



## Live from the Homesick Jamboree (Wesleyan Poetry)

### Adrian Blevins

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Although death is frequently evoked in Adrian Blevins's latest collection, not even drowning can kill the speaker of these poems. As the title suggests, she is what's coming live (electrified?) from the homesick jamboree. She is sometimes self-deprecating, as in "School of the Arts," in which she refers to herself as "like some forever raggedy thing forever underwater." However, there is no doubt of the character's strength as she navigates her raucous childhood. What is momentarily perplexing is her nostalgia for those days.

*Live from the Homesick Jamboree* is about the relief and regret of escape. The poems move from early childhood through adolescence and into motherhood and marriage. But they do not land calmly in maturity. When the speaker's family arrives in the later poems, she writes, "they are after pulling me out of the stillness I came up North for." The depictions of her former home are not pretty—are filled with booze, rednecks, and an undercurrent of violence—yet her homesickness is not surprising. It is not surprising when, in the title poem, she describes her current residence as "the district of the Gone Astray." She is able to evoke what's missed about this simultaneously familiar and unknown South. Daniel Boone revenges his slaughtered dogs in the same poem in which "dogwoods start blooming at the end of March // causing a delectable whiteness to pervade the atmosphere." It is this combination of toughness and sensitivity that creates such a realistic portrait of the South and the speaker. There are perhaps a few too many stereotypes evoked, but there are also plenty of new details. The real question is, whose South is this? It belongs to neither Daniel Boone nor Tennessee Williams. It is entirely Blevins, and her ownership makes these poems sing. Rarely is a collection of poems so aptly titled.

Her debut full-length collection had an equally enticing moniker, *The Brass Girl Brouhaha*. It won the Kate Tufts Discovery Award in 2003. *Live from the Homesick Jamboree* continues Blevins's straightforward-sometimes to the delicious point of crude-narration. In the first poem, the speaker is compared to a wolf and both girl and wolf survive drowning. In the last poem, "Now There's a River," there is a final effort to drown the wild girl, but by this point, the poet's readers know better. You cannot drown a wolf, and "her heart that was once bone" is still enduring as bone underneath.

(November 19, 2009)

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