Peter Hulme, *The Dinner at Gonfalone's: Salomón de la Selva and His Pan-American Project in Nueva York, 1915–1919*. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2019. xiii + 397 pp. (Cloth US\$ 110.00)

Time has been kind to Salomón de la Selva. After almost being swept into oblivion by the master narratives of literature, his role in shaping twentieth-century Latin American poetry and the rise of Latino literature has finally granted him a formal acknowledgment in the form of a slow but steady stream of critical studies and reeditions. In this “second coming,” Peter Hulme’s thorough inquiry gets its name from the place where the Nicaraguan poet organized “a Pan American literary affair” (p. 303) of U.S. and Latin American writers in June 1919, and it much enhances the debate on this “trans-American” literary figure and his environment. Although not strictly a biography, life narrative provides the binding argument that posits the relevance of de la Selva “as a significant ancestor of strands of contemporary writing situated close to the interface between English and Spanish” (p. 8). Drawing from an impressive archive of primary sources that include poems, translations, essays, reviews, memoirs, and letters, the work is testament to the long history of New York City as a borderland between U.S., Latin American, and Caribbean cultures. Even though the subtitle centers the research on de la Selva on a specific city and lustrum, the domain of the study is much larger, and a network of people, events, and institutions maps a wider cultural geography, hard to pin down within a personal, national, or linguistic frontier.

The dinner is one of many encounters that allow Hulme to reflect on the ways cultural intercommunication in the Americas was conceived and attempted by de la Selva and others, despite the societal and institutional challenges they confronted. The book’s first chapters give an overview of New York City in relation to the rest of the continent in a time when direct U.S. intervention in the neighboring republics strained the debate about the exact nature of that relationship. The city’s cultural landscape, with an important Spanish-language community and press, as well as institutions such as the Poetry Society of America, the National Arts Club, and the Hispanic Society, are central to the debates that unfold. Hulme reminds us of the difficulties of periodization and cultural translation with issues like the contentious place of *modernismo* within the debate about modernism and modernity, as well as the way concepts like Latin and America developed over time. Chapters 3–7 each analyze a year from 1915 to 1919, and focus on important meetings such as the ones de la Selva had with Rubén Darío (1915) and Teddy Roosevelt (1917); both contribute to delineate the poetic and political itinerary of de la Selva’s ambitious intellectual project. His friendship with figures such as Edna St. Vincent Millay, Edwin

NEW WEST INDIAN GUIDE

© CARLOS G. ESPINAL, 2020 | DOI:10.1163/22134360-09403017

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC 4.0 license.

Downloaded from Brill.com04/26/2023 12:27:42PM
via free access

Markham, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Luis Muñoz Marín, and W. Adolphe Roberts shows just how multifaceted his circle was and reveals the strains of their societal interpellations. An important controversy Hulme lays to rest is de la Selva's participation in the Great War, given what was implied and accepted from his poetic collection *El soldado desconocido* (1922). A concise "Aftermath" gives the highlights of de la Selva's later years, when he became an important leader in cultural and political episodes that developed in Mexico and Central America.

Although the extent of the material and a skillful narrative makes the story seem closed, Hulme himself reminds us that "researchers are at the mercy of what has survived in the archives" (p. 293). The remaining half of the epistolary exchanges stress what the archive conceded even if we sometimes get a glimpse of the full dialogic exchange as with Millay's apparent comment on his particular friendship with Henríquez Ureña (p. 126). De la Selva's dramatic letters to Millay (which now await an editor), as well as to other friends, are brimming with intense outbursts that Hulme does not shy away from problematizing, as they display "often a large dose of fantasy and wishful thinking" (p. 126). The book summons the researcher first to visit the trans-American landscape of New York City in the first decades of the twentieth century, and then in relation to de la Selva, delivers an astonishing account without falling into the hagiographic pitfalls that menace some of the previous research on such a captivating figure. For those interested in de la Selva and the history of Latino literature, the book can also be read like a program for subsequent inquiry with a neat synthesis of previous work and a good outline of things to be done. With *The dinner at Gonfarone's*, time has indeed been kind to Salomón de la Selva.

Carlos G. Espinal

Department of Latin American, Iberian, and Latino Cultures,
Graduate Center/CUNY, New York NY, USA
cespinal@gradcenter.cuny.edu