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# **Wildlife of Berlin**

## **Philip Neilsen**

Philip Neilsen is a poet, author and editor who has published sixteen books. *Wildlife of Berlin* is his sixth collection of poetry. He teaches poetry & poetics at the University of Queensland and is adjunct professor of creative writing at QUT.

His creative books have been translated into various languages including Chinese, German and Korean. His poetry has been included in prestigious anthologies such as *The Making of a Sonnet: A Norton Anthology* (New York); *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry*; *Australian Poetry Since 1788* (University of NSW Press) and *The Turnrow Anthology of Contemporary Australian Poetry* – the first US anthology of Australian poetry.

With the UK poet David Morley he co-edited *The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing* (2012). He is lead editor, with Professor Robert King and Professor Felicity Baker, of a scholarly book on creative arts in recovery from severe mental illness – *Creative Arts in Counselling and Mental Health* (SAGE: 2015). He has edited anthologies of Australian satirical verse for Penguin and UQP and been a member of the Literature Board. His awards include an Australian Notable Book Award and a Writers Fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts.

Philip Neilsen  
**Wildlife  
of Berlin**

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I was made at right angles to the world and I see it so.

**Elizabeth Bishop**

The trees are coming into leaf  
Like something almost being said

**Philip Larkin**

Then I could fuse my passions into one clear stone  
and be simple to myself as the bird is to the bird.

**Judith Wright**

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**I**

## Marienplatz – Munich

While at coffee in the Marienplatz you say  
that possessions, like regrets, are ridiculous:  
in the square I see them swarm like starlings,  
exclamation marks without a sentence.  
You say it is only logical then  
that there is no such thing as theft:  
I see the star boats return with slack nets.  
You point out a Louis Vuitton bag  
slouched sideways on the next table:  
the old collaborator launched lawyers  
at those who copied his design,  
though even this Bavarian sky  
is a forgery from the east.  
You say there was a time when you would  
have taken that bag and dumped it,  
maybe at an op shop, just to show them.  
At the Museum of Hunting the stairwells  
are studded with antlers and heads, the floors  
patrolled by brown bears, wolves and a lynx,  
their Waldgeist stolen by some taxidermist.  
That night we rock the lacy bed  
with ferocious intent and Frau Mettler,  
morning in her hair, shakes a fat finger at  
our blue eyed impertinence  
but gives us gingerbread when we leave.  
I don't think I will ever learn from all this,  
except that infatuation is another kind of stealing.  
Which is why, long after Munich  
I keep a black elastic hair band in my sock drawer.

After all, when lovers leave it seems unnatural,  
like the stuttering dolls of the Glockenspiel,  
or the trucks with cranes that arrive at dusk  
to remove tubs brimming with red and yellow.  
It keeps them from the quick fingers  
of Jugendliche, the flower thieves,  
night pilots who have no regrets.

## Wildlife of Berlin

The documentary tracks badgers, follows foxes  
in their mellow tunnels and silver dawns,  
the delicate relocation of a bee swarm,  
the nattering flutter  
of squirrels, bats and swifts.

A young scientist abseils from the Rathaus tower  
to colour band peregrine falcon chicks  
with a nurse's care.

Like a compliant snow drift, white swans break and bunch  
under a humped bridge. The voice-over confides with a chuckle that  
'the authorities turn a blind eye to Berliners feeding bread to the swans'  
as they might have done to women  
who hoarded bread, or rope to hang themselves  
after the Russian soldiers moved on,  
no one noticing a fox snout  
or breathing spider's web,  
no seasonal triumph of nature to see  
except children sifting rubble for scraps of pigweed  
or boiling bark for tea.

## Hotel Paris

The tour guide warned about tall women  
in designer suits who smile then bump against you

in the lifts and ooze your wallet to their silk sleeves;  
and there they were, impossibly elegant, sneering

when you backed away, stilt-walking from the demi-monde,  
flame scarved giraffes necking the savannah.

He didn't foretell the small fire in the restaurant  
and the panic in the lobby, the potted palm that flailed

like an octopus, sweets spilling from glass jars like goldfish.  
I saw a giraffe kneel and say the rosary: Chanel, Céline, Chloe,

Givenchy, Gaultier – she had the gift of peace upon her face,  
and I saw the city of light take us into its illumination,

the fashion of serious thought, the gilded bridge  
we crossed over, never entirely to enjoy home comforts again.

# Cane Toad

Fist of olive and autumn  
toad rises from its cup of leaves,

muscles into brink of lawn.  
The ranks advance forty miles

each circuit of the sun, a river  
from Cairns to the Indian Ocean.

Survivor of the Miocene,  
toad could write rhyming couplets,

squat satires on dingo fence  
or vanity of Berlin Wall.

Eco-terrorist and legal immigrant  
fluent in five languages of moisture,

desert-riding like a prophet,  
the dignity of the never-kissed,

toad lowers a head of milk  
in passive resistance.

# Americans are Shooting Elephants

A man fat and flushed as a tallow factory  
scowls behind a lion he has shot.  
His belly circumnavigates the acacias,  
the scrap of a wife's hand on one shoulder.

A blonde girl, cute as a cartridge,  
lies smiling beside her collapsed giraffe.

*A beauty queen hits it clean.  
She sure wiped his dial.*

A whole Brady Bunch family squats with  
their .585 Gehringers in front of a tusker  
who obligingly leaks into the orange soil.

Their grins are aimed exact enough  
to make an orthodontist swoon.

Whether smiling or scowling, oh freedom.

There is no punchline.