase "make it new" expresses a common goal of all of the avant-garde -isms. There was a desire to express the condition of modern life in the new century, and to renovate both thematics and aesthetics. Accelerated time, space, movement, dynamism, speed, communication, modern machines, transportation, and man-made beauty were newly-important issues for the poet, as was humankind's place in that new world. The poet expressed our joy in the rush of modernity, our senses constantly bombarded by stimuli, but also spoke to our ultimate loneliness, paralysis, sense of being lost, lack of personal communication, and to the social injustice of the bourgeois-controlled system. Latin American *vanguardismo* is cosmopolitan and universal, but at the same time it places much importance on national identity (this is especially true in Mexico, a new nationalism having been created by the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution).

The avant-garde wanted to create a literature that

would better reflect the spirit and state of mind of the modern world. It wanted to make all artistic expression independent of the constraints of traditional realism. It is often non-representational, anti-sentimental, anti-anecdotal, anti-rhetorical, anti-rationalist, and it rejects the old thematics. The poem (or other work of art) is seen as an object in itself, without necessary ties to any exterior subject. It does not represent; it *is*. Form and the word are set free. Thus form and content are more organically united. There is a great deal of experimentation, including the use of neologisms and creative typography to reflect the content. The concrete form of the written word itself and its placement on the page are used conscientiously (letters, lines, shapes and images they form).

The combination of time and space (the 20th century awareness of their interaction and mutual influence) is a major theme as well as an element of form in both poetry and painting (the spatialization of time, the temporalization of space, the combination of reading's linear time—duration—with the visual instant). There is a movement towards abstractionism, away from the realistically represented object (although the creative work is still based in reality). The avant-garde seeks to express perceived reality rather than apparent reality; that is, the simultaneous multiplicity of perspectives with which one perceives reality and not just one isolated, artificial plane.

The image is all-important, and there is total freedom in its creation. The traditional distinction between image and metaphor virtually disappears and the terms often may be used interchangeably. There is a real avant-garde cult of the metaphor. At the same time there is interesting use of metonymy, often the structuring device and sole key

to a poem (e.g. Jean Arp's "Poux Fardés"). The possibilities of association and suggestion are multiplied in the new combinations found in metaphors: juxtaposition of opposites, or other unexpected combinations.

There is a penchant for originality, surprise and novelty. There is much word-play, punning, verbal incoherence (reflecting the state of human communication), and often a strong note of humor and sarcasm designed to attack blatantly the mask of seriousness with which the bourgeois always cloaked its art. "Épater le bourgeois" was a major goal of the avant-garde—this became evident not only in the poetry but also in the public spectacles created by the avant-garde, especially the Dadaists and Futurists, and, as we shall see in Mexico, the estridentistas. In general, the avant-garde was a reaction against nineteenth-century tradition.

During this period, art increasingly emphasizes form more than theme (or one could say that form becomes essentially *the* theme). Wylie Sypher has said that Cubism is painting about painting; one may assert that vanguardista poetry is poetry about poetry. The new century required a new aesthetic. In avant-garde literature we see a fragmentation of syntax, causing concentration on the individual word. There are many kinds of insistent repetition (the best example of which is Gertrude Stein's prose style), and an abstract relationship grows between words. In the image/metaphor there is often a union of two different semantic fields. The constant use of fragmentation and unexpected combinations has to do both with new ideas about perception and with new stimuli to be perceived. Language is the medium by which things are realized (perceived) in the adult human mind; the poet plays with

our perception as well as offering new meaning. Ernest Hemingway's prose certainly may not seem avant-garde to most readers, but he was an avid student of Gertrude Stein, and his descriptive paragraphs³ demonstrate an in-scape, an inner sense of the thing described, a spiritual vision of it, thus linking the writer's perception of the stimulus to the literary (verbal) expression of it. The resulting relationship between subject and object (the observer and the thing observed) makes the writing Art. Our manner of perception determines our sense of reality.⁴

Two things happen when the literature and art deal with the explosive first quarter of the twentieth century in the Western world: the profusion of modern phenomena causes the writer/artist to be caught emotionally between extremes of great intensity while physically surrounded by a dynamic whirlwind, and the aesthetic expression of this experience produces a work so apparently hermetic that the traditional reader/viewer often feels incapable of understanding. One sees, however, that there is a need for writers/artists to express modern life, and the reader/viewer, in order to understand, must not only discard traditional expectations but also participate in the re-creation of the work of art and thus in the experience.

A brief summary of what these new phenomena of the twentieth century were may be of use: mechanization, industrialization, Einstein's theory of relativity, Heisenberg's theory of uncertainty, the Mexican Revolution, World War I, the Russian Revolution, Marxism, Socialism, Com-

3 Excellent examples are found in the stories "Now I Lay Me" and "Fathers and Sons" (*The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966). Hemingway also studied Cézanne, as did Picasso.

4 A clear example of this is found in the four distinct perceptions and consequent narrations of one situation in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Random House, 1929.)

munism, Freud's theories about dreams (psychoanalysis, lunacy, cause and effect), the first surgical interventions, anesthesia, x-rays, the discovery of radioactivity and the effects of light, atomic and nuclear physics (nuclear reaction theories, atomic and molecular theories, atomic model), black holes, quantum theory and mechanics, fission of heavy nuclei, electromagnetism, photography, cinema, translation of Darwin's "Origin of the Species" (still controversial in the public sphere), brain physiology, pavement, cement, more railroads and steamboats, ocean liners, airplanes, helicopters, cars, bicycles, motorcycles, telegraph, telephone, trans-Atlantic cable, microphone, phonograph, radio, jazz, electricity, battery, blast furnace, hydraulic crane, steel bridges, oil wells, oil and gas for cars, vulcanization, McCormick reaper, electric light, typewriter, Eastman-Kodak camera, evaporated milk, canning, dynamos, war machines (tanks, submarines, dynamite, torpedoes, machine guns, mass-production of rifles, revolvers, big ships, dredges, airplanes), man-made fabrics, and so on. Some of these phenomena date from the late 19th century but are still new to the general public in the early 20th century.

The technological advances become the trademarks of modernity. The scientific theories (especially Einstein, Heisenberg and Freud) become distorted popular ideas and cause paranoia among the general public: I can never be sure if I exist or not (Heisenberg); an assertion of anything is no longer possible after Einstein's theory of relativity—this gives a certain freedom to art—"this is round" only because that's how I perceive it in this time and space. "It's all relative." These common preoccupations influence modern thought and the relationship of humans to the environment. The old mysticism is replaced by a new scien-

tific mysticism; the brain is now the central object. In addition, the rise of the bourgeoisie and Positivism in the 19th century and the resultant oppression of the proletariat brought a strong reaction in the 20th century.

Stephen Spender explains the artistic reception of these new scientific and technological concepts in his essay “The Making of a Poem”:

A world of external impersonal forces must be sacrificially reinvented as the poet’s inner personal world, so that, for his reader, the impersonal modern world may be personalized in poetry... What I am concerned with is his awareness of a contemporary situation which affects personal relations and art itself, and which is different from past situations...

What writers may fruitfully know is that which they can experience with their sensibility. So it is not so important that they should know the second law of thermodynamics as that they should perceive the subtle changes effected in the rhythm of language by the environment resulting from inventions and its influence on human behavior and modes of feeling. It is not scientific knowledge but its effects which become part of the experience of modern life.⁵

Crucial here: the reader of a poem that expresses the effect of modernity on life is required to decipher the code and then re-create the poem—thus adding, by the way, to its dynamism. Hugh Kenner notes how exciting that can be, referring to an Ezra Pound poem:

Printed as he prints it, and unpunctuated, the delicacies this scansion obliterates are set out for the mind to discover, the run of live breath checked by eager nerves, played against the units of attention. Make it

⁵ Stephen Spender, *The Making of a Poem* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955) 32, 37.

new; its last word is 'revived'.⁶

To conclude this introduction to the avant-garde and return to Latin America specifically, it is useful to look at Andrew P. Debicki's summary comparing Modernismo and Vanguardismo:

Simplificando demasiado, pudiera decirse que los modernistas trataron de encarnar artísticamente sus temas por medio de un lenguaje especial, que elaboraban y aplicaban a la descripción o a la anécdota para extender su valor. Su esfuerzo se centraba, por tanto, en el enriquecimiento de una realidad exterior. Los vanguardistas en cambio evitan descripción y anécdota, y crean la experiencia más directamente, por medio del lenguaje y de la imagen. Dan un paso más—un paso muy importante—en el alejamiento de la poesía del mensaje y de la confesión personal de su autor. (López Velarde puede considerarse, en este esquema, figura transicional entre el Modernismo y la Vanguardia.) El así llamado 'hermetismo' de la poesía vanguardista se debe en muchos casos a la falta de organización anecdótica o lógica; una vez que el lector deja de buscar tal organización y se fija en la experiencia creada directamente en el poema, éste no le parece extraño.⁷

ESTRIDENTISMO: A REVOLUTION IN POETRY

Manuel Maples Arce's formative years as a poet (teenage years) coincided with the periods of Modernismo and Postmodernismo in Mexico. Even though his earliest poems and first published book (*Rag. Tintas de abanico*, 1920, prose poems) were modernistas, Maples felt an in-

6 Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971) 543.

7 Andrew P. Debicki, *Antología de la Poesía Mexicana Moderna* (London: Tamesis Books Limited, 1977) 20.

creasing need for change, the need to renovate and modernize the state of poetry in Mexico. Postmodernismo had reached a point of stagnation and its traditional 19th century/turn-of-the-century perspectives were no longer valid for the new 20th century.

Yo perseguía un arte que correspondiera a mi propio gusto y no al halago de los demás. Promovía algo nuevo. Las modalidades líricas del modernismo y aun del postmodernismo me parecían [pretéritas], y había que renovarlas. Interesábanme las imágenes enigmáticas que no pudieran formularse racionalmente... Yo preconizaba un cambio en la expresión, pero sobre todo en las imágenes, de las que hacía depender el misterio de la poesía en aquellos años. Cada verso debería encerrar una imagen para pasar a otra, enlazada virtual o explícitamente, fundida en los términos de la comparación. Desaparecían las relaciones visuales, para transformarse en algo prodigioso... Yo había pensado reiteradamente en el problema de la renovación literaria de manera inmediata, en ahondar las posibilidades de la imagen, prescindiendo de los elementos lógicos que mantenían su sentido explicativo. Inicié una búsqueda apasionada por un nuevo mundo espiritual, a la vez que trabajaba por difundir, entre la juventud mexicana, las novísimas ideas y los nombres de los escritores universales vinculados al movimiento de vanguardia, al que México había permanecido indiferente.⁸

Maples began to experiment, as well as to talk with other artists concerned about the need for change. His poem “Esas rosas eléctricas” is the first published manifestation of his new vein of poetry. The poem was rejected by *Revista de Revistas*, one of the three most prestigious literary magazines in Mexico City at the time,⁹ but was accepted for publication in *Cosmópolis* (No. 34) in Madrid, Spain. This publication

8 Manuel Maples Arce, *Soberana Juventud* (Madrid: Editorial Plenitud, 1964) 120-122.

9 *Revista de Revistas*, *El Universal Ilustrado*, *Zig-Zag*.

Chapter Two: The Prism: Fragmented Reality, *Andamios Interiores*, 1922

“Art gives form and harmony
to what in life is chaos and
discord.”

Isadora Duncan

Maples Arce's 1922 volume *Andamios Interiores* contains a uniform, cohesive group of poems of Cubist structure in which form reflects and reports theme. In the situation of the protagonist separated in one way or another from his beloved, the dichotomy of union vs. separation is presented and vanquished in each poem, reunion being achieved in the structure and images of the poem above and beyond the verbal thematic meditation; that is, the poet creates a timelessness within time and salvages the situation in the work of art. The Cubist mode is the right choice for these poems, since it works with the same problems and finds resolution in the same way as the particular situation of the protagonist in Maples Arce's *estri-dentista* volumes.

... en el cubismo, al igual que en el creacionsimo, las imágenes se van sucediendo hasta fundirse en una situación final donde [se] ve no aparecen la perspectiva ni las distancias y se pierden los tiempos del ayer y del mañana, donde una imagen o un poema engloban todos los tiempos y todos los planos en un solo instante.⁵⁴

54 A. Maack, “Huidobro, Picasso, y la correlación de las artes,” *El Sur* [Con-

... Es decir, que los excitantes interno y externo se reducen a uno solo, al tiempo que la inteligencia va fatigándose.⁵⁵

Poems written in this mode, in order to be deciphered and understood, require active involvement on the part of the reader. These poems are not easy to read. One must find the connections between images, consider the poem as a whole, and reconstruct the total image. Most published criticism of *Andamios Interiores* falls victim to the danger of seeing only isolated images, never reaching a total picture. Frank Rutter speaks to this situation when he explains the problem and the necessary method of approaching a Cubist poem:

... existe un predominio de lo ilógico y lo irracional, resultado inevitable de la casi eliminación de elementos narrativos o descriptivos. El lector, entonces, utiliza sus facultades imaginativas para evocar su propia visión interior, construyendo así una 'totalidad' a partir de un poema que consiste sólo en imágenes aparentemente inconexas. En la mayor parte de los casos esta totalidad se registra en la mente del lector únicamente después de un esfuerzo intelectual posterior a la lectura. En la pintura cubista se observa un paralelo semejante... exigía un concepto intelectual de cómo todas las partes formaban la totalidad del objeto de arte. Esto conllevaba una visión de la que el observador se hacía partícipe en la construcción de la totalidad por medio de sus poderes de imaginación e intelecto. Por eso el arte moderno no permite una rápida mirada superficial... El tema principal o la totalidad del poema ["Vide," de Vicente Huidobro] es tradicional, es decir, se trata del dolor y sufrimiento de una

cepción, Chile] II (19 agosto 1984): n. pag. (Referring to Estrella Busto Ogden's study of Vicente Huidobro's poetry.)

55 Luis Marín Loya, *El meridiano lírico* (México, 1926) n.pag.

persona que ha perdido el objeto de su amor; la presentación, sin embargo, es distinta. La omisión de descripciones, narraciones y de un orden cronológico oculta el leitmotif poético que se revela sólo después de un análisis del conjunto de las imágenes que compone el poema.⁵⁶

The process Rutter describes is precisely the key to interpreting Maples Arce's *estridentista* (Cubist) poems, and will be used throughout this study. Rutter has made an excellent observation, and his explanation of how modern art and modern poetry work, as stated in the above quotation, delineates the fundamentals of understanding and interpreting such works.

Similarly, in his 1923 review of *Andamios Interiores*, the Mexican novelist Gregorio López y Fuentes explains that one cannot approach these poems in a traditional way, since they are not immediately linear or representational.

El procedimiento que sigue Manuel Maples Arce es un procedimiento que requiere una constante gimnasia mental porque él no toma la imagen como la cámara fotográfica, en línea recta, sino que el objetivo llega al cristal receptor, podría decirse, mediante una combinación de espejos cóncavos y convexos: cuando los espejos han modificado la imagen, marcando poderosamente los rasgos característicos, él la traslada al lienzo; por eso a sus temas no se puede ir en línea recta: debe desandarse la línea quebrada que él siguió sobre los cristales reflectores.⁵⁷

Poet and reader both follow a decipherization or reduction-reconstruction process (like Maples Arce's de-

56 Frank Rutter, "La estética cubista en 'Horizon carré' de Vicente Huidobro," *Bulletin Hispanique* 80 (1978): 129-131.

57 Gregorio López y Fuentes, review of *Andamios Interiores* by Manuel Maples Arce, *El Heraldo* 16 marzo 1923: 3.

struction-creation cycle) in the first three of Maples Arce's books, much as the Cubist and Dada painters (and viewers of their work) did, taking the total image apart, separating its components and eliminating all but the essential elements in order to get to the essence (identity), to then, in a Cubist manner, reconstruct that image anew. The reader must take the puzzle pieces that are presented in the poem and put them together to form the complete picture. Recreation is the dynamism of this process and it preserves motion, eternalizing the present moment in a kind of timelessness within time. As each individual reader tries to decipher and reconstruct the story, multiple interpretations may occur, each valid as long as it is justified, and rather than detracting, this adds to the dynamic quality of the poem.

The following characteristics of *Estridentismo* in general, as noted by Luis Mario Schneider, can be observed in the poems of *Andamios Interiores*: "una dirección de lenguaje ... emotivo, ... pirotecnias verbales, ... imágenes y metáforas por lo general de raíz cubista, yuxtapuestas, pero motivadas todas por una sola idea, ... una musicalidad, y un vértigo espiritual que se produce por el cultivo excesivo de los sentidos." Schneider also points out the unique use of perspective and mood in *Andamios Interiores*: "Por medio de acendrado subjetivismo que muchas veces conduce a un desarraigo, al derrotismo o a un estado de soledad, crea atmósferas que están más sugeridas que declaradas."⁵⁸

Most of the poems of *Andamios Interiores* treat the same basic theme and situation and contain similar elements of

58 Luis Mario Schneider, *Mele* (Carta Internacional de Poesía/International Poetry Letter) ed. Stefan Baciu [Special issue on *Estridentismo*] agosto 1980: 10-11.

Chapter Three: The City in Clamor and Reflection,

Urbe, 1924

“...the street cars go by singing to themselves
I am iron ”

W. S. Merwin, “Touching the Tree,”
The Rain in the Trees

“—One Song, one Bridge of Fire! Is it Cathay,
Now pity steeps the grass and rainbows ring
The serpent with the eagle in the leaves...?
Whispers antiphonal in azure swing.”

Hart Crane, *The Bridge*

The above quotations illustrate the dual character of Maples Arce’s 1924 book-length (228 lines) poem *Urbe*. This poem is at once a Whitmanesque song of praise to the modern city and a record of the gradual corruption of a revolution that dreamed of utopia. The rapid growth of modern technology in the early twentieth century coincided with Mexico’s 1910 revolution and its hopes for the future. Young writers and artists in the early 1920s in Mexico felt an electric surge of optimism, produced by the exciting new technological inventions world-wide, the improvement in transatlantic communication, the creative boom in the arts, the attempt to put the goals of the Revolution into practice and into a new government, and by the writers’/artists’ own brash youth. In Maples Arce’s

poetry, we see the effect of the above-mentioned phenomena most clearly in *Urbe* and in *Poemas Interdictos*. These volumes are indeed the product of their times, filtered through the poet's vision and sensibility.

In his November 1, 1981 Public Television program, "The Shock of the New," Robert Hughes noted the effect of modern art and literature on life, and vice-versa. He explained that the avant-garde of engineering had something in common with the avant-garde of art: the conquering of horizontal and vertical space. The new machines brought heightened notions of motion and speed. They changed man's perspective on the world: the blurred vision of rapid motion through space past static objects is captured in many paintings of the Italian Futurists, as well as in Maples Arce's poem about an automobile ride, "80 H. P." The view of the ground from the top of the new Eiffel Tower in 1899 was a turning point in human consciousness, as was the view from an airplane some years later (on her first airplane ride, Gertrude Stein remarked that what she saw below reminded her of Picasso's paintings), and can be compared to the sight of Earth from the moon in our own times, after the 1969 lunar landing. Such a new view of the universe inevitably altered man's concept of identity and existence. More and more, Einstein's theory of relativity became evident to the public. Hughes noted Cezanne's emphasis on the process of perception, and Picasso's attempt to compress the inspection of an object—a perception which, because of the object's tridimensionality, normally requires linear time to complete—into one single moment on the canvas. In addition to the idea of perception through dynamism and from new angles, people were fascinated by the machine.

The new technology meant a brighter future, and it was man-made beauty as well as power. The tremendous optimism involved in humankind's esteem for wondrous mechanical feats such as the Brooklyn Bridge, the Eiffel Tower, transatlantic ships, the automobile and the airplane, is much like the optimism found in the early stages of a revolution. The Russian Revolution of 1917 gave the Russian avant-garde its image of dynamism; it was the hope for the future. The same applies to the 1910 Mexican Revolution and the *estridentistas*: they wanted to carry the Revolution to the arts, and they did so with great energy. The apogee of their efforts was in their work in Jalapa. *Urbe* was published at the very beginning of that period of combined literary and social activism. Indeed, it was a sort of catalyst or springboard for the *estridentista* move to Jalapa and the subsequent addition of a social and political orientation to the movement.¹⁰³

The impetus for the Russian avant-garde was, however, "the future that never came," in Hughes' words, and likewise in World War I, when modern machinery was turned against its inventors and its children. The dream destroyed itself; this also happened in Mexico. The Mexican Revolution succeeded in ousting elitist dictator Porfirio Díaz in favor of agrarian reform and more rights for the proletariat. Unfortunately, however, in the 1920s, while trying to put together a new government, the former rebels, now political bosses, fought for power amongst themselves and the Revolution became corrupt. In the process, the ideals of the Revolution became secondary concerns to the officials, even though the *pueblo* still

103 Luis Leal, *Panorama de la literatura mexicana actual* (Washington, DC: Unión Panamericana, Secretaría General de la OEA, 1968) 41-42.

marched for labor unions and equal rights. This is the atmosphere that produced Maples Arce's *Urbe*.

Maples recounts in *Soberana Juventud* the violent political situation in Mexico City during the 1920s:

La vida del México de aquellos años se encontraba tensa de dificultades y de potenciales estallidos militares. Después de cada elección presidencial sólo había una pausa, relativamente breve, de tranquilidad pública, y volvían otra vez a agitarse los círculos políticos y los elementos militares a pretender conquistar el Poder. Esto daba origen a horas de inquietud, de agitación parlamentaria y de violencia armada. De esta suerte, reinaba siempre un estado de angustia que impresionaba a todos los espíritus y que no dejaba de tener resonancias psicológicas en la vida de los jóvenes.¹⁰⁴

Maples Arce often attended sessions of the House of Representatives (Cámara de Diputados) to listen to the speeches—probably not uncommon for a law student—and on one such occasion a flurry of pistol shooting broke out among the arguing representatives. The shooting caused two deaths and many injuries while observers and politicians alike scattered for refuge. The poet comments, “Después me encaminé a pie hasta mi casa, pensando con amargura en el fracaso político de nuestra democracia y en la violencia que dominaba nuestras instituciones;” and later, “Yo seguía los acontecimientos en los diarios y con amigos de las más diversas orientaciones, y sentía la trágica realidad de nuestra historia.”¹⁰⁵ Several rebellions and violent skirmishes followed. The implications of this situation for Mexican society as a whole, especially with regard

104 Manuel Maples Arce, *Soberana Juventud* (Madrid: Editorial Plenitud, 1967) 144.

105 *Soberana Juventud* 145-146.

to the goals of the Revolution, became clearer to Maples Arce in a quasi-“revelation” he experienced while walking home and observing a May Day march. This revelation produced the poem *Urbe*.

Un primero de mayo, por la tarde, regresaba de Mixcoac a pie, pues no había servicio de transportes, totalmente paralizados por la manifestación obrera. El viento arremolinaba el polvo de las barriadas y grupos proletarios regresaban cargando sus pancartas y calicós con lemas reivindicadores y banderas rojas y negras. Oleadas de obreros vestidos de mezclilla se sucedían constantemente y se escuchaban vítores a sus líderes y confederaciones. No obstante la fatiga de la caminata, me interesaba ese movimiento de masas humanas. Sentía la impresión de lo que estaba pasando y la fiesta de los trabajadores llegaba como una apoteosis hasta mi corazón. Me parecía bello aquel desfile interminable bajo el sol deslustrado de la tarde. Mi espíritu, lleno de las inquietudes del instante, me sugería esas resonancias. Así, me fui pensando y soñando a través de la ciudad, integrado a la marcha gloriosa de los obreros. Las disensiones sindicales, las agitaciones políticas y las amenazas de la guerra civil se cernían sobre nuestros destinos. En la Cámara de Diputados, la razón de los discursos se trocaba sorpresivamente en un relámpago de pistolas. Los entorpecedores del progreso de México fanatizaban a grupos de militares y políticos para adueñarse del poder, los obreros desfilaron en manifestaciones de alerta, y por mi parte, miraba estos espectáculos y reflexionaba sobre las circunstancias y responsabilidades de los hombres que podrían influir en los destinos nacionales. Cuando llegué a mi casa, bajo las fuerzas estimulantes, me puse a escribir un canto en que latía la esperanza y la desesperación. Vi más claramente la necesidad de dar una intención estética a la Revolución, y en *Urbe* junté mi emoción íntima y el clamor del pueblo. Todos estos elementos, acompañados de mis reacciones emotivas,

Chapter Four: Poet in the Transitory World, *Poemas Interdictos*, 1927

Cantar.

Cantar.

Todo es desde arriba
equilibrado y superior.

Maples Arce

“Canción desde un aeroplano”

Art ... survives time and death... I shall make
life for both of us.

Michelangelo

Poemas Interdictos, including poems written from 1923 to 1927, was the most well-received by critics of Maples Arce's three *vanguardista* volumes. Its images are fresh, unusual, often very striking, and well developed in cohesive poems. They give the sense of a poet maturing in his craft. Luis Mario Schneider has called *Poemas Interdictos* “uno de los poemarios más relevantes de la vanguardia en castellano.”¹⁴⁹ It is in this volume that Maples Arce best illustrates the role of the poet in the world he has previously described to us—a world of impermanence and separation, as well as of dynamism and machines, seen in *Andamios Interiores* and *Urbe*. Now we see the protagonist out in the world, moving through it, acting upon it, rather than

149 Luis Mario Schneider, *El Estridentismo* 188.

quasi-passively observing it from his balcony. He has gone a step beyond the sympathetic solidarity with the masses of *Urbe* to the active role of modern man moving of his own will through his environment and, at the same time, to artisan moving toward new poetic heights. We have previously been presented with the basic union/separation, permanence/transitoriness problem (*Andamios*) and the world in which it exists (*Urbe*); *Poemas Interdictos* gives us the poet daring to exert his volition in order to overcome or outwit the problem in that world. The typical Maplesian vocabulary appears in this volume, expressing the usual problems, but now the poet works on one of the suggested possible courses of action (cf. Chapter Three) to solve the problem of time and impermanence: try to prolong the moment, to make it last as long as possible, to strive for timelessness through action and motion—endless dynamism.

The poems of *Poemas Interdictos* can be divided into three groups, the first being comprised of “Canción desde un aeroplano,” “T. S. H.” and “80 H. P.” These are principally concerned with modernity and take place in the city and its environs. They are the most Cubist of all of his poems. “Canción desde un aeroplano” is one of the happiest poems Maples wrote, and *Poemas Interdictos* perhaps the most positive of his books. The second group is composed of “Primavera” and “Puerto.” These two poems are set in seaports, and emphasize *Estridentópolis* as a place of contact with the rest of the world, an important dimension of communication. The third group contains “Revolución” and the poems of the subgroup titled “Poemas de la lejanía” (“Partida,” “Ruta,” “Paroxismo,” “Evocación” and “Saudade”). These usually take place in the coun-

tryside, where the protagonist is sad and lonely and misses the woman he loves. The point of view has changed somewhat: it seems that now, when goodbyes are said in the train station, it is he who is leaving (not she). He is on the train in the narrative present of many of the poems, and in others he is out in the countryside after having travelled some distance. In fact, in most of the poems of *Poemas Interdictos*, he is in the process of travelling, in motion across the land, in a train, automobile or airplane. Thus the idea of dynamism is paramount, and there is nationalism in the sense of identity with the land and specific places. The new sense of Mexican identity and connection with the land brought on by the Revolution is still present here, and is linked with the technological advances of the modern age. The trips range from afternoon jaunts out to local towns, with a feeling of adventure, to distant treks as a soldier of the Revolution. Still present are the ideas of union and separation, memories, nostalgia, insomnia, and the autumnal vocabulary, but now taken out into the open air, poet confronting his world. As stated at the beginning of “Canción desde un aeroplano,” he is in all of the poems of *Poemas Interdictos*, “a la intemperie de todas las estéticas.”

“CANCIÓN DESDE UN AEROPLANO”

Estoy a la intemperie
de todas las estéticas;
operador siniestro
de los grandes sistemas,
tengo las manos
llenas
de azules continentes.

Aquí, desde esta borda,
esperaré la caída de las hojas.
La aviación
anticipa sus despojos,
y un puñado de pájaros
defiende su memoria.

Canción
floreceda
de las rosas aéreas,
propulsión
entusiasta
de las hélices nuevas,
metáfora inefable despejada de alas.

Cantar.

Cantar.

Todo es desde arriba
equilibrado y superior,
y la vida
es el aplauso que resuena
en el hondo latido del avión.

Súbitamente
el corazón
voltea los panoramas inminentes;
todas las calles salen hacia la soledad de los horarios;
subversión
de las perspectivas evidentes;
looping the loop
en el trampolín romántico del cielo,
ejercicio moderno
en el ambiente ingenuo el poema;
la Naturaleza subiendo
el color del firmamento.

Al llegar te entregaré este viaje de sorpresas,
equilibrio perfecto de mi vuelo astronómico;
tú estarás esperándome en el manicomio de la tarde,
así, desvanecida de distancias,

Chapter Five: The Search for Permanence, *Memorial de la Sangre*, 1947

Fui a Egipto y sentí todo
el peso del tiempo.

Borges, Dickinson College
April 7, 1983

Ver en la muerte el sueño, en el ocaso
Un triste oro, tal es la poesía
Que es inmortal y pobre, la poesía
Vuelve como la aurora y el ocaso.
Borges, “Arte poética”

Memorial de la Sangre continues Maples Arce's search for permanence in the transitory world. This volume is the work of a mature poet (written over several years, 1927-47, published at age 47) who had, since the publication of his previous book of poetry, lived and worked in Europe and witnessed the Spanish Civil War and World War II. *Memorial de la Sangre* is no longer avant-garde or Cubist but instead philosophical, reflecting the prevailing thought of the times. The destruction-creation cycle we have seen in Maples Arce's earlier books becomes predominant in *Memorial de la Sangre* and is of key importance in the kind of permanence-amid-the-transitory that these poems discover. *Memorial de la Sangre* examines more universal

problems than the previous books (the personal situations of separation and transitoriness are expanded to societal dimensions), and this increased depth of thought causes a stylistic change in the poems. In *Memorial de la Sangre*, Maples Arce enters into mythical and existential concerns, questions of time, endurance, eternity, and memory; he confronts life and death and the idea of continuation into a future generation. At times in *Memorial*, he achieves poetic heights comparable to the mature work of Octavio Paz and T. S. Eliot, especially in his “Memorial de la sangre,” “Fundación del olvido,” “Elegía mediterránea,” “Cántico de liberación,” and “Elegía paterna.” Living in Europe during the Spanish Civil War and World War II and visiting Greece, Egypt and Italy affected the poet profoundly and, (parallel to the evolution of the century’s philosophy) together with his own maturation, those experiences account for the change in tone from the previous collections.

In *Memorial de la Sangre*, Maples Arce expands his preoccupation with time and the destruction/creation dichotomy (separation/union, absence/presence) to larger expanses of time and space, across whole periods of history, making connections between the New World and the Old World. There is a growing concern with destruction (separation, loss), and his fear of it, but the answers he finds in humankind’s creative power span generations. This volume has a very human quality and emotional intensity. The style is refined and controlled. The title poem, “Memorial de la sangre” was written on the occasion of the birth of Maples Arce’s first child, Manuel. Essence and identity persist and escape destruction through time by means of reproduction, re-creation. The poet’s son carries

on his essence, his identity. Blood is the life force, the creative force, the energy that is passed on from generation to generation. The poem, of course, is also the poet's child, his artistic creation.

"Cántico de liberación" is written in praise of this creative force, as it is manifested in art. "Fundación del olvido" looks for a persistence of human essence and identity similar to "Memorial de la sangre," but in entire races, across generations and centuries. Pyramids and ancient statues in marble and bronze contain something of the magic and mystery of the persistence of this essence through time. The protagonist says at the end of "Fundación del olvido": "¡Que el olvido descienda por las linfas del sueño! / Ya la creación imprime sus dedos en mi frente / y alzan su voz ardiente / de otras razas sonoras las sirenas, / y recitan mi vida, mi fábula, mi ausencia!"

"Elegía mediterránea" is a poem to the Mediterranean Sea, to Helen of Troy, perhaps in part also to Boticelli's Venus. The protagonist is becoming more preoccupied with "ausencia" and "olvido," but finds in great natural beauty and great works of art an essence that persists mysteriously even in material absence and remains unchanged by the years. He describes these works with the qualities of light, gold, bronze, marble, diamond. At the end of this elegy he says: "Oh! cuerpo incorpóreo sin mirada y sin eco, / soplo espantoso que propagas las fiebres inmortales / y levantas del polvo la multitud del olvido!"

The protagonist lives only by the energy he receives from these images of the creative, artistic force. At the end of "Cántico de liberación" he says of this force: "Oigo, oigo el furor astral de tu presencia, / tus labios persuasivos como un canto de bronce."

This secret power of metamorphosis from the world of time into that of timelessness within time is held by all of the subjects of the poems in *Memorial de la Sangre*. The poet writes in “Fundación del olvido,” “¿Qué espanto absoluto / brota de los anales de la piedra? / Potencias del silencio nos abisman / en el misterio de las metamorfosis. / Yo abro espacios de fuerza hacia la noche / donde se pierden las tribus del recuerdo / que persiguen los gritos famélicos del tiempo.” As a poet, Maples Arce searches for the key to solve the mystery of this metamorphosis through time, and with this key he hopes to save essence and identity from the seemingly omnipresent death and destruction (separation, absence). Again, the answer becomes both the poem itself and the power of art in general to transcend time and space.

The evolution of Maples Arce’s experience of the city as the place to achieve transcendence (earlier manifestations have been discussed in previous chapters) continues in *Memorial de la Sangre*. The reader travels with the protagonist to Mediterranean cities that were once capitals of great ancient civilizations, where marvels of art and architecture remain and are seen as elements of continuity with the past in which essence and identity remain across time, a union of epochs and minds. It is a logical progression and there are no inexplicable changes from Maples Arce’s avant-garde phase to the *Memorial de la Sangre* phase, contrary to what most critics have said. He moves from the immediate to wider spheres of time, in search of eternity. In the city and in art, Maples Arce “ha buscado y encontrado la posibilidad de ser.”¹⁷⁶

While Estridentismo as a movement has received the

176 Bonifaz Nuño, Estudio Preliminar, 30.

Chapter Six: Self-Portrait with Memories,

Poemas No-Coleccionados, 1919- 1980

Mirar el río hecho de tiempo y agua
Y recordar que el tiempo es otro río,
Saber que nos perdemos como el río
Y que los rostros pasan como el agua.
Borges, “Arte Poética”

Step by step you go into the darkness.
The movement is the only truth.
Ingmar Bergman, *The Magician*

Placed at the end of *Las semillas del tiempo* are fifty poems, grouped by theme, that were not previously published in book form (some had appeared individually in periodicals). These heretofore uncollected poems span Maples Arce's career, but the majority of them were written in his later years and constitute an examination of the poet's life, a self-portrait through poems dedicated to his friends, his loves, his favorite works of art and literature, places he admired, and his treasured Tuxpan River. Because of the length and the lack of a total cohesion of the assortment, this chapter will discuss only those poems (some from each of the seven groups) that relate directly to the themes of this study: Maples Arce's contemplation

of the transitoriness of life, his search for union, permanence, and timelessness through time. Thus we will see how these preoccupations progress in the years after *Memorial de la Sangre*, and on through his final years, when the nature of death becomes the dominant question.

Included in the first group, called “Personas y retratos,” is “Elegía a Ignacio Millán,” a lengthy poem dominated by fourteen-syllable lines and having the feel of prose. Maples Arce relates his friendship with Millán from adolescence through adulthood, speaks of Millán’s character and his concerns, and of the poet’s sadness at the passing of his friend. They were kindred spirits from youth; “ahondábamos nosotros en el ser y lo eterno.” Contemplating the loss of his friend, the poet feels both anxiety over the finality of death and anguish over the absence of Millán. Death took this good man away unfairly and the poet wants him back.

Lector ¿alguna vez tuviste tú un amigo?
 ¿Conociste, por gracia, la amistad verdadera?
 ¿No es acaso una estrella, una alta esperanza,
 una fuerza tangible que tiene nuestra barca
 confiada contra el viento que azota la ribera?
 Millán tendía su brazo, su corazón verídico
 en generosa ayuda, pero falta de pronto,
 la obscuridad le cubre los ojos para siempre,
 y nos hunde en la noche de un tiempo desvalido.
 ¡Ay! mi llanto
 corre por el silencio que esconden las ciudades.
 Regrésame su sombra, aunque esté más oscuro
 que el mismísimo Fausto ¡él tan claro!
 y permite que venga
 a respirar conmigo el aire del poema. (p. 106)

The poet recalls similar mourning in all of tragic literature, and senses that Millán’s spirit has gone into that

realm, called by *las sirenas*, as the ocean waves repeat Millán's name. Maples tells himself that at least now Millán has no troubles, is not suffering. But the poet suffers—"tú ya no tienes penas, ni yo tengo sosiego." He closes the elegy wishing his friend tranquil sleep, and concludes, "La vida es lo que huye, y su furor, la nada." The fear of *la nada* becomes increasingly present in the later poems.

"Estrofas para un amigo" is a group of eleven poems dedicated to Germán List Arzubide on his eightieth birthday. Though they are a birthday felicitation, the poems contain some rather brazen criticisms (that only a true friend and confidant would be allowed to make) of List Arzubide, and imply the need for greater modesty and truth-telling. At the same time, they examine the nature of the two men's friendship over the many years, and promise eternal faithfulness, "ser amigo sin fin." Some things the poet criticizes are his friend's penchant for self-aggrandizement, stretching the truth, womanizing, generalizing, frivolity, and radical political views. Maples also defends himself (in "Confrontaciones") against some earlier attacks from List, asserting that his (Maples Arce's) only masters or teachers are "Don Quijote, Hamlet y el Mago Simón" (p. 108).

To a certain extent, List Arzubide is a metaphor for Mexico or the Mexican man in the criticisms raised by Maples Arce in "Estrofas para un amigo." This metaphor brings the poems out of a personal realm into art and social commentary. Examples of this are found in "Encuentros" ("caíste en la quimera de creerte Don Juan," "Tú esperabas entonces que alzarán el telón: / el aplauso y el público fueron tu perdición"); "La máscara" (where the poet talks about the *máscara*—a false, protective façade—and also crit-

icizes the 1968 murder of students at the Tlatelolco protest against government spending for the Olympic Games); “Interrogaciones” (mentioning people and events in Mexico’s history; corruption and indifference); “El vals del peyote” (in which he warns against *sueño*, *espejismos*, *engaño*, *un arsénico dulce*—as in the effects of peyote—and speaks of the false image Mexico puts on publicly: it isn’t the truth); and “Destellos” (“¡Que el mundo de la mentira y la farsa haga crac!;” “¡Desastre mexicano! ¡Diana de la victoria!”). Many of the poems of this series talk about false appearances, false promises, corrupt behavior, false self-importance, lying, exaggeration—not only as personal character flaws of Maples’ friend List Arzubide, but problems of Mexico as a country.

In the poems of “Estrofas para un amigo,” the poet works with fixed rhyme schemes quite often; they seem a bit forced or self-conscious at times, though not always. As in the other sections of “Personas y retratos,” “Estrofas para un amigo” demonstrates what being a true friend meant to Maples Arce, and who his real friends were. The eleven poems of the series can be briefly summarized as follows: 1) “La Plaza Dorada,” a sonnet, serves as an introduction to the group, especially in lines 4, 9, 10 and 11: “el tiempo y la historia están frente a mí;” “Tengo pocos amigos, la mayor parte han muerto, / estoy casi solo como el desierto, / y resuena en mi pecho un lejano fragor.” 2) “Confrontaciones” is an attack against List Arzubide’s / Mexico’s weaknesses, and a defense of himself. 3) “Encuentros” contains advice and criticism, and mentions another friend of Maples and List, Germán Cueto. 4) “La Máscara” asks for a confession of List Arzubide’s true self (“Sácate la verdad de lo más entrañado. / Confiesa ante tu

amigo”). The poem tells about the time when Germán List Arzubide and Leopoldo Méndez showed up at the Maples Arce’s mother tended their wounds. It ends saying that the quashing of demonstrations back in those days was relatively tame, far from the violence with which the army countered the 1968 protest at Tlatelolco (students protested the use of excessive government monies to host the Olympic Games rather than to care for the poor, hungry and homeless in Mexico), causing it to be viewed as an international tragedy. 5) “El País de la U” refers to List Arzubide’s trip to the USSR—“a Moscú saludaste”—combined with another jab at his *donjuanismo* (“Ser Don Juan es tu tic”). 6) “Interrogaciones” finds the poet asking, from his residence in Europe, if things are still the same back in Mexico, or if they have changed. 7) “El vals del peyote” warns List Arzubide and Mexico against false promises, illusions, mirages, says to heed the old idea that “las apariencias engañan.” The poet refers to Mexico’s economic problems, false appearances, chimeras; he says you can’t always believe what you see on the surface. He advises belief, however, in the lessons of Don Quijote and Sancho. 8) “Alarma” speaks to the threat of nuclear war. 9) “Bifurcación” discusses going to heaven versus going to hell, and how one should live life. 10) “Ars Poética” talks of literary preferences and the value of poetry. 11) “Destellos” affirms and promotes youth, says down with the old ways, down with falseness; it contains an element of nostalgia, and says to live life to the fullest while you can. This poem is a final tribute to List Arzubide, just as he is, good points and bad points, his best quality being “ser amigo sin fin.” This poem ends the series.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion, The Seeds of Time

Ver en el río o en el año un símbolo
De los días del hombre y de sus años,
Convertir el ultraje de los años
En una música, un rumor y un símbolo.
Borges, “Arte Poética”

To me, literature is a calling, even a
kind of salvation. It connects me with
an enterprise that is over 2,000 years
old. What do we have from the past?
Art and thought. That’s what lasts.

Susan Sontag
New York Times Magazine
August 2, 1992

What we have seen in “A Hamlet” and the other poems of Chapter Six –the protagonist pondering his own life versus death, his own mortality– is the ultimate and most personal extension of the destruction/creation dichotomy and the search for union and permanence. The connections made with nature, time, myth and the river make the concentric circles of the destruction-creation cycle grow ever wider, while at the same time anchoring in the most basic and essential elements of life. Like Hamlet’s endless questioning, “To be or not to be,” Maples Arce’s career as a poet is a continual questioning of the essence of both life

and art. Maples Arce was not only the *estridentista* poet of the 1920s, but also the man who continued writing poetry that grew and evolved for more than fifty years after the *estridentistas* broke up. He insisted on the poet's right, indeed duty, to continue to progress, change, and evolve—like Hamlet, to continue questioning. Maples Arce's work matured as he did, in pace with the twentieth century.

The trajectory of Maples Arce's poetry, spanning more than sixty years, begins with *Estridentismo*'s manifestos and innovative, rebellious experimentation combined with art as a "happening." *Andamios Interiores* presents the themes of separation vs. union, destruction vs. creation, and transitoriness vs. permanence, which continue to dominate all subsequent volumes of Maples Arce's poetry. These themes are seen in *Urbe* as Maples Arce considers the state of his country and the process of revolution. *Poemas Interdictos* continues the same themes as it examines dynamics and time-space relationships. *Memorial de la Sangre* goes deeper into the themes by exploring the essence of literature and art and meditating on the course of life from birth to death. Still considering these dichotomies, the *Poemas No Coleccionados* recall memories of the poet's past (what his life has been) and ponder questions of mortality and the ominous presence of death in man's consciousness. Within these large themes, there is present a basic connection to the self, the individual. Maples Arce's work shows a preeminence of the sense of man's existence in the time and space context of the modern world, and a coetaneous dissociation from some ideal harmonious place and time. We have seen Maples Arce's poetic struggle to achieve union in order to overcome separation (space), and to find permanence in order to overcome transitoriness

(time). Structurally and philosophically, he finds in poetry a way to achieve harmony in a disharmonious situation. That desire for harmony, or continuance, relates again to Hamlet's question, "ser o no ser." In the chapters of this study, I have illustrated the concrete way that these abstract issues work in Maples Arce's poems.

Maples Arce's poetry progresses in maturity as follows, expressed in his own words:

Al vanguardismo emotivo, radical y psicológico de mi juventud, siguieron otras formas de expresión y de experiencia. Con el tiempo, mi poesía avanzó de una manera esencial y no puramente técnica. La duración existencial, el pulso de los días jugó en ella un papel primordial, imprimiéndole un movimiento de fuerza vital. No tiende ya a plasmar la fugacidad de los acontecimientos, sino a buscar la permanencia del ser en su total realidad: es el fruto de una diferente intencionalidad.

Por supuesto, la metáfora no desaparece, con su significado múltiple y sintética, pero el poema no reposa en ella exclusivamente. La continuidad temática es mayor, más apretada, más coherente y acaso deja pasar percepciones y sensaciones más complejas, y no únicamente por una cuestión de estilo, sino de la concepción misma de la poesía y del lenguaje que transmite algo profundo de mi subjetividad.²²³

As Maples Arce explains in the above quotation, there is a subtle switch in emphasis between his *estridentista* poems and those of *Memorial de la Sangre* and after. The later poems deal with the same issues as the early ones, but from a slightly different point of view. Instead of trying to illustrate and overcome the problem of transitoriness (as

223 Manuel Maples Arce, "¡Italia! ¡Italia!," *Plural* [special issue on *Estridentismo*] Segunda Época XI-III.123 (dic. 1981): 28. [From third volume of MMA autobiography, *Mi vida por el mundo*, Chapter Three, 72.]

did the early work), the later poems search for permanence. The two approaches are like opposite sides of the same coin. Maples Arce also notes that there is a change from more emphasis on style in the early volumes to more emphasis on theme and on the concept of poetry itself in the later work. So too, is life: youth is discovery, vivid experiencing of the here and now, self-expression and self-affirmation, identification of problems, facing conflict. Maturity has long been familiar with the problems, and speaks with the voice of wisdom and experience. Age sees life in a wider context, from a more ample perspective, and is able to delve more deeply into the heart of things, below the surface. Age ponders the meaning of life and the human expression of it. Age confronts the issue of death. This is a normal process of maturation, and is an entirely appropriate progression for a poet's work. This is how William Carlos Williams progressed from *Spring and All* to *Paterson*, how T. S. Eliot moved from *Prufrock* through *The Waste Land* and to the *Four Quartets*. Maples Arce's *obra completa* is a poematic symphony, each successive movement building on the themes of the previous one, variously weaving and intertwining motif and rhythm—in a style appropriate to its own stage in the process—as it grows and approaches its conclusion.

Throughout this study, I have illustrated the destruction-creation cycle in Maples Arce's poetry. In his poetry, we have seen how the traditional poetic image has been challenged, how the union of apparent opposites has created new, multi-dimensional images, and how the union of those elements has often overcome a contextual separation. (In this regard I have referred to Cubism, William Carlos Williams's use of imagination and Dadaist

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