



# The permanent struggle for hope: Three suburban pieces

Tony Ulyatt<sup>1</sup>

## The home sweet home paranoia syndrome

[Variations on two themes by David Cooper]

*From the womb we are born into the box of the family from which we progress into the box of the school.*

*By the time we leave school we have become so conditioned to being in a box that from then on  
we erect our own box, prison, bin around us – until, finally with relief,  
we are put into the coffin or the oven.*

David Cooper

*There is no hope. There is only permanent struggle. That is our hope.*

David Cooper

back then, in the 60s, most folks lived  
in 'boxes, little boxes, made of ticky-tacky'  
they even crooned about those home sweet homes  
in clichéd pretty sing-song ditties  
nowadays, the ticky-tacky is more sumptuous  
each box fitted out with all mod cons  
barricades of Devil's fork  
screaming alarms  
and  
blinding lights  
all unlikely to bring anyone running  
from their homes  
for fear they might get killed  
or  
worse still  
maimed in some wanton mêlée

the ageing canary that hung in a cage  
from a skew verandah beam  
chirped his last Carpe Diem long ago

a steel-barred cage prevents the thieves from being  
led into temptation  
and absconding with our cars  
at night  
guns lie zealously under the bed  
poised for the instant  
the dogs of war begin to snap and snarl

we do our Sunday oblations armoured  
in the certainty God will deliver us from evil  
but just in case  
we beseech the help of Devil's fork  
to keep the demons out our churches  
and to keep the demons in  
our mental asylums and old-age homes  
while graveyards nestle  
in the keen embrace of razor-wire and fences  
even the dead must feel secure  
although we're on our own in the suburbs  
we'll never be lonely

### Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

**Affiliation:** <sup>1</sup>Research Unit: Languages and Literature in the South African Context, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa

**Email:** chinkoa@vodamail.co.za

**Postal address:** Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom 2520, South Africa

**How to cite this article:** Ulyatt, T., 'The permanent struggle for hope: Three suburban pieces', 2013, *Literator* 34(2), Art. #1043, 3 pages.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/lit.v34i2.1043>

**Copyright:** © 2013. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS OpenJournals. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.



wedded as we are to the terror and its shadow  
 they settle in  
 colonising our minds  
 making themselves at home like family  
 unpacking their paranoiac baggage  
 meanwhile  
 incarcerated in our fragile tin-roofed forts  
 we do battle with our daily dread  
 unlikely unwilling or unable  
 to forgive those who trespass against us  
 the ineffable questions sired in the shadow of death  
 still torment us

**paranoia** /parəˈnoɪə/ noun.

[Origin: Modern Latin from Greek, from *paranoos* distracted, formed as *para-*<sup>1</sup> + *noos*, *nous* = mind]

1. Orig., dementia. Now, a mental illness characterized by delusions of persecutions, unwarranted jealousy, or exaggerated self-importance.
2. A tendency to suspect and distrust others or to believe oneself unfairly used.

**syndrome** /0ˈsɪndrəm/ noun.

[Origin: Modern Latin from Greek *sundromē*, from *sun-* syn- + *drom-*, *drainein* run.]

A group of symptoms or pathological signs which consistently occur together; a condition characterized by such a set of associated symptoms.

*Shorter Oxford English dictionary*

\* \* \*

## Suffer, little children

### [Variations on a theme of Mary Lamb]

*A child's a plaything for an hour\**

Mary Lamb

her father  
 robust city councillor, stout pillar of the church  
 taught her the tricks of pleasuring him  
 when she was five or six  
 he always waited until her mother had gone to work  
 too small to clamber over the Devil's fork  
 she was too small for revenge  
 she loathed the sight of him  
 especially afterwards  
 and on Sundays in church  
 resting his paternal hand high up on her thigh  
 nothing sacred there  
 like a spectator at an execution her mother smiled  
 her Sunday smile  
 dear jesus the child would pray i could come to heaven now  
 and be with you safe for ever and ever  
 but jesus must have been busy with more important things  
 when at last her father had a heart attack -  
 the notion of a defenceless assault pleased her -  
 she listened to the crematorium's fiery furnace  
 then threw his ashes on the wind-swept rubbish dump  
 - another wicked irony -  
 but still  
 the tendrils of her wretchedness coil relentlessly about her

\*This quotation comes from Lamb's book entitled, ironically, *Parental recollections*.

\* \* \*



## ‘To love, honour, and obey’ [Variations on a theme of William Shakespeare]

*Such duty as the subject owes his prince  
Even such a woman oweth her husband\**

William Shakespeare

for years she felt the weekdays go by  
with every blow every clout every punch every pummel every hit  
every smack every strike every bash  
every flat of the hand every fist

MONday-TUESday-WEDnesDAY-THURSday-FRIDay

then

the weekends came around as unstoppable

as his pulverising barrage

her face swollen eyes shut lips split

jaw broken ribs cracked

so she could scarcely breathe

some teeth gone too

then he'd weep and blamed the drink

he couldn't give up

if the truth be known he wouldn't give up

he'd tried so many times and failed over and over

he beat her for that

then he'd weep

she said she would leave

he beat her for that

then he'd weep

she said she would call the police

he beat her for that

then he'd weep

she said she would take the kids

he beat her for that

then he'd weep

she took refuge with friends

he beat her for that

then he'd weep

she even said she loved him

he beat her for lying

then he'd weep and weep

making promises she knew he could never keep

in fact would never keep

or even make an effort to

he was still snivelling and grovelling and pleading

when she blew his brains out

using the revolver he'd threatened her with

umpteen times before

his family said she was the worst thing that ever happened to this good man

he was kind and gentle and loving and a wonderful father

but

his brutish language

attached completely different meanings

to the terrible words

she discovered in his dictionary by mistake

kindness

gentleness

forgiveness

love

\* *The taming of the shrew* V.ii.156

\* \* \*