I never expected very many critics to praise The New British Poetry - and few have. But all publicity is good publicity in selling anthologies and not only has it sold well, it has acquired the tag "controversial". (That was how Radio 3 described it in an introduction to a discussion featuring three Black writers from it.) The attempt to present a rainbow alliance of Black, Feminist and "Experimental" writings - to use the blurb's terms - has not been taken very seriously. The critics could not afford to do so, since they would have had to compromise their squeamish "fairmindedness" about the Black and Feminist sections which is clearly intended to forestall accusations of racism and sexism. This move is calculatedly transparent, when compared to their treatments of the later sections where there are no social taboos. The hands that wave the Equal Opportunities policies when it suits them also wear the knuckledusters and the frustration of good behaviour is too much for them.

There are exceptions. Tony Lopez' TLS review worries away at the concept of "Britishness", but in the process almost ignores the Black and Feminist sections altogether. But generally speaking, it is the kinds of work closest to the project of Pages that have been most maligned; I too wish to pass over those sections which have received faint patronising praise. Their fate, in any case, may be a worse one because of that praise.
So many aggressive terms in Peter Porter's review for *The Observer* could be translated from the sneering of the well-anthologised into the language of the neglected. For "whingeing" read "angry"; for "Sixties Old Boys' Society" read "poets who, since the flash of publicity in the 1960s, have been forced farther 'underground' than the "Underground' ever was"; for "ageing experimentalists" read "senior formalists"; for "self-referring hagiography" read "axiomatic reference points not normally associated with British poetry".

Horovitz has even had two shots at the anthology: one in the *Guardian*, which was badly edited, and a second fulsome account in *The Poetry Review*. It is this review on which I wish to concentrate. Horovitz sees the book as an inadequate heir to his own *Children of Albion* and - to be personal for a moment - I do hope that it impresses a contemporary 15 year old buying it at WH Smiths as much as the earlier book once impressed me (and still does, re-reading the best of it). Indeed, my own experience is exactly that described by *New British Poetry* editor Ken Edwards: a reaching back to American poetry after having gauged the Englishness of Fisher, Harwood and others.

Horovitz, however, seems unhappiest with the book's final section "Some Younger Poets", which contains many poets published in *Pages*. Edwards' own poems, which exist in the tension between commitment and formalism, are mauled by Horovitz, damned for their supposed "academicism", for resorting to "mental smoke screens". Horovitz' rhetoric fogs an easy dismissal of any ambition to think through difficult forms. (This, despite his own *Guardian* criticisms of Forbes' review, in which he quotes Schwitters' exemplary: "I prefer a language through which you cannot understand things so common and mundane that everybody knows them already. I prefer a language which provides a new feeling for a new future.") Edwards is only saved when a touch of the colloquial ("... down to the one/Poor fucker, Waterloo surgical spirit/Drinker..."), excites Horovitz with its realism.
He senses that Edwards "responds to the observable physical world his eyes are living in" and "the words quite naturally start breathing and you can see with him". Oddly, this neoleavisite coercion of the productive reader and its appeals to commonsense immediately precedes his appreciation of the most formalistically inventive poet of the section, Maggie O'Sullivan. In her work she proves that textual experiment is a passion for survival in an observable physical world which is so threatened by unseen ideological forces: this is not breathing and seeing but formal play and passionate thinking.

This lack of focus is not all Horovitz' fault (indeed, he has most thoroughly attempted to summarize the total collection). This last section does contain work which offers itself as a precise transcription of the processes of experience, with its artifice of line, breath and eye, alongside work which turns towards an impacted logopoeia that attempts to expose the mechanisms of language in a serious play of signifiers. The terms I've used here - "experience" v. "signifier" - imply larger debates not yet articulated about this anthology. Just as it is not merely "academic" to be intelligent, or unimpassioned to be "experimental", it is not deadly to be theoretical, although theoretical speculation (and the poetry it accompanies) can prove lethal for both the poetry and criticism of unprominent experience.

ROBERT SHEPPARD

Two new ideas for Pages: as part of its pages, a series called "Readings": a page or two of analysis or appreciation of a text or number of texts published in previous Pages. I am looking for contributions. If there has been a piece on which you would like to write, let me know. I would like to promote a practical poetics and not just a theoretical approach.

The second project will be a series of folders entitled Resources, presenting valuable information and background on poets who have not hitherto had the chance of presenting their resources.
OUR ASHES  from the German

Barbed wire  is the cloak of Saints
he whom down or darkness covers  lives in sin
Only under the searchlight
can you deny your guilt
only under interrogation  conceal your actions

No-one speaks of the
forty days on bread and water
(who painted the Tintorettos
on your cell wall?)
no-one speaks of your walk
to the cess-pits
   no-one helps you carry the
      latrine-buckets-
and doing that
   you broke down
      more than three times

No-one came
   only a black bird of smoke
and later the murderers
   appeared punctually
they carried the sun
wounded/pierced/bleeding
on their bayonets
   to the black wall
Walk
said a voice
five paces to the wall
and don't look round
when you hear the shots

What will happen
when the scream crucifies the sky
what will happen
when the wind destroys the memory
what will happen
when the sunfish leaps in the veins
and the lime obliterates our faces?

The answer is
already given
but which of us
which of us has heard it?
who among the living
can say
he has heard it
who has seen it—
which of us?

We have chlorine in the eyes
and sand in the ears
and eternity
grows silently in our bodies

When will our ashes speak?

HORST BIENEK  tr. Harry Gilonis
The hired men walking your tightrope have won. Now for a week of understudied passion!
New-born diehards on barefooted excursions, ideals like returning flares long gone.

I can hear the sea unravel,
the storm burst over the resinous pines. Let fly the song, untested despite this report.

The panther weeps, the wheatear scents a reason ahead. From naked boughs, the leopard sips.

Lightning pokes about both / of us clutching / the sink, drowning / the fury these hammering windfalls / echo.
as we do when deafened actors suffocate in tunnels of complete failure.

Spain has scraped through, her cracked open vials release their torn shadows. That half-gentleness lights upon the stars.

each one the brain of a spent volcano:

Let us hide in the other room. The monsters you aroused bled normally. But Death called for his nurse, in empty winter seaports; and the long-looked for smoke came loose.

The ambulance gave in to vexation of laws made to forgive the sick, lying in the poisoned snow.

Suddenly the empty laugh, the minotaurs leer, could offer room inside smoking rubble. Now the half-life of cash is the motto of shortage and Fabian toothache dents the age.
On a doomed ocean, the ungrateful pulse slumbers. The ship goes round as yet. But I am cold leaning on his arm, reeds away over.

Gales redden the ear, and the watch-dog shakes in the field. Remember hope, for its honey infects, teasing the heart to stick to the path.

No climbing after sunset then, the woods are private here.

Our four engineers take a nap, play truant from hunger unpropped by the new sexual data.

The image asleep is faithful to another. The horizon soon blazed with an ancient happiness, biting and squeezing the two poles. A beggar sprang up, whose head ached in no language. What kind of unrealistic hunger wanted to awaken Christmas with its bungled joke lost in custody?

You see who blinks. When carnivora direct policy; their political ideas migrate over ice.

And the invincible doctor will give in without caring.

All will adopt the verdict the Incas succumbed only last week. Their avengers swarm over the edge of Courage Falls.

Hell-fiends throng the distant arena; their joints burn with the chance to relive this, their horses stagger in the stream. Vipers suck beside the boat, and these hooks are snatched from their lips.

Whose clouded remarks share the other easel with nuclei free of distrust? Who will plant wildness under shrunked torchlight?

We aren't thickest among unknown metals. We get paid to crouch on overlooked roads, sick of gin capture, while the tide pool brims over. The rightful animals watch:
Your fear of autumn invading the valley, crows sweeping over muddle.

You have kept arcades over both place and time. But history gets sand inside before you want it.
Stealing a jungle where nothing grew, apart from the roofless grave.

We bear in the last future to make the dead yawn. They come on their nights off, afraid to wear the smell of prison. Their geese recoil and tempt the hostage to sub-let.

"The outriders never get dreams, or pull down verandahs. You Latin chisellers are going cheap!" Hector smelled of booze.

You know the lyr-bird stuck fast.

The python is shrugged off.

Grief comes flying to their orbit.

I would sell baby over and over, like a sleepwalker in mysterious fathoms. The missing tears would slither, flush with the seams in his crooked teeth.

See: the faint publicity of the drifting moon pluck off the rind over vision. Hear: grating voices.

While the miniature scars of the harp seal grow rugged.

The injured force you overboard. If you escape the upraised anchor, the revenging fin, a dagger fades which, rubbery at first, means yes—all the skills brought back must die.