

have influenced such writers as James Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver. Brown has obviously read a great deal about cultural theorists, and the latter chapters of the book feel a bit padded, as Brown seeks to bring poor Stagolee into an MLA conference. He uses Stagolee as a post-modernist trope. Stagolee, Brown argues, is an allegory that “unmasks the ever-new ... as always the same and the timeless as temporary.” Moreover, one of allegory’s strongest impulses is “an appreciation of the “transience of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity.” Clear? Give me blues lyrics straight. The evolution of Stagolee’s allegorical message to present-day rappers, whose nihilistic lyrics supposedly reduce the world to fragments and rubble, is a bit much. Stagolee may be to academics “the allegory, or symbol, of the black man as the person who is the inverse of a stranger,” but he is not that to the performer on stage or to the actual listening audience. Stagolee isn’t comfortable in this theoretical convention, where there is no smoking, and where the drink is white wine served with fancy hors d’oeuvres. He does not fit there, because he is bigger than that. Look for him in juke joints, in the smoke and hellish heat of late-night sessions, where the song and rhythm causes one to shake his head in recognition of the type. Stagolee, to use another lyric, was “a bad mother ... shut your mouth.”

Sometimes evil cannot be explained. Brown puts on a defense for Stagolee, teasing out versions that have the victim start the fight or threaten Stagolee. There are enough versions to go around. “Bad Bad Leroy Brown” is a close cousin. Perhaps, as one blues musician said, the attraction of Stagolee is what the singer can read into him. He is explained anew in every version. The heart of the song, though, has an unrepentant Stagolee being bad because no one messes with his hat and all that it means.

“For Stagolee to become a ballad,” Brown writes, “meter, music, and meaning had to come together. But more than purely musical elements were involved in its persistence over a

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century.” Brown uses the ballad to record the growth of blues, including how it followed the great migration to the cities. The song was probably fitted into an earlier ballad (Brown has some suggestions), and then it began to have a life of its own. It was documented in the early 1900s and reached its widest circulation in recordings in the 1930s. One of Brown’s strongest chapters is a discography of versions, and a close analysis of some classic versions, most notably Mississippi John Hurt’s, with the changes he made in the standard text, and a change in the song’s point of view. In Hurt’s version (quoted above), Stagolee speaks, and the song alternates point of view.

Interestingly, the real Shelton, unlike the Stagolee, wasn’t hanged. He was put on trial, represented by the leading criminal defense lawyer in St. Louis at the time, Nat Dryden (a white man, of course, but Irish), and got a hung jury. His lawyer died (reputedly from drink), and in the second trial, Shelton was convicted of manslaughter. He served several years, was released, and later was back in prison on a second assault charge. He died forgotten, but his alter ego lives on.

Stagolee Shot Billy is a fast and interesting read, well worth picking up. Go home, pour some whiskey into a glass, and read it while in the background, some version, maybe Hurt’s or Lightnin’ Hopkins’, plays. It is safer than going to the haunts where Stagolee hung out, and where, faced with disrespect, Stagolee did what he had to do. **TFL**

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Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy

By Matthew Scully

St. Martin’s Press, New York, NY, 2002. 434 pages, \$27.95.

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL FOSTER

Matthew Scully is a man on a mission, and he leaves no doubt about it from the first page of *Dominion* to the last. His goal is to reshape our thinking about the animals with whom we share this planet, to prompt us to examine our dominion over them and the way we exercise it, and to persuade us to treat them with greater kindness and consideration. Scully believes that “Animals are more than ever a test of our character, of mankind’s capacity for empathy and for decent, honorable conduct and faithful stewardship. We are called to treat them with kindness, not because they have rights or power or some claim to equality, but in a sense because they don’t; because they all stand unequal and powerless before us. ... Dominion, as we call this power in the Western tradition, today requires our concentrated moral consideration. ...” He gives the issue that and more in his book.

The task he has set for himself may seem to some quixotic and unachievable, but if he is daunted by its magnitude, he shows no sign of it in his book. He is relentless; he uses every tool of the writer’s trade, from the frankly emotional appeal and the biblical admonition, to simply holding up for public scrutiny various inhumane practices in the treatment of animals. He has written a jeremiad, a polemic, and it is not hard to imagine his satisfaction at the discomfort he has caused those he singles out for criticism. He offers few concessions to opposing viewpoints, and he brings to the task of critically dismantling them a skill at crafting arguments and phrasing them eloquently — a talent he must have honed during his tenure as a speech writer for President George W. Bush.

Scully makes his points by focusing