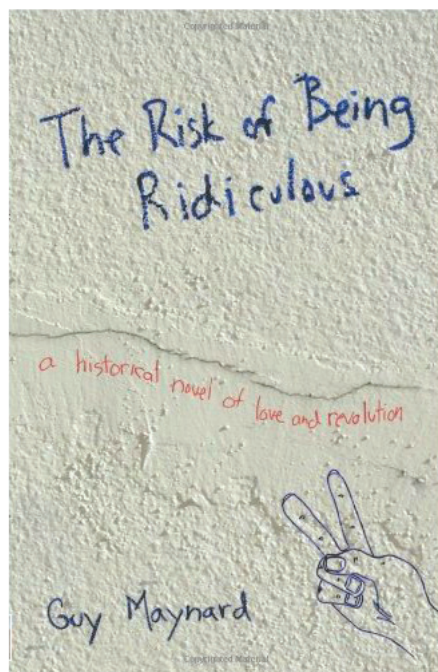


Risky Business

Guy Maynard's first novel looks back



Eugene journalist and *Oregon Quarterly* editor Guy Maynard has turned his considerable skills to novel writing, and his first book takes us back to a not-so-distant time when America was at war with itself. The revolution of the late 1960s was fed by war, injustice, bigotry and radical politics and infused with rock music, long hair, drugs, sex and love. It's all mixed together in *The Risk of Being Ridiculous: A Historical Novel of Love and Revolution* (Hellgate Press, \$19.95).

The scene is Boston in the winter of 1969-70, and 19-year-old Boston University student Ben Tucker is infatuated with Sarah Stein, but like the times, his relationship is complicated. He's broke and sharing an apartment with a wild bunch of friends, and he's in trouble for protesting on campus. He's outraged about the injustices he sees everywhere, from the streets of Boston to U.S. foreign policy. What can he do about it? Is violence the answer when peaceful politics are not working? Sarah is also in love with him but skeptical of Ben's radical ideas and attitudes. Can they reconcile their differences?

Maynard draws on his years in the Boston area to paint the scene for us in great detail, and we suspect this book is his personal exploration to better understand his youthful experiences and emotions. He injects fascinating historical facts in the book, his characters are memorable and sympathetic and the dialogue

flows easily. His account of being in a protest mob facing angry cops is gripping, and his description of an LSD trip is the most transporting we've read anywhere. The tale builds to an unpredictable ending.

The quandaries Maynard's characters face still haunt us today. And as with Eugene's more recent history of eco-sabotage, protests and abusive police crackdowns, the underlying issues remain unresolved. — *Ted Taylor*

Guy Maynard reads from The Risk of Being Ridiculous at 7 pm Monday, Oct. 25, at Gerlinger Alumni Lounge, UO.

A Past More Perfect

The work of Oregon, in poem form

The anthology *New Poets of the American West* (Many Voices Press; \$24) thudded onto my desk like the largest paperweight or laptop desk I'd ever seen. I promised to review this *why*?

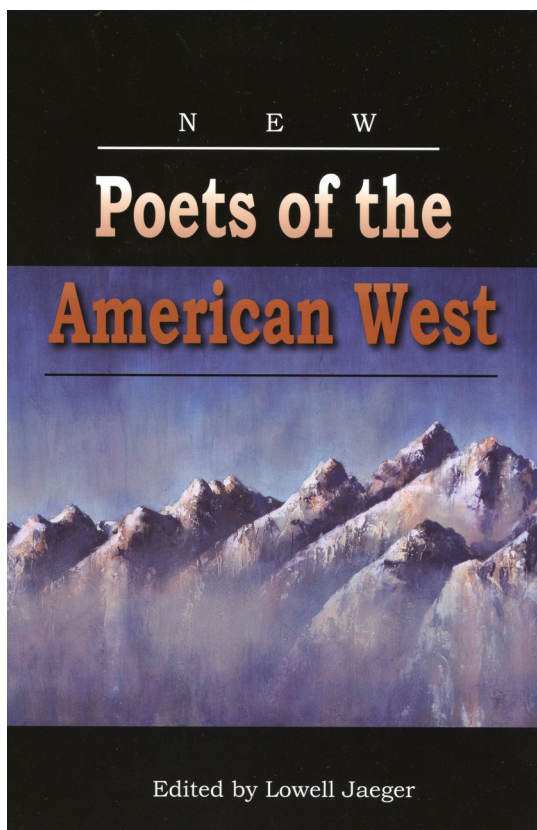
True, I like poetry even though I read too fast for much of it; I have to force myself to slow by reading it aloud, which serves a much better purpose — to re-imbue poems with their rhythmic, musical, language-play satisfactions. If you think you don't like poetry, try reading it to someone else, or even your pet. You might change your mind.

For our purposes, I only needed to read the Oregon poetry section, which turned out to be a mixed pleasure. Book editor Lowell Jaeger (who, along with an all-volunteer staff at Flathead Community College in Kalispell, Mont., put the book together — a true labor of love) says in his preface that “as a reader, I'm most pleased by poems made from the stuff of this world, the nuts and bolts of our daily existence.” That means a lot of the poems contain concrete imagery, much of which concerns the work of the working-class: logging, specifically, or other timber-related jobs; and for some of the poets, being a logger's wife or daughter.

Ginger Andrews' poetry kicks off the Oregon portion with the gritty poetry of North Bend — not the airport where business folks fly to get to the Bandon Dunes, but the North Bend where the fishing business isn't so great, where the mills fail and people go to war and go to alcohol and put their dreams into church or the calendar hanging above the workbench. That feel of the West, instead of the feel of the Pacific Northwest with its rains and progressives and eco-warriors, runs through many of the poems.

Other themes emerge, especially those of aging, making choices that can't be unmade, loss. Eugene poet Ingrid Wendt's “Benediction,” about washing her mother's dead body, strikes deeply into the heart of physical loss and love. There's talent in this state, poets' eyes seeing and sifting and understanding. Read the anthology to see into their worlds. — *Suzi Steffen*

Oregon poets Ingrid Wendt, Maxine Scates, John Witte, Jenny Root, Joy McDowell, Harold Johnson, Pamela Steele and M.E. Hope read at 5 pm Saturday, Oct. 23, at Tsunami Books.



Funny Guy?

Mike Birbiglia puts his pain on display

Self-deprecating comedian Mike Birbiglia's new book, *Sleepwalk With Me and Other Painfully True Stories* (Simon & Shuster, \$24), is a slim little volume with a deceptively casual voice. Birbiglia writes like he talks; some of the pieces in the book clearly began as bits to be performed, and it helps to have some familiarity with Birbiglia's stand-up (or off-Broadway show, or CDs, or late-night talk show appearances). It's like a cheat sheet for knowing just how to hear the stories in your head: the tone is unpretentious, gentle, slightly baffled. Birbiglia is a dry observer of life's most awkward moments, which he twists into stories that are never unkind in their honesty. Most of the more brutal honesty is directed at Birbiglia himself: His first memory of getting “widespread attention” involves shitting in the yard at the age of 5; his first kiss results in the girl proclaiming him “the worst kisser she's ever kissed”; and then there's the everyday, consistent rejection of trying to become a successful stand-up comedian. His time on the college circuit makes for a fascinating read — the “nooner” performances in inappropriate spaces, the forced travel, the unreceptive audiences — especially once, near the book's end, Birbiglia gets to the story that gives the book its title. He's a sleepwalker, prone to waking up in a karate pose on the bed, convinced there's a jackal in the room, and in a La Quinta in Walla Walla, Wash., the sleepwalking takes a notably dramatic turn. It's painful, not funny, but that's Birbiglia's thing. Plenty of comics mine the horrible and transform it into humor, but Birbiglia leaves the pain right there, wrapping the awful stuff in a sort of distantly affectionate regret that things played out the way they did — except that if they hadn't, he wouldn't have gotten a story out of it

Sleepwalk With Me begins and ends with Birbiglia's dad's constant refrain: “Don't tell anyone.” It's a good thing Birbiglia, like the rest of us, didn't always listen to his parents. — *Molly Templeton*

Mike Birbiglia performs at 1 pm Sunday, Oct. 24, at the Eugene Public Library.