



## STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (200)

TEXT: *The Seeds of Time: Poetry of Manuel Maples Arce, 1919–1980*

AUTHOR: Manuel Maples Arce EDITOR / TRANSLATOR: Diane J.

Forbes ISBN: 978-1-949938-17-3

### PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on Diane Forbes's introduction and notes)

#### A CENTURY-LONG LIFE IN POETRY AND HISTORY

##### *Life parallel to the century:*

Manuel Maples Arce was born on May 1, 1900, in Papantla, Veracruz—literally “with” the 20th century—and his life tracks its upheavals: Mexican Revolution, post-revolutionary politics, the avant-garde, diplomacy on four continents, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and late-life introspection. His biography encompasses law, government service, social justice activism, a distinguished diplomatic career, and an enduring devotion to literature and the arts.

##### *Memory and presence:*

The refrain “Remember me is what I ask” encapsulates a core tension in his work: remembrance vs. oblivion, presence vs. loss, continuation vs. cessation. Across decades his poems circle around separations and unions, life and death, creation and destruction—the “seeds of time” that carry both new beginnings and the certainty of loss. Early poems dramatize modernity’s brokenness and the longing to restore harmony; later work deepens this into existential and intimate concerns.

#### ESTRIDENTISMO: MODERNITY, NOISE, AND REVOLUTION

##### *From modernismo to avant-garde:*

Maples's early poems emerge from the atmosphere of modernismo (symbolist, musical, often late-Romantic), but by 1921 he and like-minded friends in Mexico City were determined to drag literature into the 20th century and connect it to the Mexican Revolution. His first avant-garde manifesto, **“Actual No. 1. Hoja de Vanguardia, Comprimido Estridentista de Manuel Maples Arce”**, posted on city walls in December 1921, was a deliberate provocation—“Chopin to the electric chair!”—calling for “actualismo” (Make it Now), a cult of the present moment comparable to Pound's “Make it new,” but insistently immediate.

##### *Estridentismo as movement:*

The scandal worked. Maples became the prime instigator of **Estridentismo**, soon joined by Arqueles Vela, Fermín Revueltas, Germán List Arzubide, Germán Cueto, Ramón Alva de la Canal, Leopoldo Méndez, Salvador Gallardo, and allied artists like Diego Rivera, Silvestre Revueltas, Fernando Leal, Jean Charlot. Estridentismo linked poetry, painting, music, photography, and political agitation, publishing in *Irradiador* and *Horizonte*, staging happenings, and collaborating with muralists. It brought the energy and contradictions of the Mexican Revolution into the arts, decisively breaking the hold of post-modernista taste and opening Mexican literature to experimentation.



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## THE POETIC TRAJECTORY: FROM CITY NOISE TO MEDITATIVE DEPTH

### *Early vanguard collections (1920s):*

**Andamios Interiores (1922)** – “radiographic poems” and “inner scaffolds”: A bridge between modernismo and the avant-garde. Poems present fractured, cubist “puzzles” of separation and union—especially the emblematic “Prisma,” in which reflections, memories, and city scenes assemble into a single complex image. Influenced by imagism and Cubism, these poems embody the Estridentista *imagen equivalentista*: joining disparate images to create a new third reality.

**Urbe (1924)** – “bolshevik poem in 5 cantos”: A hymn to the modern city and a critique of post-revolutionary Mexico’s political violence, workers’ struggles, and corruption. There are Whitmanesque affirmations of urban dynamism alongside bitter portrayals of congressional brawls and betrayed revolutionary ideals.

**Poemas Interdictos (1927)** – “forbidden poems”: Less sentimental, more outward, immersed in technology and public life: cars, radios (“T.S.H.” – *telefonía sin hilos*), airplanes (“Canción desde un aeroplano”), ports, and revolutionary combat. The poetic persona no longer merely observes but participates; the poems are steps from interior to exterior, from private to public modernity.

### *Mid-career and later work:*

**Memorial de la Sangre (1947)** – written across Europe and the Mediterranean: Reflects travels, ancient civilizations, great artworks, the Spanish Civil War, World War II (experienced in Italy and England), and philosophical questions about history and survival. Art and beauty appear as what endures against destruction; the generational life-force and creative force propel humanity through catastrophe. Longer, more thematically continuous poems display heightened technical sophistication and an “essential” deepening of purpose: beyond the fleeting present toward “the permanence of being in total reality.”

**Uncollected Poems (1947–1981)** – later sonnets and meditations: These poems revisit the Tuxpan River, friends, favorite places, and the vocation of poetry with a calm, wise tone reminiscent of older Neruda. They also confront mortality, especially in the Hamlet dialogues (“To be or not to be... Remember me is what I ask”) and elegies. Maples explores different metrical patterns (sonnets, 8/11/12-syllable lines) beyond his characteristic 7/14-syllable rhythms composed on afternoon walks.

## RECEPTION, CANON, AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

### *Why he is less known outside Mexico:*

Compared to some Latin American contemporaries (e.g., Vallejo, Huidobro, William Carlos Williams in the U.S.), Maples Arce published relatively few poetry volumes over a long life, devoting much energy to essays, cultural diffusion, and diplomacy. Political tensions (notably over his 1940 *Antología de la poesía mexicana moderna* and conflicts with the *Contemporáneos*) and long years abroad also muted his presence in Mexican public culture. Manuscript losses (a stolen suitcase in Colombia, 1952) further limited the canon.

### *Estridentismo's afterlives:*

His avant-garde work has periodically resurfaced, especially around anniversaries of Estridentismo, and is now increasingly taught and digitized (university courses,



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YouTube, online editions, museum exhibits). Yet outside Mexico, he remains largely unknown among Hispanists and almost invisible to Anglophone readers. Forbes argues that his stature—as a pioneering Mexican vanguardista and as a mature, philosophically rich poet—warrants comparison to figures like Vallejo, and that his full trajectory (not only the 1920s) deserves sustained critical attention.

## THE BILINGUAL EDITION AND TRANSLATION CHALLENGES

### *Goals of the bilingual project:*

*The Seeds of Time* gathers the complete poetic work 1919–1980, offering Spanish originals with facing English translations. For teaching, this format supports close reading, translation workshops, and comparative poetics, allowing students to see how Maples's images, syntax, and rhythms function in Spanish while following a guided English rendering.

### *Lexical and semantic intricacies:*

Forbes highlights several recurrent translation challenges:

“**Amarillo**” (yellow) with dual valence: bright, midday, life; and faded, autumnal, time-worn.

“**Estremecimiento**” (thrill/trembling) and “**deslumbramiento / deslumbre / traslumbre**” (dazzle vs. blinding glare) oscillating between positive and negative.

“**Espuma**” (foam, surf, whitecaps) carrying multiple registers beyond any single English term.

“**El olvido**” as both “forgetting” and a quasi-mythical “land of oblivion” that haunts the poet.

Ambiguous pronouns (“su”) and temporal markers (“la tarde”) which resist one-to-one English choices.

**Form vs. fidelity:** Maintaining syllable counts, rhyme, and intricate sound patterns is nearly impossible in English; the translations aim instead to preserve core meaning, emotional tone, and “semblance” of rhythm. Some poems, Forbes notes, stand on their own as English poems; others function more as reading aids. When forced to choose, she favors clarity and access over forced archaism or false equivalence, while respecting Maples's characteristic lineation whenever feasible.

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## PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

### *Estridentismo and the Mexican Avant-Garde*

How did Estridentismo differ from European avant-gardes (Futurism, Imagism, Dada, Surrealism)? In what ways did Maples Arce and his circle “bring the Mexican Revolution to the arts”? Consider the role of manifestos, performance, and collaboration with muralists.

### *Separation and Union: Modernity's Wound*

Early poems in *Andamios Interiores* dramatize separation vs. union (broken mirrors, scattered images that must be reassembled). How does this dynamic reflect larger “Modern problems” (fragmentation, loss of harmony)? Compare this to a poem from his later period: have the terms of the separation/union question changed?

### *The City, Technology, and Politics in Urbe & Poemas Interdictos*

Analyze how Maples Arce represents the modern city, technology (cars, radio, airplanes), and revolutionary politics. Is the modern city primarily a site of liberation, alienation, or both? How does his poetic voice position itself in relation to automobiles, airplanes, and broadcast media?

### *Memory, Oblivion, and the “Seeds of Time”*

In mid- and late-career poems (especially *Memorial de la Sangre* and the uncollected pieces), how do themes of memory and oblivion evolve? How do travel, war, and engagement with ancient art and history reshape his understanding of what “endures”? Discuss the contrast between early fascination with the “new” and later preoccupation with continuity and legacy.

### *Bilingual Reading: What Survives Translation?*

Choose one poem and compare Spanish original with its English translation. What aspects of Maples Arce’s style (image, rhythm, tone) carry over effectively? What is inevitably lost or altered? How do you, as readers, navigate choices around words like “amarillo,” “olvido,” “espuma,” and ambiguous pronouns?

### *Canon and Memory in Latin American Poetry*

Given Forbes’s argument that Maples Arce has been under-recognized compared to contemporaries like Vallejo or Huidobro, discuss how literary canons are formed. What roles do politics, geography, genre (poetry vs. prose), and translation play in who gets remembered and who is consigned to “el olvido”?

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## PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Andamios Interiores: poemas radiográficos*. México: Editorial Cultura, 1922.

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**Essays, criticism, memoirs**

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**PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)**

*What central thematic tension recurs throughout Maples Arce's work, from early to late poems?*

- A) Nature vs. technology
- B) Remembrance vs. oblivion, presence vs. loss
- C) City vs. countryside
- D) Poetry vs. prose

**Correct Answer: B**

*Estridentismo, as led by Maples Arce, can best be described as:*

- A) A nostalgic return to Romanticism
- B) A Mexican avant-garde movement linking poetry, visual arts, and revolutionary politics, aimed at "making it now"
- C) A purely academic, apolitical literary circle
- D) A regionalist, anti-modern rural movement

**Correct Answer: B**

*Which early collection is described as a bridge between modernismo and the avant-garde, using cubist "puzzle" techniques and interior imagery?*

- A) *Memorial de la Sangre*
- B) *Urbe*
- C) *Poemas Interdictos*
- D) *Andamios Interiores*

**Correct Answer: D**

*In Urbe, Maples Arce's attitude toward the modern city is best characterized as:*

- A) Unambiguously negative and anti-urban
- B) Completely indifferent
- C) Ambivalent, combining admiration for dynamism with anxiety over political violence and corruption
- D) Focused only on romantic love, ignoring politics

**Correct Answer: C**

*According to the editor, one major challenge in translating Maples Arce into English is:*

- A) The absence of any clear images in his poetry
- B) His use of extremely simple vocabulary
- C) The nuanced semantic range of key terms (e.g., "amarillo," "estremecimiento," "olvido") and the structural role of rhythm and lineation
- D) The lack of any historical or cultural references

**Correct Answer: C\*\***

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