

## Neighbouring Pink Ladies' Lament by Alun Roberts

Together we stand naked, the duo  
stripped of offal, meat, feathers.  
Exposed to all elements,  
tickled pink to our bones.  
At the end of our corridor for  
there's nothing in our closet.  
Everywhere is now blank  
spaced off to eternity.

Wish we could have run green fields  
kept safe from predaceous vulpes  
as we dreamt of a vocation  
in our existence unfulfilled.  
We were Kammersängerinnen  
hemmed tight within our coop,  
clucking arias operatic but  
humans couldn't comprehend.

Why didn't our farmer free us?  
Why don't politicians listen?  
Why don't media darlings crusade?  
Why don't diners give a toss?  
We're only a concern for today if  
we're yesterday's indigestion  
no matter the hue of our bones or  
the length of our corridor.

We left on a butcher's block, the duo  
with other timorous beasties.  
Had our existence much value  
after a life on corn and beans?  
And what of twice-toxic additives?  
Could they have turned us pink  
or will they be a reason for  
increased gastric trauma or sick?

Been caught in a causality dilemma:  
did we come first or was it our eggs?  
But that's of little consequence  
in the grand scheme of bird life,  
for we're just profit and nutrition  
to a World that doesn't care  
apart from glitz, glamour and ...  
appearance over substance.

## **Turbans And Tommies**

And when they set sail from the warm Indian Ocean  
they promised to return home while we said much the same

and on arrival in Europe they paraded next to us  
and while they wore cotton drill we were grateful for winter kit

and marching through Flanders their routes meandered like ours  
and when they were misled we were also let down

and as they dug dark trenches we sweated together  
and surviving in those trenches we all waded guts and mud

and when they ate fresh curries we had Maconochie from tins  
and we all drank tea brewed from putrescent hot water

and when cannon roared thunder they cowered close beside us  
and when they were afraid they stunk just as we did

and when they proffered prayers we did to our God too  
and when they wrote home they lied just as we did

and when they spent cartridges their aim was true like ours  
and when going over the top we were all foolhardy yet brave

and when they cried in pain our tears outflowed with them  
and when their blood spilt it was crimson like ours

and when they were taken they fell prostrate alongside us  
and when loved ones heard they were as distraught as ours

and when they were buried we lay together in alien fields  
and now they're honoured at Neuve-Chapelle and Alrewas.

Yet they travelled around a world of trauma and nefarious conflict  
through mustard agent and bullets to disfigurement and decapitation

amongst millions of lives sacrificed en pursuit of a freedom  
we share as brothers, as neighbours now a century later.

*Inspired by 1.5 million Great War brave volunteers from pre-separation India and  
"For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front 1914-18"  
by Shrabani Basu (Bloomsbury 2015)*

## **We Are All Much The Same**

Peel away our skin,  
shave off our hair,  
silence our tongues,  
we are all much the same  
in front of our God. Heads

full of random squiggles,  
curved outlines,  
abstract shapes,  
prejudices that make no sense,  
we have them all. Our

ears that do not listen,  
eyes that will not see,  
mouths exuding bile  
with hurt, no remorse. Yet

we are captured for our beauty,  
for posterity,  
for our ego,  
by artisans of oils  
who portray what we fear. For

the colours they paint  
are but the same,  
only we differentiate  
black, white, brown, yellow  
and shades in between. Then

in front of our God, true  
neighbours are much the same.