he is challenged at gunpoint by a coyote leading a ragtag group across the border. Manuel believes Miguel is a federal agent surreptitiously setting up a business project in Colorado. His trust is well-founded. Indeed, Miguel’s confession draws one from Manuel who urges him to hide in the cave where the dope is stashed. And a further admission with the potential of fearsome consequences, Manuel reveals he has learned the pot is mixed with cocaine, a substantially more serious crime.

Manuel, Miguel, and Hank find they share an interest in the missionary Kino, his values and ways of life. With each setback they remember Kino’s emphasis on waiting for celestial favors. The story grows more involved, more bloody, climaxing with a startling shootout challenging the spirit of Kino’s words. The police, the border guards, drug peddlers, and the surprising spiritual conversion of the young Roberto all find a niche.

Bruno Jambor, a scientist and retired aerospace engineer, has created a multi-faceted story drawing together the natural beauty of the Southwest, the friendship of men whose ‘day jobs’ have differed enough to add a piquancy to their friendship, and a vigorous tale of derring-do. The characters, their emotions, behavior and the intermittent sequences with the past are deftly woven together. Those attracted to any of the themes and not least Kino’s vicarious presence, are in for an enjoyable read.

—Jane Manaster
Dallas, Texas

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**Oklahomeland: Essays**
by Jeanetta Calhoun Mish
130 pp. $15.95 paper.

As Jeanette Calhoun Mish notes, this book has two sections, “The Arts,” mostly literature, and “Oklahomeland,” about her place as a physical and psychological inhabitant of Oklahoma.

Like anyone who writes about the literary and cultural scene in the state, Mish has to begin by pointing out, with what seems to each defendant both laborious and redundant, that Oklahomans “are not just a bunch of crackers and hicks.” While she admits that “It’s difficult being a writer in Oklahoma,” her list of small presses, literary magazines, and venues for readings indicates that it is not as tough as it used to be for men and women of letters in the Sooner State.

This is in great part due to the conscious efforts of Mish to succeed, with due reverence, Frank Parman as editor, author, and guru for new talent. In Mish’s attempt to help a particular kind of Oklahoma writing flourish, she
founded Mongrel Empire Press, edited special issues of Oklahoma literary and cultural journals, and generously supported the work of others, from poets to photographers to the Miss Oklahoma Project—in which, rather like Wallace Stevens’s jar in Tennessee, an over-dressed mannequin is placed in various Oklahoma landscaped, estranging the landscape. Or in this case being estranged. She didn’t found the Rural Oklahoma Museum of Poetry, but her research in and support of working class writing is in the spirit of that institution.

As critic, Mish speaks eloquently in support of vernacular writing in preserving what is distinct and energetic about Oklahomans’ brand of English—not surprising, since she sees herself as “one of Woody’s Children: a leftist Okie poet who grew up working class in a small town 26 miles from Okemah.”

When Mish moves from cultural overviews to particular works, as in her discussions of the poems of Jeanne Bryner and Sandee Gertz Umbach and the photographs of Craig Varjabedian, she manages, without much quoting or, regrettably, reproducing photographs, to convey the spirit of the work in ways that make the reader want to seek it out.

In “Oklahomeland,” the second section of the book, Mish moves from a celebration of the state to a consideration of her relationship to people like her grandfather; to her sense of Highway Nine as a lifeline that carried her away and back to Oklahoma; and to her belated learning about her great-great-grandfather’s suicide and attempt to link that to her family narrative, including her own attempt.

The final essay, “Like a Fire in Dry Grass,” is the only piece not previously published. It traces the history of lynching in Oklahoma, primarily of African Americans, to come to a reckoning of the extent of my state’s and my own disfigurement, the many ways in which race and race relations in America are still complex, difficult, and important. A white person with any liberal tendencies will respond uneasily to the history and, still more, to Mish’s experience of being called a racist. We might not have a Klansman in the woodpile, but almost everyone has at least a casual racist somewhere in the family tree.
Oklahoma still has its share of crackers and hicks, some of whom are members of the state legislature, but Mish’s essays offer hope that the state can produce better, both in life and art. In helping to purify the language of her tribe, she points the way toward a better style not just of writing but of living.

—Robert Murray Davis
University of Oklahoma

**Sex as a Political Condition**
by Carlos Nicolás Flores
384 pp. $34.95 paper.

Carlos Nicolás Flores dedicates his novel *Sex as a Political Condition* to the Salvadoran poet and revolutionary Roque Dalton for inspiring the book with his poem “Toward a Greater Love.” The poem is based on a quote from feminist Kate Millett: “Sex is a political condition.” And, like a game of telephone among children, what begins as a single opinion offered by a woman becomes confused in the hands of a man, only to be thickened with hyperbole and embellishment by the time it reaches Flores and his protagonist, Honoré del Castillo.

The premise is simple enough. Former narcotrafficante Honoré del Castillo, who comes “from a long line of vain and violent men, always in trouble with women or the law or both,” has set aside his days of outlawing to run his family’s curio shop in the Texas-Mexico border town of Escandón, where he lives with his sexy wife and their teenage daughter. The problem is also fairly simple. Escandón is well known as “El Barrio Sal Si Puedes...El Barrio Get-Out-If-You-Can,” and Honoré laments his inability as yet to “get out of this black hole.” Honoré’s great fear is dying in front of the television, a “stupid, inconsequential” death. Like many middle-aged men before him, Honoré fears a life of purposelessness, a life that is, essentially, already over. The solution to this great suburban problem comes in the form of Trotsky, Honoré’s friend, mentor, and revolutionary, who invites Honoré to accompany a convoy of humanitarian aid to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. Finally, Honoré can find purpose and, perhaps, fulfill his wish to “die on some beach in Central America, before a firing squad.” This is where hyperbole and embellishment enjoy their starring roles. Amid absurd and archetypal action-comedy run-ins with federales, hookers, rednecks, and lesbians, there are moments of beauty and truth: “Sometimes things make sense, and sometimes they don’t,” Trotsky tells Honoré. “Sometimes your closest allies turn out to be your worst enemies. Do you know what this