Jeanine Leane. *gawimarra gathering*. University of Queensland Press, 2024. 94 pages.
Paperback ISBN: 9780702266324 AU$24.99.

Jen Webb. *The Daily News*. Recent Work Press, 2024. 104 pages.
Paperback ISBN: 9780645651324 AU$19.95

Hazel Smith and Sieglinde Karl-Spence. *Heimlich Unheimlich*.
Apothecary Archive, 2024. 53 pages.
Hardcover ISBN: 9780648807995 AU$35.00

This literary trifecta has more in common than might appear at first glance: they are all "gatherings" of "unfinished business" (Sarah Holland-Batt on *gawimarra*); all "homely/unhomely" explorations "weaving . . . raw living matter into usable yarn" (Chris Arnold on *Heimlich Unheimlich)*; all "listening to the voices that make up our everyday experience" (Judith Crispin on *The Daily News*). And while their individual artifice is distinctly different, they all believe that poetry is a compelling way of knowing and apprehending "reality." They are all purposeful, interrogative, radical.

gawimarra gathering richly deserves the praise and awards conferred on it, e.g. by Sara M. Saleh, Mykaela Saunders, John Kinsella and the 2025 Victorian Premier's Literary Award. Its three sections serve to "please and teach" but, more pressingly, demand an end to bullshit and blandishment. Aptly, it begins with an invocation of *maliyan*, the soaring eagle: many of the poems are fierce, dangerous, confronting. The first *gawimarra* of poems celebrates Blak women's deep, rich knowledge and understanding of the connectedness, complexity, pleasure, and pain of history and landscape expressed in "Country."

"The Gatherers" opens the collection by showing how gunhinarrung (grandmothers) gather food along the Murrumbidgee: "custodians of / place—keepers of the secrets of women / teaching the young minhis and mingaans the lore of the land." The dense free verse is ripe with language, imagery of food, work, physicality and relationship, as "Baiame watches." It made me think of another "pastoral"—different art form, different century, European—Millet's *Gleaners*: in both works there is "beauty" and a critique of an "other." Here, it's the "Colonial collectors [who] come steal and kill," though "the seamless baskets of the mind / . . . will never unravel."

"Black Swan" an apostrophe poem recalling, for me, William Blake's "The Tyger" or "The Sick Rose" and, more locally, Barron Field's "Kangaroo," creates an iconoclastic critique of European imagining and enforced containment: "you sailed beyond their dreams / . . . south of impossible." Elsewhere, "secrets" and "searching" dramatise an Aboriginal girl child's knowledge of what is hidden and forbidden; beneath the "clothes" and "pictures" and administrative blandishments of "octoroon" and "illegitimate" are "hidden stories" of Australia's obscene sickness: "there's a pandemic in this country / begun in 1788."

In the second section "Nation" the tone of the poems changes markedly to something more violent and accusatory, the anger of the poet and her people is fleshed out, continuing Kevin Gilbert's Bicentennial metaphor of Aboriginal writing in English "rattling the chains." Leane's voice, prompted by self-admonishment ("cleanse me from colonial silence") moves from a gently mocking irony to a withering denunciation of Australian hypocrisy and enforced inequality, in the dramatic monologue "Historians": "*Sixty grand* eh? Lotta money. No book or film ever turned up here—mob still waitin'." In "Heal Country. Heal ~~our~~ Nation" Leane's cultural critique is accusatory: "The nation is a masculine myth that makes all our / Countries sick . . . / . . . Australia—the name that erases all our Countries."

In "O Australia" Leane contributes to the ambiguous tradition of national iconoclasm from colonial poets such as Bernard O'Dowd, through Dorothea Mackellar, A. D. Hope and Ania Walwicz by citing the familiar poetic clichés but dismissing their hollow hypocrisy: "get the Black Velvet out of your closet . . . that terror still nulling you." (am I hearing a jibe at Marcus Clarke's pervasive "weird melancholy"?)

Leane focuses on some of the complexities for Blak women in "On International Women's Day": "Between my skin and my womanhood / and my womanhood and my skin are blood and bone." More explicitly, in "They Said I Could Be a Feminist": "I am the history of battery and assault and invading / armies," echoing other poems in sections one and three: "I am a link in a bigger rape chain." She demands a reassessment of historical truisms, calling out the obscenity hidden in polite discourse.

The third section "*ngulagambilanha / returning*" might suggest acceptance or resolution of the bitter critique of settler Australia's continued marginalisation of Aborigines. The penultimate poem "Still Gatherers" seems to reinforce this: Blak women as the "custodians" of knowledge and healing, "refining" the rubbish and "rewrit[ing] national narratives." But for me, the pressure of the poetry in this section is to remind us of the injustice, suffering and devastation of the repeated "rape." In "Forced into images," "Blak bodies are contested spaces / . . . / Australia is a violent translation . . . / . . . I am a bad translation." In "Unfinished Business" the poet revisits the "ruins of a homestead" in Gundagai that her mother cleaned: "I came back to scream at the walls, shout back at the / silence."

Underpinning these poetic tropes, Leane invokes Derrida: "Every text remains in mourning until it is translated" (see the wonderful "Biladurang Untranslated," about the platypus). The mourning in these poems dominates the celebration so that, despite the optimism and generosity suggested in the collection's title and its beautiful cover, it's the darkness, the scream, that prevails.

These fine, multilayered, forceful poems contribute significantly to the "translation" process, mixing language registers and styles, abstract and concrete images, lyricism and manifesto, demonstrating that *gawimarra gathering* is a call to revolution, post Oodgeroo's elegiac *We Are Going*: "gathering" is uprising, swelling, building to a climax beyond the collection's final line: "make [these words] speak."

In Jen Webb's poems in *The Daily News,* a vernacular familiarity belies their subtle strength, tracing, tangling and untangling some of the complexities of thinking and feeling in our diurnal lives. Like the weekend edition of a newspaper or rooms in an art gallery, its six sections offer us different perspectives on "life": a contemporary "book of hours" or a "handful of haibun" (*pace* John Tranter)?

Mind you, I can't help feeling that the first lines of the first poem "First Responders"—"After the apocalypse we sent in the dogs" and the last words of the last poem, "A history of speech": "you close the door. So gently it might have been a breath"—form a consciously wrought frame to this powerful, mature, accomplished collection. In the first poem the metaphorical dogs work with "we" (authorities? humans?) to search for and rescue survivors of the disaster but "When evening came they fell silent, and walked away / their tails held low." There's a strong sense of existential scepticism sustained in Webb's Anthropocene. The final poem looks for certainty in images of personal history e.g. "a door that sounds decisive when you close it . . . a child / who knows precisely when to hang up the phone." However, these last words offer only provisionality, uncertainty in our life's flicker in the eyelid of eternity.

Except for a small handful, these are all prose poems whose compression by the margins sculpts the pared-down words so that poetry's slowing-down intensity is often riveting. They are fine, masterful poems swimming in the mundanity and extremity of minutiae and macroscopy. "Studies in Hysteria" in the "Therapy" section begins "After all the warnings, it's

the spilt milk that brings us to our knees." Not only has Webb cleverly subverted a too-slick truism but the ordinariness of "knees" scaffolds a widespread psychological malaise.

The first three sections, "Fire," "Year of the Plague" and "Weather," are dramatic, arresting takes on some of the big issues, nationally and globally. The next two sections, "Change" and "Therapy," focus more through lenses of personal history, memory, experience and relationships. The final section, "History," has both a grand sweep (see "Foreign affairs" and "History for beginners") as well as a more intimate and introspective focus (see "Eulogy for a dead lover").

"Vexed," in "Year of the Plague," is a clever miniature, beginning with an almost commonplace urban vignette: "The boy with tattoos is leaning over the piano we left / outside, playing half the notes perfectly, wincing at keys / that are way out of tune." It feels like a poem that's going to explore a number of character vox pops responding to the pandemic. But Webb's focus changes dramatically: "There are, says the doctor, currently 50 deaths per million in childbirth." This poetic "fact" is followed by "your daughter" asking, "Hey Google . . . what are my odds?" to which, enigmatically and "coolly," Google replies, "I'm not sure how to answer that." Maybe the eight lines of prose constitute a lineated "decade" like the crisp compression of Eliot's "Preludes" but in Australian demotic, not iambics.

Proleptically, the first poem in the "Weather" section, "Bureau of Meteorology," instantiates a climatic fatalism, "The weather will always change," tempered by the poem "Laws of physics" which refocuses science's "universalist" perspective with "Lover, I am here now." Similarly, in "Weekender" the forces of nature press in on the domestic business of organising and packing up possessions so that, "odds are"—a repeated phrase which suggests more fatalism—stability will persist until random change (inevitably?) dominates. The prose poem, argued Madison Godfrey at the recent ASAL Conference in Adelaide, is a kind of "mosh pit . . . a transgressive space of reinvention" where a confusion of subjectivity is jostled and squeezed by external forces. Webb's poems leave the reader enmeshed in both particularity and universality.

"Change" envisions a "steampunk future" acknowledging impermanence within momentary freeze-frames: "the water that held the sky in its arms / . . . holds you too" ("Swimming in the reservoir"). In "Nature Morte," Webb's "I" takes the reader through three wittily imagined scenarios by which a person becomes a kind of still life: "I acted art for you, being nude duck descending a / staircase, then man walking to the sky, then Oldenburg's / giant peg." From a comic take on European surrealism through modernist American sculpture the images suggest and parody a relationship breakdown as the "I" comes to feel objectified "as a Morandi" against a global backdrop of "the barbeque scent of a continent ablaze." Webb's next sentence changes focus using a more domestic lens: "The house is filled with all you left me before you left me" accumulating images which climax in "A string bag of oranges, slowly turning brown." It's a forceful miniature in which subjective consciousness embraces and embodies a global withering.

The final section "History" is both panoramic and particular: "absence of news is the passage of time." "History for beginners" is a standout grapeshot poem of brittle imagery clustered around "wedding photos burning and curling in the basin." The last two poems constitute a suggestive, insistent tension between fatalism and affirmation. "Eulogy for a dead lover" asserts "old photos tell you it was neither / miracle nor mistake . . . / . . . You let go; you think *I can't* / *let go*, but then you do." "A history of speech" suggests the pervasive impermanence and hypotheticality of existence: memories and images. "Leaving love behind, you place the phone back in its / cradle"—an image of a (still)birth?

Throughout these "poems wearing the costume of a paragraph" (Godfrey), *The Daily News* is pervaded by clear-eyed disbelief, claiming brief moments of beauty and illumination as well as moments of pain, separation and distance. Jen Webb's poetry shows a journalist's

"speaking truth to power" fused with Wordsworthian "powerful feelings . . . recollected in tranquillity." Webb's images are engaging, agnostic and full of restrained moment—I can see why she invokes Auden in her Afterword: "We must love one another or die."

Heimlich Unheimlich by Hazel Smith and Sieglinde Karl-Spence is "a poetry and art celebration"—a very different book from both *gawimarra gathering* and *The Daily News* in that it's a hard-cover art object using words, photos, collage, colour, textures: the paper is photographic quality and the images, background and foreground, bleed and are woven into each other. The texts are in different fonts, styles and forms—both poetry and prose. Its eleven sections trace the intertwined, postwar histories of two women: Hessian (representing Sieglinde) and Muslin (representing Hazel) who migrate to Australia from Germany and England respectively. As well there is a carefully worded and illustrated Preface and extended notes on the text, the art, and the construction of the book, its performances and installations. It's a "text" stitched into contexts of history, gesturing beyond its covers (as are the other two collections, of course) reminding us not only that meaning is significantly in the eyes of the unimagined beholders but is "completed" (incompletely) by the readers and their cultural contexts and awareness. Significantly, for this review, *Heimlich Unheimlich*'s final section is titled "Gathering."

"Archive of the Evergreen" opens the poetry with a scattering of images and phrases across two blue pages—from and about a computer-generated family tree which is "a set of tags / it does not disclose / the lives of the people to whom the names belong / what they were like / . . . / they look like aliens but also welcoming." On the facing page is a mini-collage, including a pic of a young Hessian/Hazel, crouching, reading from a text, juxtaposed with a photo of her grandfather, the pair of them separated and joined by smaller photographic images and words such as "graffiti" and "ghosts."

The next section, the titular "Heimlich Unheimlich," is another double page: white text on deep sepia with disembodied photographic ghosts form a radiating mandala from the young Muslin/Seiglinde on the right-hand page, facing a shadowy notebook page with child-like coloured drawings of a garden: "words do not fit with / the husks that house them." The book's consciously constructed suggestions of "uncanny" and "secretive" behind *Heimlich Unheimlich* are embedded and resonant.

The next eight pages return to Hessian's blue background for "From Rubble to Reliving," a "bricolage not reproduction / [of] scraps scribblings / shreds slivers // memory is a collage not a video recorder // slabs from several separate quarries." The collage is assembled from photos and pages contributed by both Smith and Karl-Spence, including "constructed body parts . . . from hessian and muslin . . . for the original *Heimlich/Unheimlich* exhibition" (Notes, p. 51). Around and behind the collaged images of people and bombed buildings in postwar Germany slide key lines of text such as "history is / a sly bully / and seriously / unforgiving" and, memorably, "belonging has always / been a faithless bedfellow."

"The White Rose" six-page section alludes to the non-violent intellectual resistance movement in Nazi Germany whose "Sophie Scholl, aged 21 . . . / showered her fellow citizens with subversive leaflets." These "petals" suggest the ghostly transitoriness of Hessian's childhood: "she could not recall the moment of her conception, nor tell the story / of her birth . . . // She had to fill the hole to feel whole." This hole is partly created by her father's "walking backwards" from his position as a German officer. In Australia "she learnt the syntax of survival" while her parents "found jobs on a farm / fifteen miles from Griffith."

The next section, another double page of white text in three different fonts on mission grey: "The Vengeful, Directive Angel" inevitably invokes Walter Benjamin's "Angel of History" interpretation of Paul Klee's 1920 monoprint *Angelus Novus*, where history is seen as a series of inescapable cycles of disaster that compel our gaze but offer no hope of escape. A photograph

shows "the girl in the dress with the lace collar is learning to play the violin. / . . . / She was equivocal about her ethnicity, ambivalent about saluting the past." My sense here is that *unheimlich* is dominating the *heimlich*.

"Mill of Memory" comprises ten pages of white text against dark grey collages, occasionally tinted, of Hazel's photos in which Muslin "clings to the clothes of the dead / as if limbs not coverings." Snippets of growing up, weddings, living in Leeds, her father becoming a rag merchant (his "fabric alchemy"—shredding, mixing, grinding—an image of Hazel's own poetic process), watching *The Lone Ranger* "oblivious to the racism it rode" and joking aside, "the Norwegian au pair girl announced / I will 'kunit' for the children"—against a background of postwar Britain and her mother's violin concerts. Maybe it's the "mill," but my sense in this section is that the words and images tip in favour of personal creativity and new-fashioning. The shadow puppets are constituting their monstrous origins into new beings.

"Muslin's Lament" (echoing Purcell's Dido): "will I still be mouthing poems?" is a double-page of a grey leafless winter treescape with a violin-playing child in a shower of yellow blossoms. The text suggests the young girl's acute awareness of some of the conflicting family contexts acting on her: a bipolar aunt's advice: "It's better / to marry someone you dislike than not to marry." Her father's fighting in the German army. Her "mother's boyfriends wrote sentimental love poems from their billets. / You furtively ate the salami, followed by a resounding slap."

"The Oriana" double page is like a more formal memento certificate and collages the 1953 migration from Bremen to Sydney: referencing Queen Elizabeth's coronation; the on-board Crossing the Equator ceremony and "Leaving the boat at Colombo and encountering black faces for / the first time."

"If" is a stand-alone poem on a double-page of greyish (concrete?) wall with shadowy church windows and a foregrounded smiling child—smudges of pastel yellow across the canvas lighten its tones. Its six stanzas pose a Frankensteinian proposition: "if we could re-shape the body / rethink its syntax and its grammar . . . / [five stanzas] / that would be a revolution." Conceptually the poem allows its possibility, and of course, this has been the burden of the preceding sections, but the ghostliness of history and globalism make it unlikely . . .

"Walk to the End of Whistling" returns to the white text on dark background, this time in both English and German—expressing the core centripetality of the writers' collaboration through textual and visual collage: "a soldier ripped apart in an unnamed war / begged me to carry his / body parts home."

Finally, "Gathering" reprises some of the images from both Smith's and Karl-Spence's "histories" as a kind of visual and verbal coda to the collection. It shows both how images and memories "hold hands"; how "transparent overcoats / . . . amplify the garments / underneath," and how "strangers locked together / in transient monogamy / errant songfulness / . . . / . . . look for what we / cannot find we / dig for what we / think we need to / know but what we / cannot apprehend / eludes us."

Heimlich Unheimlich is both more "finished" and more elusive than *gawimarra gathering* and *The Daily News*. It is a finely curated artwork with complex, interlocking and tangentialising texts and images. Like the other two books of poetry, there is a tension, an obversity, at the heart of this volume: it, on the whole, suggests failure or at least scepticism, about pulling all the threads together (or another kind of resolution / restitution)—incompleteness; whereas the book itself is a remarkable achievement, a *livre composé*.

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