Instituto Cervantes plays a visible role in promoting events related to Hispanic culture and the study of the Spanish language in many countries. The Instituto Cervantes of Manila seems to have a more acute agenda since the Filipinos who decide to learn Spanish are, in a way, renewing the country’s historical ties to Spain. Put succinctly by Nick Joaquin in his essay “The Language of the Street” (1963) at a time when Spanish speakers had already diminished drastically: “Spanish is not dead in the Philippines; we unknowingly speak it every moment of our lives.” Hence, one of the objectives of the collection Clásicos hispano filipinos, launched in 2009 by Instituto Cervantes of Manila, is to recover the diverse voices within Philippine literature written in Spanish, and to present them in an accessible manner through annotated critical editions. The Instituto’s goal is to publish works by twentieth-century Filipino writers that have limited circulating copies or have never been published.

As recounted by Spanish scholar Isaac Donoso in his edited volume Historia cultural de la lengua española en Filipinas: ayer y hoy (Cultural history of the Spanish language in the Philippines: Yesterday and today) (Verbum, 2013), the initiative for Clásicos hispano filipinos has a history that dates back two decades. During the 1980s, Francisco Zaragoza, a passionate Filipino Hispanist and Secretary of Academia Filipina, proposed the publication of one hundred volumes of Philippine literature in Spanish under the name Clásicos filipinos. The volumes for this initiative were to come from Zaragoza’s impressive personal library. Although this endeavor never materialized, Clásicos hispano filipinos is, according to Donoso, inspired by Zaragoza’s enthusiasm. Thus, with joint efforts headed by José María Fons Guardiola, Deputy of Cultural Affairs at the Instituto in Manila, three volumes have been published so far. They are Cuentos de Juana (Juana’s tales) (2009) by Adelina Gurrea, Los pájaros de fuego (The birds of fire) (2010) by Jesús Balmori, and El campeón (The champion) (2013) by Antonio M. Abad.

Cuentos de Juana, the first volume of the book series, is a collection of short stories first published in Spain in 1943. In 1951, it received an award from the Unión Latina, an international organization of writers headquartered in Paris, and
owing to that distinction it was republished in 1955, again in Spain. The most recent 2009 edition, edited by Spanish scholar Beatriz Álvarez Tardío, includes critical annotations mainly for readers that are unfamiliar with Philippine history, a previously unpublished story titled “El Talisay,” and an introduction to the author of these stories, Adelina Gurrea (1896–1971).

Born and raised in La Carlota, a hacienda in Negros Island, Gurrea pursued a career in literature in Manila where she began to publish poetry. In 1921, she moved to Madrid, yet retained her Philippine citizenship, revealing a permanent attachment to her Filipino roots. Editor Álvarez Tardío provides summaries of the stories and describes the three strange spiritual beings or duendes from Visayan folk culture that feature in them. In Álvarez Tardío’s words the tamao and asuang are “entes malignos” (25; malignant entities) while the camá-camá is a “duende cillo bueno, pero travieso” (25; good, but mischievous little duende). Since it is the first volume of the book series, her introduction gives an overview of Philippine literature in Spanish.

Cuentos de Juana consists of five main stories within a frame narrative. Juana, a native maid from the island of Negros, is storyteller to the children of a Spanish-Filipino family. The stories are mostly told in the third person, but are interrupted by brief first-person accounts, told by the alter-ego of Gurrea, that insist that she is re-telling the tales as she first heard them from her nanny Juana when she was seven years old. This metafictive strategy underlines that, as fantastic as these stories about good and bad duendes may seem, they come from real witnesses.

One of the recurrent themes is the power of love. For example, the first story, entitled “La doncella que vivió tres vidas” (The maid who lived three lives), is about the abduction of a sixteen-year-old girl. According to Juana, the tamao who dwells in a huge tamarind tree fell in love with this maid and held her captive for three days. Other stories address the colonial condition of the Philippines by revealing the mistreatment and resistance of the natives of Negros. According to Álvarez Tardío, one of the main aspects of Cuentos de Juana is “la crítica velada pero aguda que Adelina hace al sistema colonial” (27; the concealed yet sharp criticism Adelina makes of the colonial system). It is worth mentioning that in the introduction and throughout the footnotes, Álvarez Tardío has an unusual affective tone towards the author and calls her by her first name.

In 2010, Clásicos hispano filipinos launched its second volume: the long awaited novel Los pájaros de fuego by Jesús Balmori (1886–1948). According to its editor, Isaac Donoso, the manuscript was written during the Japanese occupation but was considered lost. It was not until recently that three versions of the text resurfaced: a manuscript of 163 pages that is partially typewritten, a microfilm of a prefaced typescript version that indicates that there had been an attempt to publish the novel in around 1979, and a later “apocryphal” digitalized version presenting more
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revisions, supposedly by Balmori. Donoso clarifies that the 2010 critical edition is based on the first version, the only one that undoubtedly comes directly from the author’s hand.

Donoso’s introduction, apart from providing consistently lucid and well-sourced annotations, gives a thorough overview of Balmori’s vibrant career in Manila as a novelist, poet, playwright, journalist, and diplomat. For instance, in 1932, Balmori wrote “Nippón,” a lecture in verse form that praised Japanese civilization and was presented in front of members of the Japanese Association in the Philippines. That same year, Balmori travelled to Mexico and consequently published a series of poems in the magazine *Excelsior*, titled “De Manila a México” (From Manila to Mexico). Revelatory of Donoso’s archival dedication in producing this edition, the introduction to *Los pájaros de fuego* is followed by a long bibliography of Balmori’s published works, including his numerous contributions to various Spanish-language journals. Furthermore, there are high-resolution reproductions of photographs of Balmori, his published literary works, and the scores of his musical collaborations.

Of potential interest to comparatists of Hispanic literature is Donoso’s portrayal of the influence of the Spanish and Hispanic-American literary movement of modernismo.

The main characters of *Los pájaros de fuego* are members of the Robles family: the widower and nipponophile, Don Lino, his brother, Don Ramón, and his two young adult children, Natalia and Fernando. In the beginning of the novel, the Robleses are presented in an almost anachronous environment, enjoying the particularities of high-class society, such as the regular visits of an Italian music teacher and a German doctor. Soon they begin hearing rumors about Japanese attacks. The young Fernando impulsively joins the Philippine Army, but the patriarch Don Lino remains skeptical about the magnitude of the attacks; he doubts they would affect him and his family. Towards the end, however, the Japanese reach the Robles mansion and the novel ends tragically. Don Ramón reflects: “Vanas las dos enormes civilizaciones, la de España y la de América, que engalanaban fastuosamente el espíritu y la vida de la raza. Vano todo sacrificio, todo el amor, toda virtud” (149; How vain the two enormous civilizations, the Spanish one and the American one, which so lavishly dressed the spirit and the life of the race. How vain is all sacrifice, all love, all virtue). *Los pájaros de fuego*, a title that clearly alludes to the Japanese bombers, portrays the violent destruction of Manila and Balmori’s disenchantment with Japan. It also coincides with the end of what various literary critics often refer to as the “Golden Age of Philippine literature in Spanish.”

The third volume of Clásicos hispano filipinos, *El campeón*, was the third novel of Cebuano author Antonio M. Abad (1894–1970). In 1940, Abad presented it to the first literary contest organized by the Commonwealth government. It won first place, yet it was not published before 2013, in the present edition. In
the introduction, editor Salvador García provides a biography of Abad, a prolific writer and an avid defender of the Spanish language in the Philippines. García also includes a well-researched account of how at least three versions of *El campeón* were conceived between 1939 and 1962. Recounting the difficulties Abad went through in the attempt to publish *El campeón* in the Philippines, Spain, and Argentina, García refers to it as “una novela peregrina” (a travelling novel). García also states that the present critical edition is based on the version that Abad had presented to the Commonwealth Literary Competition in 1940.

*El campeón* is set during the turbulent first decades of twentieth-century Philippines and tells the life of a fighting cock named Banogóñ. It begins with Banogóñ’s cockfights in small provinces and then narrates his multiple encounters with other animals, such as his first love, Bakiki. As indicated by the editor in the introduction, the novel dialogues with José Rizal’s short stories “Memorias de un gallo” (Reminiscences of a Cock) and “Los animales de Suan” (Suan’s Animals), and can be read as an allegory of the multi-ethnic composition of Philippine society through the cross-breeding of various types of cocks.

The novel is mostly told in the first person from the point of view of Banogóñ, with intermittent chapters in the third person from the point of view of his owners, who find ways to make him ascend in his career until he becomes a national champion. Throughout the chapters, Abad affirms in an almost essayistic tone the important social role cockfighting plays, as it brings people together. Moreover, there are numerous passages that demonstrate Abad’s ability to narrate action, counterpointed by romantic dialogues between Banogóñ and Bakiki, whom he meets again towards the end of the novel.

It is worthwhile to note here that García, the editor of the third volume in the series, is a Mexican scholar. In other words, Clásicos hispano filipinos renews not only the historical ties between the Philippines and Spain but also the ties between the Philippines and Hispanic America. But because the volumes of Clásicos hispano filipinos are in Spanish, access to these critically annotated volumes unfortunately remains restricted to a reduced percentage able to read Spanish.

Yet it is significant to note that the critical annotations of *El campeón* are ascribed to both García and Filipino scholar Luisa Young, further highlighting the dialogic potential of the book series. Put differently, these literary works call for further collaborative work; they lend themselves to a larger transnational context without diminishing the possibility of being read by Filipino scholars, whether Hispanists or not, in the Philippines.

The three volumes can be found in select libraries worldwide, mainly in the Philippines, Spain, and the US. Distribution of these books is one complication,
and another one could be the impression that Clásicos hispano filipinos is a neo-imperial or revisionist enterprise because it is mainly funded by Instituto Cervantes, an organization created by the Spanish government. However way one wishes to approach it, the fact remains that Clásicos hispano filipinos opens new and multidirectional pathways for the study of Philippine literature in Spanish. As Italo Calvino says, “A classic is a book that has never finished saying what is has to say.” Thus, it is hoped that these books—as clásicos more than hispano filipinos—soon find a well-deserved, broad, and scholarly readership.

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The practice of discernment demands keen insight, incisive judgment, and intelligent discrimination based on standards that are clearly articulated and soundly reasoned. That the word also refers to the manner by which Christians attempt to determine how God desires them to live their lives can only render projects that aver to discern and to be discerning more daunting for their authors. Such is the burden carried by this book, a collection of previously published scholarly and popular articles, by Ralph Semino Galán, who admits at the outset to a “chronic lack of self-confidence” in his “capacity as a creative-critical writer” (vii).

This curious confession, however, is at once mitigated, if not militated against, by the occasionally polemical introduction from Oscar V. Campomanes. Suffused with remarkable generosity of spirit, the essay does not content itself just with providing an overview of what the book contains; it takes pains to install Galán in a locus of continuities that reach back to Lope K. Santos and Nick Joaquin, and forward to Ferdinand M. Lopez and Isidoro M. Cruz. Moreover, it lays down the terms along which Galán’s discourse operates, as well as those within which it ought to be read. Galán’s model of writing, Campomanes argues, involves the sublation of creative-critical and theoretical material, which in turn allows for the subsumption of such material into the function of critique, thus making the familiar new and rendering accessible what is usually difficult while retaining rigor.