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### *Other Edens*

Susan Schreibman

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## REFERENCES

Benjamin Keatinge and Aengus Woods (eds), *Other Edens: The Life and Work of Brian Coffey*, Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 2010, 288 p., ISBN 978-0-7165-2910, 39.95 euros

- 1 *Other Edens* is a long overdue retrospective on the life, work, and friendships of the poet and literary critic, Brian Coffey. Within an Irish context, Coffey's work has typically been evaluated alongside that of his contemporaries, Denis Devlin and Samuel Beckett. Along with the slightly older Thomas MacGreevy, they have been labeled (or as more contemporary critics would have it, mislabeled) the Irish modernists. Keatinge and Woods, in their exemplary introduction, offer several reasons why this perspective no longer serves Coffey obscuring "a more complex reality".
- 2 It is this complex reality that *Other Edens* explores. In 19 chapters written by established literary critics (including Gerald Dawe, JCC Mays, and Thomas Dillon Redshaw), as well as emerging voices (Maria Johnston, Sandra O'Connell, and James Matthew Wilson), poets who knew Coffey (Augustus Young and Billy Mills), and relations (Brian Coffey's son, John Coffey) a complex and shifting portrait of Coffey, in relation to his writing, to his career, and as a devoted friend, father, and husband, is revealed. Two final chapters, a descriptive checklist of Coffey's publications by Redshaw and a bibliography by Woods, gather heretofore fragmented bibliographical information.
- 3 The critical chapters are wide-ranging, exploring a poems and themes too infrequently encountered in Coffey scholarship. There are, of course, chapters on what is arguably his most famous (and probably most accessible) poem, "Missouri Sequence", but there are chapters exploring other themes and texts: the music of *Third Person*, Coffey as critic, the philosophic background to his poetry, the heroic, as well as the antiquity in *Death of Hektor*.
- 4 This collection is a much welcome addition, not only to Coffey studies, but to the study of Twentieth-Century Irish poetry. Keatinge and Woods were right in embracing a more

expansive formula for this tribute: part critical, part biographical, part bibliographical. What emerges from so many of these portraits is Coffey's inherent humanity, the difficulties that emerged as a result of his professional choices, and his ability to persevere as a creative and critical writer. Coffey enjoyed a renaissance late in life, not only as a poet, but as a publisher, creating beautifully-crafted letterpress books in the attic of his house.

- 5 Coffey's home in Southampton was always open to the poet or scholar interested in Coffey's own work or that of his contemporaries. Coffey was generous too, taking a keen interest in the work and lives of the younger poets and critics who sought him out. I was lucky to have met Coffey and his wife Bridget in their big rambling house in Southampton. Reading the many recollections of people who Coffey befriended, reminded me of his generosity to me, of his encouragement, his urgings to persevere, to believe in a path forward, like his own, in which each new twist and turn reveals a new vista.