



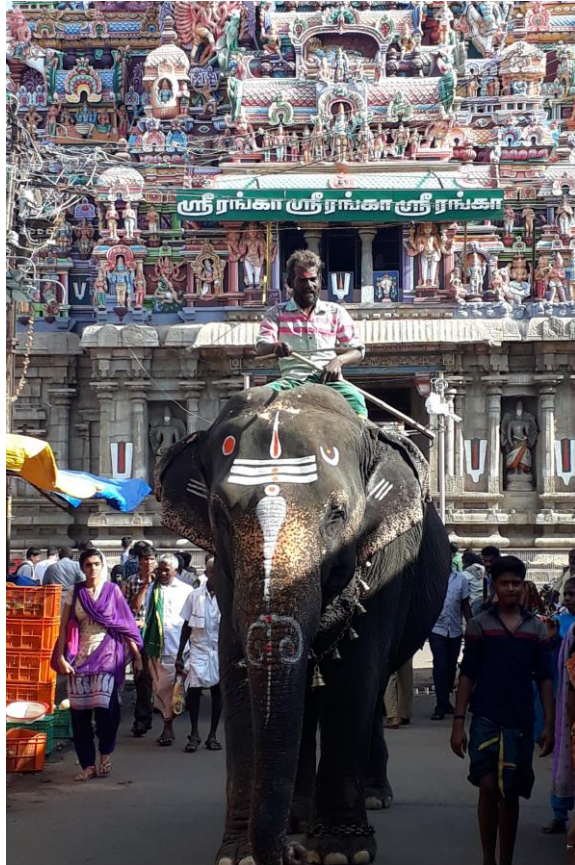
A
Year of
Poems
2023



Temple Elephant

The temple towers over
the mayhem that is Madurai.
Intricate carvings adorn its sides
from ornate roof to dusty ground
where street vendors sit in shade
selling souvenirs and garlands.
Inside no peace, no calm but
a heaving mass of humanity
as tourists and worshippers
jostle for space in a sea
of bobbing heads.

A tinny bell rings out
to herald the entrance
of the holy elephant.
The crowd parts like the ocean
before a battleship
as the huge beast
forges a path through
the waiting crowd
placing one foot placidly
before another regardless
of the bare-footed crowd.
Awestruck faces peer up
the walls of its grey hide
to the fly-swatting ears
and the scented garland
adorning the giant neck,
The elephant sails serenely
through the awed throng
and enters the Inner Sanctum
without a backward glance.



Margaret Hardy
January 2023

Beach Bar

January

Winter wind whips sand
Past a grey roiling sea.
Tables and chairs huddle
Behind closed doors
Sunbeds wrapped in plastic
Windblown dog walkers
Seek shelter, hot
Chocolate and chorros.



April

Tables and chairs unfold
Like petals of spring flowers.
Wet- suited swimmers
Brave the cool sea.
On the beach the yoga class
Points towards the sun
At the bar coffee drinkers lift
Winter faces to its welcome rays.



July

Holidaymakers throng
Ice clinks in glasses
Drinkers in beachwear
Sip cocktails and soak up sun
Oiled bodies lie on sunbeds
Sacrifices to the god Helios
Children play in meagre shade.
Only swimmers stay cool



October

The last sun worshippers
Glean rays of autumn sun
As the sunbeds recede
Children splash in sea
Play on the expanse of sand
Drinkers stretch tanned legs
Throw balls for dogs, enjoy
Autumn sun and Sangria.



Margaret Hardy
February 2023

The Face

A face
seen in a broken mirror,
eyes, ears, nose, mouth
twisted into a nightmare.
Blank eyes misaligned
ears like shattered shells
mockery of a mouth
topped by boxer's nose,
hair hanging long and lank
in strands of tangled string.
Domestic violence?
Awful accident?
Drawing of 'MuMMy'?
Or the genius of Picasso?



Margaret Hardy
March 2023

Exmoor

A wild untrammelled landscape,
a canvas of bracken and wilderness
daubed in shades of brown and green
dotted with splashes of yellow gorse
and pools of purple moor grass.
Wind tangled trees huddle together
branches twisted into tortuous shapes.
Squat hardy sheep tear
tough tussocks of grass
heads bent, intent on eating,
impervious to the elements.
It is bleak, hostile country.



Suddenly
a chestnut pony gallops
into the picture
head tossing, heels kicking
black tail swishing.
Exmoor wild and alive.



Margaret Hardy
April 2023

Fado

A voice and a guitar.

The voice sings
of feelings
of heartbreak
of loss.

The guitar cries
its accompaniment.

Fado is music, poetry,
the Portuguese soul -
a tribute to the agonies
of the oppressed
the distressed
of the marginalised
the stigmatised
the common
the forgotten.

a voice and a guitar.



Margaret Hardy
May 2023

The Swan

I sail serenely up the river
stately swan
my feathers snow white
and perfectly preened
by my beautiful beak.
I survey the scene
with ebony eyes, and
dip my long slim neck
to nibble decorously
at the water weed
presented for my delectation.
I am the personification
of peace and serenity.



But

if danger threatens
my wings flap ferociously
beady eyes bore
into the enemy.
My beak becomes a dagger
to thrust and thrust again.
I honk a war cry
hideous to the ear,
a warrior on the warpath
Serenity forgotten -
more hawk than dove.



Margaret Hardy
June 2023

The Poet

I met him on the Artists' Path,
a poet sauntering
to a Sunday sonnet,
his suit of metaphors
well brushed,
his words well-worn
but polished.
A poet well-versed
he carried his rhymes lightly.
His measured step
beat a regular rhythm.
A man of amazing alliteration
he greeted me gaily
with a rhyming couplet:
'I'm so sorry I can't stay;
Do have a delightful day'.
Then gathering his words
he wended his way
thoughtfully
towards his next poem.



Margaret Hardy
July 2023

Paradise



‘Paradise is a lake
surrounded by snow-
capped mountains.’
(Advertisement for Zell
am See 2004).

They came in multitudes
from the hot, dry lands,
the men black-haired and bearded,
the women covered head to toe,
bejewelled, with hennaed hands.
They gazed in awe at the lake -
So blue! So beautiful!
They looked in amazement
at the mountains - So green!
and the trees – So tall!
They marvelled at the snow
So white! So crisp! So cold!
They lifted delighted faces
to the rain – So fresh! So cool!

And they gave thanks to Allah
for this foretaste of Mecca,
for this paradise on Earth.

Margaret Hardy
August 2023

What is Pink?

Pink is the younger
sister of red
gentler and prettier
it could be said.

Pink is a blush
an Everton shirt
a flamingo
a party skirt

You can taste pink
in a rosé wine
drunk chilled outdoors
when the weather's fine.

Pink sugary treats are
a sweet-tooth's dream:
marshmallows, candy-floss
strawberry ice-cream.

A pink sunset
is the prettiest sight
before the day
fades into night.

You can smell pink
in many a rose
a delicate pink
that tickles the nose.

You can hear pink
in the softest voice,
the sound you'd choose
if given a choice.

You're 'tickled pink'
if something's funny.
If you're 'in the pink'
your life is sunny.

If you doubt pink has a role
just look around and think
how dull life would be
if we didn't have pink.



Margaret Hardy, September 2023, with thanks to Mary O'Neill, Hailstones and Halibut Bones

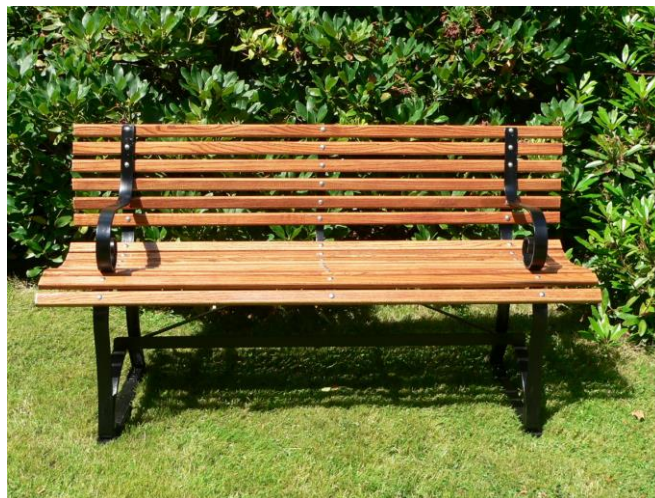
Four Feet and a Park Bench

Four feet approached
Two in trendy trainers
Two in pretty pumps
Wooring whispers, a kiss.
Four feet turned as one
And wandered away.

Four feet approached
Two in brown brogues
Two in high heels
Loud voices argued.
Two feet turned right, two left
And stalked away.

Four feet approached
Clad in sensible shoes
Moderated voices murmured.
Four feet stood carefully
And walked slowly
Companionably away.

Four feet approached
In worn-out boots
Sounds of slurping
A breaking bottle,
Four feet staggered
Drunkenly away.



Margaret Hardy
October 2023

Poppies

Poppies in your peaceful fields
You missed all the action -
Heavy boots marching,
tramping across your land
rolling tanks groaning,
churning up your soil
planes flying low,
huge shadows stealing
light from your ground.
Finally the cut of spades
blades slicing deep
into the soil of your fields
where they buried the dead.

And then you appeared -
blooms of bright scarlet
like huge drops of blood
in the peaceful fields.
You'd missed all the action.



Margaret Hardy
November 2023

A Modern Cinderella



Cindy wasn't going clubbing
her Step-Mum said with spite,
she had too many chores to do
enough to last all night.
Meanwhile her ugly sisters
were straightening tangled hair
for they were going clubbing.
Life really wasn't fair.
When Step-Mum went to Bingo
Cindy took her chance -
in best gear and make-up
she legged it to the dance.

Cindy took to the dance floor
and immediately caught the eye
of an amazing dancer
a really handsome guy.
They danced so well together
other dancers stopped to stare.
The sisters gave the evil eye;
Cindy didn't care.

Next day her nasty step-Mum
gave Cindy every chore -
punishment for disobeying.
A knock came at the door.
Enter the handsome partner,
'A talent scout saw us dance.
Here's a contract for a TV show.'
Cindy seized her chance.

'But you didn't find her shoe!'
Step-Mum shrilly cried.
'No, we air dropped numbers',
a puzzled 'prince' replied.
No need for fairy helper,
Cindy did it on her own -
landed prince and riches
with the aid of her mobile phone.



*Margaret Hardy
December 2023*