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Review of *Tough Daisies: Kansas Humor from "The Lane County Bachelor" to Bob Dole* By C. Robert Haywood

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Tough Daisies: Kansas Humor from "The Lane County Bachelor" to Bob Dole. By C. Robert Haywood. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xv + 286 pp. \$22.50.

Haywood calls *Tough Daisies* "a sampler" intended to illustrate that Kansans, contrary to a long litany of misconceptions, "have always had a sense of humor." He succeeds splendidly, chiefly because he gives the reader dozens of well-selected jokes, anecdotes, poems, and cartoons, and partly because the author himself has a wry sense of humor, one that wears well and unobtrusively complements his material. I finished the book wanting more—more jokes, more stories, more history, more Haywood.

He begins by identifying three forms of frontier humor: the tall tale, the practical joke, and what he calls the "minimal parody." Because I spent my own formative eons in a small town in southcentral Kansas, I especially appreciate the weather-related tall tale. "We never dig wells in Kansas," according to a scribe

in the *Lakin Eagle*. "Condensed wind does it for us." Or the man in western Kansas who said that "it had been so dry for so long he thought he had better send a sample of his drinking water for testing. It came back, showing only thirty percent moisture."

(A Jayhawk friend of mine put his own twist on the contention that if you don't like the weather in Kansas today, just wait until tomorrow. It'll change. Said my friend, "If you don't like the weather today, just stay in Kansas for ten or fifteen years. *You'll* change.")

As Haywood points out, humor derives from almost every conceivable context—the Great Seal of Kansas, with its motto *Ad Astra per Aspera* (To the Stars Through Difficulty, or perhaps Drawing to a Pair of Deuces and Filling); the Jayhawk; the grasshopper; the Capitol ("What to do with the topless, fully exposed dome with its suggestive red-bright nipple still remains an ethical and economic dilemma . . ."); "The Oz Connection" (picture this: a postcard, showing Dorothy in a gay bar in San Francisco, saying "Gee, Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore"); and of course the "tough daisy," that "ubiquitous sunflower," from whence comes the title of Haywood's book:

David Jarvis, a seven-year-old boy, made his first meaningful encounter with a sunflower when his grandfather stopped along Highway 54 in Comanche County so that David could "pick the flowers." After struggling for some time he brought back to the car his prize, a badly mauled and bedraggled sunflower, exclaiming in triumph: "Man, that's one tough daisy!"

Other topics include the Great Depression, a period that Brooks Hays says "wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't come in the midst of hard times"; World War II; professional humorists (including, most certainly, the Sage of Emporia, William Allen White); politicians (including, most certainly, Robert Dole, who does by thunder have a sense of humor: "Being a commencement speaker is like being a corpse

at a funeral. They need you in order to hold the event, but nobody expects you to say very much"); cartoonists; and, finally, poets and professors.

Oh, yes. And Prohibition. And Carrie Nation, who changed her name to "Carry" because (and this is my own version, I think, of Robert Lewis Taylor's version) Mrs. Nation viewed her name as a divine imperative: "Carry A. Nation"—into total and everlasting sobriety. God apparently spoke to her not only in English, but sometimes truncated His message, giving Carry the pleasure of fleshing it out.

On the dustcover David Dary says, "Kansans have endured because of their humor, and Bob Haywood captures this often ignored side of their state in this delightful book." The book is indeed delightful. But it is also informative and thought provoking. It affirms that the universe, as one contemporary poet has put it, "is not made of atoms. It is made of stories."

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