

# JOSE GALLARDO'S SHORT STORIES AS "SOCIALLY SYMBOLIC ACTS"

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses two short stories by Jose Gallardo, a Kapampangan writer who survived World War II. "Sumpa ning Poeta" and "Bale Tisa" are analyzed as "socially symbolic acts" illustrating experiences of social and economic marginality. Through his literary engagement Gallardo gave voice to the marginalized sector of his society and, at the same time, harnessed his intense personal desire to promote Kapampangan literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Jose Gallardo; Kapampangan; socially symbolic acts; poverty

From a sociological point of view, literary creations are socio-historical products shaped by the relations between authors and their societies. Writers' expression of even their private thoughts and experiences cannot be dissociated from social praxis. In turn, to the extent that writers are able to analyze, objectify, and articulate the realities and conditions of their particular societies and the perceptions, feelings, and values of the people in these communities, literary works have what Lucien Goldmann calls "social character."<sup>1</sup> Possessing such, literary works can become instruments in social analysis.

Correlative to the social nature of literary works is their inherent political dynamics. Terry Eagleton mentions that literature "is vitally engaged with the

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<sup>1</sup>Lucien Goldmann, *Essays on Method in the Sociology of Literature* (St. Louis, Mo.: Telos Press, 1980), 9.

living situations of men and women.”<sup>2</sup> It may be stressed that literary works adapt themselves to life’s situations and societies’ problems, and writing has the power to challenge, influence, and transform as it communicates directly or indirectly an explicit conviction that can have an impact on the reader/public. It is along such assumptions that this study is framed. Literature is a socially symbolic act, a projection of social desires. Furthermore, literature is produced by writers who are part of social groups from which they cannot escape—an affinity that cannot but make them seek the survival of their societies.

To be presented as a case is Kapampangan poet Jose Gallardo (1918–87), whose works are symptomatic of the social desires of the writers of his generation. In particular, two of his short stories, namely, “Sumpa ning Poeta” and “Bale Tisa,” could provide insights into his struggles as a writer in relation to the socio-economic realities of Pampanga in the years after the War. His case is a classic description of the relation of art to social reality. He was quite aware of the fact that even the domain of literature was somehow dominated by the forces of economic or social control. Significantly enough, his own unresolved struggles and insinuations of dissent are enacted in the house of his art.

Gallardo’s works may be unmasked as “socially symbolic acts” illustrating experiences of social and economic marginality. To analyze Gallardo’s literary works, specifically two samples of his short stories, as “socially symbolic acts,” presupposes the elucidation of significant features of their content primarily to demonstrate relations between their assumed fictional world and the socio-political realities in which they were created. In other words, from specific elements and details of the short stories, one infers the socio-political values that govern the settings, the characters who make up the fictional world, and the conflicts that result in crises. All these elements may represent what could be the writer’s real world—with its living characters and social problems. The resemblance is a mark of consideration in understanding and sympathizing with the writer’s social desire. Further, the texts are not external to Gallardo’s society; thus, their interpretation may be correlated to the conditions of their production—that will include the socio-economic circumstances out of which they were generated—and to the writer’s cognitive resources. Insights may be drawn relative to what they could contribute to what Eagleton calls the “strategic goal of human emancipation.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), 196.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 211.

First, an overall background of the creation of Gallardo's works establishes their significant organic relations with the socio-economic system characterizing the historical period of their production.

## CONTEMPORARY KAPAMPANGAN LITERATURE: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The turbulent years between the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines and the 1960s practically sent Kapampangan literature into oblivion as the writers languished amid economic hardship and social instability. Like other Filipinos, they suffered many difficulties during and after World War II, and the desire to write was almost extinguished.

After the war, disappointments greeted the poets who survived it. Their shattering experiences prevented them from engaging in any literary production. They could only recall the critical condition of Kapampangan literature during the Japanese regime. In interviews with Evangelina Lacson, a close friend of Kapampangan poet laureate Amado Yuzon and a well-known Kapampangan literary historian, she explained how the Occupation was to the detriment of Kapampangan literature.<sup>4</sup> For one thing, the Japanese stopped the performance of zarzuelas and *crissotans* (versified verbal jousts) because they did not understand the language. For another, some of the poets who joined the guerrilla group Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People's Anti-Japanese Army) or HUKBALAHAP were killed by the Japanese. Worst of all, many poets lost their written works. Only Amado Yuzon, according to Lacson, was able to keep his, but he, too, did not produce any new work during that period.

When the war ceased in 1945, the HUKBALAHAP continued their fight, this time against the Americans and, later, against the Republic for some two decades. Thus, Pampanga remained in turmoil, with many residents adversely affected either by open fighting or by espionage activities, while the rest of the country was already relatively at peace.<sup>5</sup> In the 1950s, Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay started a crusade to attract the Huks to surrendering.

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<sup>4</sup>Evangelina Lacson, interview by the author, February 12–13, 2000, Magalang, Pampanga.

<sup>5</sup>See John Larkin, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1993), 311–12; Eduardo Lachica, *Huk: Philippine Agrarian Society in Revolt* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1971), 121.

It is common knowledge among Kapampangan poets that poets acted as propagandists for the government and became the medium that Magsaysay used to propagate his message of hope and reconciliation.<sup>6</sup> When Magsaysay died in a plane crash, the HUKBALAHAP evolved into HMB or Hukbong Mapagpalayang Bayan (People's Liberation Army) and became even more revolutionary. Pockets of rebel groups then organized themselves and fought the military. The contending forces made life in Pampanga very difficult.

Such was the grim picture of the province before the 1960s. For a long time, its literature was not exempt from the affliction. The socio-economic instability experienced by many, including the poets, could have served as “raw material” for fiction, but it became a psychological block instead. Poverty with all its virulent consequences made them materialistic. Thus, even their creative production was a matter of survival. Unlike their predecessors who were able to keep the torch of culture burning in their writings—easily because most of them were educated and belonged to the social elite (e.g., Crisostomo Soto and Aurelio Tolentino were educated; Monico Mercado and Zoilo Hilario were wealthy politicians; Amado Yuzon, Belarmino Navarro were poet-lawyers), these postwar writers were bound to struggle for their sheer existence. Many of them did not have the chance to enjoy the kind of education that the early writers had. Those who did either joined the government service or the leftist movement. In both cases, the passion for writing dwindled or simply found its expression in the secluded world of alienated ideology.

The need to earn a living was therefore the main preoccupation of most writers. Even the exercise of their talent was likely to be conditioned on monetary returns, as Lacson recounts:

To enjoy himself the poet has need for cash. From the mid-1960s, when a social affair had to be organized in the community where a poet would crown the queen, the best poet—who was often penniless—was approached to compose the coronation poem, which he would himself declaim on coronation night. Understandably, the organizer usually included in his budget a few hundred pesos for the poet.<sup>7</sup>

Writers hardly wrote unless an incentive was offered. Except for the few with stable jobs, many did not write on their initiative. A “*tegawan*” (sponsor), usually rich and prominent people like Don Gil J. Puyat, a businessman

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<sup>6</sup>Lacson, interview.

<sup>7</sup>Evelina Lacson, *Kapampangan Writing: A Selected Compendium and Critique* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1984), 238.

and a former senator, or Estelito Mendoza, former Pampanga Governor and Solicitor General, was needed for them to exercise their gift; or literary contests with cash prizes had to be held to encourage them to contribute by means of their literary works to the preservation and enhancement of their withering culture.

With their scanty education and lack of motivation, post-war writers are perceived by a number of scholars to be partly the cause of the bleak future of Pampango literature. Explaining the possible causes of the retrogression of Kapampangan drama, for instance, Edna Zapanta-Manlapaz agrees with Ely Javillonar, who studied the Kapampangan zarzuela, that a kind of "literary chauvinism" was the cause of the decline. Javillonar declared:

[Today's zarzuelas] are written by people who have no knowledge, no acquaintance even, with the techniques of playwriting, much less with the rules of legitimate drama; people who pride themselves in never reading others' plays, especially non-Capampangans.<sup>8</sup>

The writers' lack of apparent vitality and limited development could be attributed to their circumscribed regional existence, a kind of seclusion that prefigured the literary crisis. While writers in the other regions of the country had already been given opportunities to enhance their creative genius through workshops and other forms of training, post-war Kapampangan writers were hardly exposed to new literary concepts because of lack of support or interest among their possible sponsors, such as the local government or educational institutions. They were also unable to integrate themselves with the mainstream of national literature; they failed to relate their art to the prevailing issues of their time. Romantic love was still the usual subject matter and its treatment remained traditional. The tired features were the "vows of undying love exchanged, pangs of unrequited love suffered, and acts of infidelity punished."<sup>9</sup> The didactic elements espoused by early writers such as Crisostomo Soto and Aurelio Tolentino were also common and were treated in almost exactly the same way that the earlier writers had done. Crisostomo Soto's ethic-aesthetic tradition homogenized the works of later writers such as Roman Reyes, Isaac Gomez, and Jose Gallardo, among others. That Kapampangan writing had not undergone any significant modernization and writers refused to open up to new concepts and new modes in writing,

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<sup>8</sup>Quoted by Edna Zapanta-Manlapaz, *Kapampangan Literature: A Historical Survey and Anthology* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1981), 27.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 51.

as Zapanta-Manlapaz observes, prevented the literature from passing a pioneering stage to a stage of maturation.<sup>10</sup> In the case of fiction, Zapanta-Manlapaz opines that “the absence of . . . a school of writers . . . has probably been responsible for the arrested development of Kapampangan fiction. . . . Even more alarming is the possibility that the present generation of fiction writers may not even be replaced by a new.”<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, although they were conscious of their distinct linguistic identity, Kapampangan writers began to experience the weak resistance of their own fellow Kapampangans to the encroachment of Filipino and English language/literature. As a result, assimilation became inevitable, and their language was prone to eradication instead of cultivation. Since members of the Kapampangan literati were drawn to English and Filipino, writers had no one to turn to in terms of their endeavor. Though they were able to organize themselves into a writers’ league called *Aguman ding Talasulat Kapampangan* or AGTAKA, their literary activities were short-lived because of lack of funds.<sup>12</sup>

## POVERTY AND POETRY

It was against this context that Gallardo wrote. He was among the postwar poets who suffered from economic deprivation. The war and its aftermath, however, were simply a concomitant exacerbation of his already impoverished origins. He was born and raised in rural Candaba, Pampanga, where he was introduced to the Kapampangan literary world as a prompter (*apuntador*) of his father’s *moro-moro* and as a participant in *bulaklakan* (verbal jousts during wakes) in the 1930s. Coming from a poor family, he hardly had formal education; yet he demonstrated poetic talent, which he nurtured until he became a very prolific writer. His artistic development was influenced by known Kapampangan writers Isaac Gomez and Roman Reyes. With his given milieu, Gallardo was exposed not only to Kapampangan literary forms but also to the precarious world of literary people, including his father’s, because of poverty. Yet Gallardo found writing an irresistible vocation—a kind of mission that he sustained until his death.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 46.

During the Japanese occupation, Gallardo was the poet of the HUKBALAHAP. He wrote songs to inspire nationalistic sentiments.<sup>13</sup> After the war, Kapampangan writers, including Gallardo, suffered even more financially. He stayed in a slum area in Angeles City where he continued to write and to champion Kapampangan language and literature despite his lack of resources. Amid the darkened sphere of literary creation resulting from the war's devastation, he kept his eyes fixed on his self-imposed mission to propagate Kapampangan literature.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1960s, a brief revival of Kapampangan writing called "Balik Paraiso" created a flicker of hope in the languishing state of Kapampangan literature. According to Lacson, after the war, supporters of the art, like the heirs of Don Gonzalo Puyat and Monico Mercado, sponsored contests.<sup>15</sup> Besides producing written pieces, Gallardo, together with other writers, had a radio program featuring poetry reading and *crissotan*. There was also the establishment of Aguman ding Talasula Kapampangan (AGTAKA). But the "happy note for Pampango literature," as Icban-Castro puts it,<sup>16</sup> was not sustained because literary production had only marginal significance, given the writers' basic subsistence problem.

Gallardo actively sought venues for literary projects that directly or indirectly aimed to unsettle what he and the other writers experienced as inequitable social order. He published extensively in various Kapampangan newspapers and magazines. For instance, besides editing the two-page spread print works by old and new Kapampangan poets in "Ing Siwala" (The Voice),<sup>17</sup> he had a column featuring a dictionary-like listing of Kapampangan words to encourage readers to learn the language. His group AGTAKA sponsored several literary contests and staged *crissotans*, both live and on the air and put out *Ing Sala* (The Light), an anthology of poems in two volumes.<sup>18</sup> He also wrote poems such as "Bangungut" ("Nightmare") to warn his fellow Kapampangans of the possible loss of their language and literature and to challenge the government to support his advocacy. Behind these endeavors was the realization that many Kapampangan writers were living below decent levels. Rosalina Icban-Castro writes, "The main preoccupation of writers

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<sup>13</sup>See "Beteranos" (Veterans), cited by Lacson, *Kapampangan Writing*, 235; "Ing Pamana" (The Legacy), cited by Zapanta-Manlapaz, 46.

<sup>14</sup>Lacson, interview.

<sup>15</sup>Lacson, *Kapampangan Writing*, 243.

<sup>16</sup>Rosalinda Icban-Castro, *Literature of the Pampangos* (Manila: Vera-Reyes Inc., 1981), 11.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

[after the war] was to rehabilitate themselves as heads of families or as wage earners.”<sup>19</sup> Zoilo Hilario confirms the socio-economic gap between generations of writers: “The early writers were men of wealthier background and better education than their counterparts today.”<sup>20</sup>

Gallardo employed his writing as an instrument for correcting the problematic condition. Holding up his literary pieces as a “mirror,” he created a platform on which he erected a level of consciousness that might be linked particularly to his society’s problems. On the whole, if viewed sociologically, his literary pieces may be related to his society in general, the class relationships making up this society, and the forces impinging upon his socio-cultural milieu. In his poetry, the various personae are essentially expressing his own struggles and challenges. His fiction depicts the distressing, impoverished conditions of characters whose crises bring to light certain social realities in his time.

### GALLARDO’S TWO STORIES: A CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

His short story “Sumpa ning Poeta” (A Poet’s Oath) was written in 1963 (most probably in Angeles City) and published in *Bayung Diwa*.<sup>21</sup> It is about Carding, a poet who is popular at coronations of fiesta queens. He enjoys applause and recognition from his audience. He spends most of his time writing, so that he neglects his family. He comes home from a fiesta and finds his child seriously ill. Having no money to spend for the child’s medication, Carding becomes remorseful, blaming himself for the death of the boy. Carding, in the end, puts down his pen and picks up a plow:

“The poet is alive, and his life has to be sustained . . . There is no sustenance in Poetry. I will no longer write . . . I will never declaim, now that people do not care about the material aspect of the life of a poet. I will have to work. I will replace my pen with a plow, a harrow, a spade or whatever will help me support my family. And whoever among my children will aspire to be a poet, I will curse his future.”

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>20</sup>Zoilo Hilario, interview by Ely Javillonar, cited by Zapanta-Manlapaz, 27.

<sup>21</sup>Lourdes H. Vidal, introduction to *Maikling Kuwentong Kapampangan at Pangasinan*, ed. and trans. Lourdes H. Vidal and Ma. Crisanta S. Nelmida (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996), 28.



Such was Carding's reason for hating to be called a poet. He no longer wants to stare at the winking stars or the smiling moon. He does not talk to the flowers anymore. He no longer comforts the weeping midnight. He is now in the rice field. His pen is his plow, and his paper is the wide field, and his stage is the mounds. The reeds are his audience, clapping as they watch him work.<sup>22</sup>

The short story puts forward multiple issues; the central one seems to be the place of poetry itself. First, there is Carding's moral and intellectual dilemma, which appears like Gallardo's own reverie but regarded with aesthetic distance. The third person point of view directly portrays the psychology of the character so that the latter's motivation and resolution may be viewed impartially. Thus, despite the sympathetic tone of the narration relative to Carding's struggle, his characterization as an egocentric and irresponsible father/husband is sarcastically presented. He neglects his family responsibilities and passes all the chores to his wife. Everyday, he does nothing but compose poems, memorize, and practice reciting them. He shouts at his children for disturbing him. He even orders his wife to borrow from their neighbors a "barong Tagalog," which he needs for the coronation day, and money for his transportation fare and for the polishing of his borrowed shoes.

Inflating Carding's ego even more is the listening community who derives pleasure from his poetry and praises him but does not compensate him financially for his performance. Gallardo apparently raises this problem and brings home the point regarding the binary opposition between art and

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<sup>22</sup>Jose Gallardo, "Sumpa ning Poeta," in *Maikling Kuwentong Kapampangan*, 179. English translation by Mallari. The original Kapampangan text is as follows (178):

"Ing poeta atin yang bie, at ing bie iyan mangailangan yang cabiayan . . . qng Poesia, alang cabiayan. E na cu sumulat . . . e na cu migale, cabang e ra dirinan ulaga ring calupang tau ing dake na qng cabiayan ning metung a poeta. Manintunan na cu. Ing paniulat, alilan keng sarul, picu, pala o nanu mang maliaring macapalto qng kekeng cabiayan at macasaguiq qng bie ra ring cacung pamilya. At ninu man caring anac cu ing magnasang maguing poeta, isumpa cu ing paintungulan na."

Macainan na neng e buiring darandaman Carding ing taguring poeta. E no buiring lalon kikindat ding batuin . . . E na ne pagumasdan titiman ing bulan. E na no pakisabian ding bulaclac. E na ne daramayan ing magulang capitangan bengi. Atiu ngeni keta qng marangle. Ing pluma na, sarul ya at ing keang papil ya ing malualas a asican, at ding pilapil ilang keang entabladu. Ing talahib ya ing talapanalbe papalacpac qng daraptan na.

The Tagalog translation by Vidal is on 179.

money implicit in Carding's and the listening community's behavior. Carding simply delights in poetry and in compliments. He finds fulfillment in his world of creation, including the joy of being acknowledged as an excellent *deklamador* (declaimer), but his devotion to poetry is also a burden of poverty, causing his family to suffer and his child to die. It is perhaps significant that his child dies on the same night that he receives the loudest ovation: the exercise of his talent was his ultimate fulfillment but, at the same time, his worst frustration. Gallardo suggests the impracticality of romantic and purely personal passion for poetry. The resolution of the story, filtered through the narrator, describes the pathetic attempt of Carding, the poet, to release his hold on the very essence of his being; he yields to the ethical pressure of replacing his imagination with a practical occupation. The writer has to pay dearly (in a figurative manner) for giving up his writing, the source of his vanity, to release himself and his family from poverty. There is no hint in the story that he is happier as a farmer.

The anguish, disillusionment, and pessimism are reflective of postwar Kapampangan literature on the brink of gloomy dissolution, as most Kapampangan poets' struggle was no different from Carding's. Writers' "starving career" then was heading towards a desperate state of emergency. Significantly enough, "Sumpa ning Poeta" uncovers such inequitable social order and presses home the harm it causes to this group of individuals.

Viewed against Gallardo's life, Carding's life is a contrast. As already described, Gallardo's historical context saw that power was concentrated in a few elite groups of Pampanga. Since many writers like him did not belong to such domain, they became subject to the control exercised by these dominant sectors which, more often than not, had self-serving interests. Being the dominated group, writers during Gallardo's time were usually manipulated: their talents were recognized as useful resources in the maintenance of power and the status quo. But this exploitation became mutual as the poets' subservience had a clandestine motive. The writers' counter-manipulation took the form of milking the economic resources of their exploiters to sustain a living and to keep Kapampangan literature alive. Gallardo was no exception. Implied in the story's conclusion is the idea that poetry could be a commodity—which Carding never considered but which Gallardo accepted.

Gallardo sought patronage every now and then, despite the dwindling public demand for Kapampangan literature. Estelito Mendoza was his regular patron during the stint of the former as governor of Pampanga. Literary contests were then held, and Gallardo was a consistent winner. Don Monico Mercado

and Don Gonzalo Puyat memorial awards were among those that sponsored contests.<sup>23</sup> The burst of Gallardo's poetic energy owed much to Pampanga's election periods. His acquaintance with political figures (Puyat, Mendoza, and local officials) enabled him to publish his works such as *Diwa* (1982), an anthology of his poems, his versified novels, and zarzuelas. He adapted his literary talent to the campaign strategies of politicians—a common practice among contemporary Kapampangan poets observed during elections in the province—and perpetuated the apparent dependence of literary production on such patronage. For instance, he was a favorite *deklamador* during political campaigns as his *kapusungan* (versified jokes) drew crowds. Common activities sponsored by politicians during election periods such as crowning of festival/barrio queens, *crissotans* and radio programs would have him as the leading poet. Like the poets for hire described by Lacson, Gallardo took on the role of entertaining voters. Gallardo wove the usual versified praises for festival beauty queens in exchange for money. He wrote poems and fiction for literary contests—again sponsored by politicians—to earn a living.

In other words, his life as a poet was made subservient to the political trends in Pampanga; his literary activities had to fit into the aforementioned propaganda patterns of his patrons. In fact, his talent was one of the valued resources of politicians whose main agenda was to win the votes of the masses—the poet's primary audience. This idea is implied in "Sumpa ning Poeta," particularly when Carding is applauded by a huge number of people in a fiesta queen coronation, usually the same audience at political gatherings.

Ironically, in the long run, Gallardo's reliance on the political power play in Pampanga marginalized all the more his literary endeavors and, for that matter, his role as a verbal artist. Politicians and other patrons would support only literary activities advancing their interests, particularly those that catered to the masses/electorate. Thus Gallardo and other writers were forced to keep churning out the same kind of poems and stories. Even if he was able to continually retrieve certain Kapampangan literary residue, to the extent that he perpetuated the traditional forms such as formulaic versification, predictable plots, didactic and romantic elements, he failed to transcend the limitations imposed by his socio-political milieu relative to artistic creation. The prevailing condition in his time was essentially inimical to the dynamic development of literary creation—a kind of silent repression resulting in the crisis that has been felt for decades now.

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<sup>23</sup>Zapanta-Manlapaz, 46.

Gallardo's literary hands were tied, so to speak, and self-expression was not really encouraged. Furthermore, being needy, Gallardo and other Kapampangan writers were faced with several temptations relative to their craft. According to a famous "Ari ning Parnasu" (King of Parnassus) who was also Poeta Laureado (Poet Laureate), a leading poet recognized by his peers and the community, it was an open secret among writers themselves that the more gifted ones, who were no longer qualified (as they were already hall of famers) to join literary contests, wrote literary pieces for the amateur contestants. The arrangement was done on condition that the monetary prizes for winning entries would go to the "ghost" writers while the "honor" (of being the winner) was to be bestowed on the striving amateurs. This type and practice of intellectual dishonesty was never taken seriously as wrong, the justification being "the writers' need to survive."<sup>24</sup>

Other than the utilitarian mode particularly of local politicians and the cultural indulgence of a few rich Kapampangans, who felt nostalgia for their language and roots, there was really no motivating factor for the writers to develop their craft and achieve maturity and technical competence. Gallardo had to yield to what Homi Bhabha calls the "incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival."<sup>25</sup>

Yet another angle to him is possible. Gallardo consciously conditioned himself to this given dismal reality and his inadequate education and constant lack of money did not deter him from pursuing his literary endeavors. Although he was aware of his having to go through the dark corridors of his writing career, he did not allow his spirit to completely falter. But such apparent complicity did not mean betraying his social conscience and failing to demonstrate his feeling regarding writers' marginalized condition. He persistently wrote about the act of social survival even at its most degrading form. An illustration will be his short story "Bale Tisa" (House of Bricks), an unpublished typescript, which was an entry to a writing contest in the 1960s. The manuscript was kept by the late Evangelina Lacson (Zoilo Hilario's daughter), who meant to have it included in an anthology. Most contemporary writers of Gallardo, such as Vedasto Ocampo, who was also active in joining literary contests, acknowledged the piece as one important part of Gallardo's body of work.

"Bale Tisa" has the usual plot, characters, and theme found in Kapampangan stories. A poor hacienda overseer, Tomas Soliman, is falsely

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<sup>24</sup>Vedasto Ocampo, interview by the author, June 1999, Magalang, Pampanga.

<sup>25</sup>Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 172.

accused of arson and is therefore killed by his landlord and owner of the brick house, Don Ramon Velez. The family of the victim vanishes from the village. After many years, Tadeo, the son of Tomas, decides to avenge his father's death. Tadeo succeeds in killing Don Ramon, but he becomes a most wanted criminal, with one hundred thousand pesos being offered as a reward for his capture. He makes arrangements with a lawyer so that his family will receive the money when he surrenders to the authorities. He is executed. The lawyer cannot refuse him despite the agony of having to accept Tadeo's death. Tadeo's loved ones live in Alabang and soon become wealthy after receiving the reward money. Then they decide to go back to their original place. Finally, the house of bricks is sold to them.

The class struggle is clearly discernible in the story. The author, who is as involved in the struggle as the character, has an affective interest in the resolution. The triumph of the poor indicates the coming to an end of the perpetuation of social disparities. "Bale Tisa" symbolically enacts the transformation of an unjust situation and a fulfillment of a social desire. The story could be read as an allegory: the overseer, Tomas Soliman, represents the poet who is killed by Don Ramon, a member of the ruling class and the original owner of the house. But Tadeo sets things right even to the point of death—which may be interpreted as a writer's sacrifice to achieve liberation from the domination of the ruling class and the recovery of his craft, symbolized by the house of bricks. Finally, the restitution of the house of bricks also suggests restoration of social order or the poor getting their due. The story, thus interpreted, strikes an optimistic note regarding Kapampangan literary legacy, the core of Gallardo's endeavors.

The arresting quality of the story is the elaborate description of the setting such as the detailed portrayal of the house. This emphasis may be correlated to the symbolic significance of the brick house, that is, as the writer's craft or perhaps Kapampangan literature to be treasured and preserved. Significantly enough, "Bale Tisa" is literally and figuratively a house of art.

But the story also has an unusual component, namely, the sudden appearance of non-fictional elements in the end. There is the inclusion of Don Zoilo Hilario, well-known literati in Pampanga, as well as of AGTAKA press, an actual printing press serving the Kapampangan writers. Obviously, this problem of intrusion creates a disturbance relative to the organic unity of the piece. In fact, the last portion of the story is irrelevant to the plot. However, the apparent impropriety could have been committed because of Gallardo's indiscreet disposition. He must have been unable to resist the

opportunity to put forward his dire need to win the contest even at the expense of *delicadeza*.

Entered in a short story writing contest sponsored by the provincial government, “Bale Tisa” should satisfy the criteria as well as solicit the attention of the judges. Apparently, Gallardo’s ulterior motive surfaced since Don Zoilo Hilario was then one of the judges. Gallardo’s sycophantic approach to win the favor of the judge makes evident the rather demeaning status held by writers and is explicable only in the context of the economic affliction he was suffering from.

Gallardo’s expression of apparent self-ingratiation as a writer, a weakness of character as revealed in writing his story, may be viewed sociologically as calling attention to a society that is divided by class. The weakness is a result of a blighted social control and power, producing a big gap between the rich and the poor. In other words, the root of the dilemma posed in the story and the corresponding response of the character may be traced to power relations. If read in this context, Gallardo’s literary work is a socially symbolic act, no matter how limited its circulation might be, and it could evoke thoughtful interaction—a partaking of his compelling message on the part of its reader. Cultural workers and anyone with a sensitive social conscience can use Gallardo’s case and his text as a base in scaffolding arguments for alleviating the economic status of living post-war and other Kapampangan writers.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

For Jose Gallardo, “poverty and poetry” probably may not only serve as alliterative phrase glorifying, if not mystifying his lamentable status. The association of the two ideas in his context makes his case significantly sociological and his works not esoteric but public.

Gallardo struggled for his sheer survival because his art was primarily his life. His poverty, which was inextricably linked with his being a poet, was a trade-off in his desire to keep alive the literature of his province. His fervent aspiration, his forever lingering literary commitment, his poetic esprit gave him the strength to carry on his endless passion for his *amanung sisuan* (mother tongue). Even in “Sumpa ning Poeta,” the narrator reminds readers that Carding gave up writing not because his love for Kapampangan had diminished. On the contrary, “the truth is, at the moment and until his last breath, his passionate desire for his mother tongue will never be diminished”

(Ing catutuan, angga man ngeni, at angga man qng catataulian nang singap ning keang pangisnawa, e mapisi capurit man ing micacalucu nang lugud keting menan nang salita).<sup>26</sup> Poor as he was, Gallardo ceaselessly tried to revive the interest of his fellow Kapampangan to their language. His voice was most pressing and urgent, exhorting those who should provide the needed support for cultural reawakening through the sting of his pen. His plea was heeded every now and then, but in his time, there was really no sustained effort to resolve the antinomies resulting from cultural dislocation.

At present, cultural workers and the academe in Pampanga have taken up his challenge earnestly. Kapampangan studies centers are established in major universities and colleges to help cultivate and preserve Kapampangan literature. Academic courses in Kapampangan are offered and graduate students are encouraged to work on Kapampangan writers/works for their theses and dissertations. Radio programs promoting Kapampangan language are also regularly aired. Kapampangan writing workshops are conducted to help writers improve their craft. Many other ways to address Gallardo's concern regarding his *amanung sisuan* are being pursued.

However, whether his social desire to deliver Kapampangan writers from the malaise of their "starving careers" has been achieved or not requires further research.

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<sup>26</sup>Gallardo, "Sumpa ning Poeta," 168, 170. Translated by Mallari. The Tagalog translation by Vidal is on 169, 171.

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