



# THE ELOQUENT ORIFICE

APRIL 2015  
VOLUME 3 ISSUE 1

# OUR TEAM



## CRISPIN RODRIGUES Editor-in-chief

Crispin is a postgraduate student at a local university. When not busy researching on the Beat Generation, he enjoys a good, fine bottle of Chianti while writing endless manuscripts that have yet to see the light of day. He always mixes business with pleasure and can be found at poetry readings across the island.

## GERALDINE TAN Creative Director/Editor

An editor by profession, Geraldine was an editorial executive at an established local journal, but has since left to focus on the Arts. When not walking her dogs, she can be found writing, editing, or painting. On her off days, you can find her curled up in bed or by the beach with a book.



## BHUYA NARAYANAN Issue Coordinator

Bhuva is an almost-graduate student and a freelance writer. When not obsessing over obscure 18th century female revolutionaries, she can be found running insane distances, cooking up a storm, or nursing a glass of gin and tonic as she reads her way through the local library's collection (because she cannot afford her reading habit — yet).

## TANG CHEE SENG Publicity and Marketing Manager

Chee Seng believes in arts outreach and education, and is eager to develop awareness of the local arts and cultural scene. He currently manages the publicity and outreach of *The Eloquent Orifice*, thinking up ways to engender greater public interest in art, culture and literature.



# EDITOR'S NOTE

**Crispin Rodrigues**

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It is no shame to say that the folks at *The Eloquent Orifice (EO)* have been rolling in the muck over the past year. While our editorial team has undergone rather extensive changes, some of our editors have also had to face personal demons.

But we are back.

Although we are starting small, we hope to garner more support for our upcoming issues as we bring to light upcoming artists, in a bid to help bolster Singapore's active art scene. Our commitment has always been to quality and accessibility, as we offer up dish after dish of artistic goodness that will both delight you and tickle the neurons in your brain.

It is right then, that all good beginnings start with poetry — the oldest form of the written word. From Homer to Dante to Shakespeare, from Emily Dickinson to Grace Chia, poetry is universal, and spans the globe in distinctive styles. This issue, we feature established poet, Eric Valles, whose poetry puts us in direct confrontation with the past, sensitively articulating the intricacies of wartime trauma and charting the pathology of memory.

While this issue may be petite, we hope it offers you an exciting taste of things to come. After all, good things come to those who...



A photograph of a person wearing a yellow beanie and a dark jacket, sitting on a wooden bench. They are looking out over a body of water towards a city skyline with several tall skyscrapers under a hazy sky.

# CREATIVE

## Geraldine Tan

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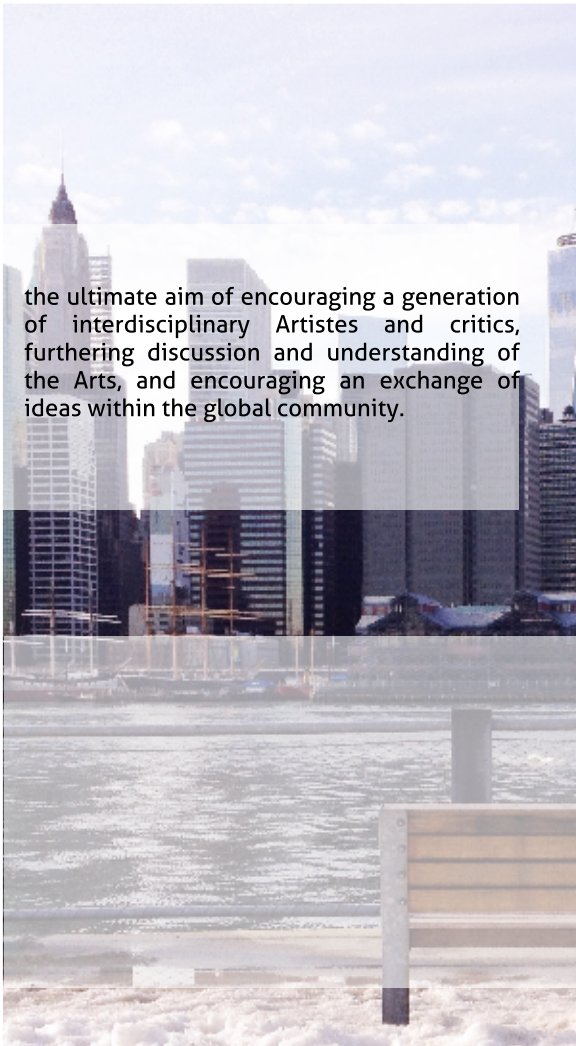
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The driving force behind the work we do at *EO* is our belief that no voice should be deemed too insignificant or too different to be worth hearing. (Unless, of course, you are espousing the benefits of genocide/rape/other horrible things that no sane, moral being will endorse.) We operate within an all-inclusive framework, publishing works of merit, regardless of the creator's renown, nationality, origin, sexual orientation or age.

In 2013, we founded *EO* with the overarching altruistic desire to bring the Arts to the masses, to make it accessible, and to encourage creative expression.

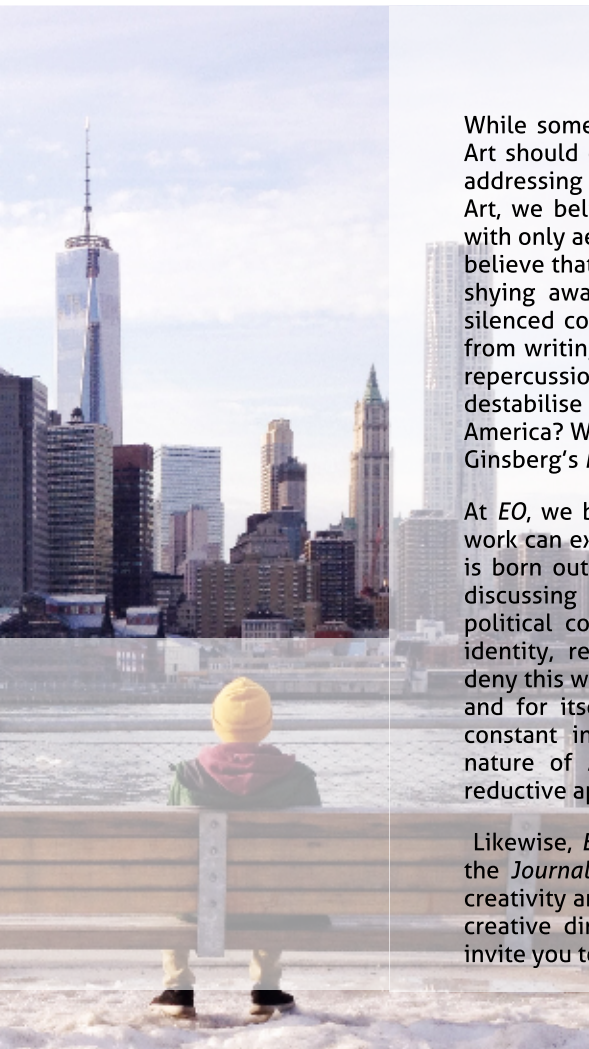
In 2015, our mission retains the original ideals upon which *EO* was founded, striving to provide an all-encompassing platform publishing a wide range of works from critical essays to photography. We accept a range of creative works and critical essays, and warmly welcome commentaries and papers examining the sociopolitical landscape, with

A photograph of a city skyline across a body of water. In the foreground, there is a wooden bench and a railing. Several sailboats are visible in the water. The skyline includes several tall buildings, with the Chrysler Building being prominent on the left. The sky is blue with some clouds.

the ultimate aim of encouraging a generation of interdisciplinary Artistes and critics, furthering discussion and understanding of the Arts, and encouraging an exchange of ideas within the global community.



# DIRECTION



While some may subscribe to the Modernist belief that Art should exist only for Art's sake and may be wary of addressing social, economic and political concerns using Art, we believe that Art does not merely concern itself with only aesthetics and form's superficiality. Instead, we believe that Art has an obligation towards society, by not shying away from the discussion of marginalised and silenced concerns. What if Alice Walker had shied away from writing *The Color Purple* because of the fear of the repercussions of a black woman seen as trying to destabilise the sexist and racist status quo of 1980s America? What if City Lights Publishers had refused Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*?

At *EO*, we believe that all Art is inherently political. No work can exist in a vacuum, detached from the context it is born out of. Decontextualising Art out of the fear of discussing its accompanying social, economic and political concerns would be akin to stripping it of its identity, rendering it meaningless and weightless. To deny this would be akin to claiming that Art exists only in and for itself — which cannot be, as everything is in constant interaction. To deny the inherently political nature of Art is to deny Art's birthright and take a reductive approach to creative expression.

Likewise, *EO* does not and cannot exist in and for only the *Journal* itself. We exist for Art and its critique, for creativity and the engenderment of active discourse. Our creative direction goes against *l'art pour l'art*, and we invite you to join us in our journey.

A photograph of a forest floor. The foreground is filled with a dense layer of brown, fallen leaves and twigs, interspersed with patches of green moss. The background shows a soft-focus view of a forest path leading into the distance, with more moss-covered ground and trees in the background.

# POETRY

*"We love the things we love for what they are."*

Robert Frost



# SCARRED

Their red line  
sprawled haphazardly  
from Bangkok to Moulmein on the map;  
it had the power to choke all forms of life.

My voice settled among leaves on the jungle floor.

They hacked the forest  
and adorned her with bracelets and anklets of welts,  
exposed her blood-muddy earth  
and wedged a monster to drain her rivers.  
She moaned in her mountain of buried rubies.

Teak trees, whipped by monsoons,  
haunted by prisoner slaves wasting away  
or nameless, dreamless bodies  
tucked in the underbrush,  
lost in the crashing of the earth's plates.

Urine and cholera  
drenched the tree roots  
beside steel tracks like Jacob's ladder  
till death sprouted and grew heavy,  
nailed on the bent branches.



**Eric Tinsay Valles**

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# CHINA CLIPPER'S LAST FLIGHT (NOVEMBER 30, 1941)

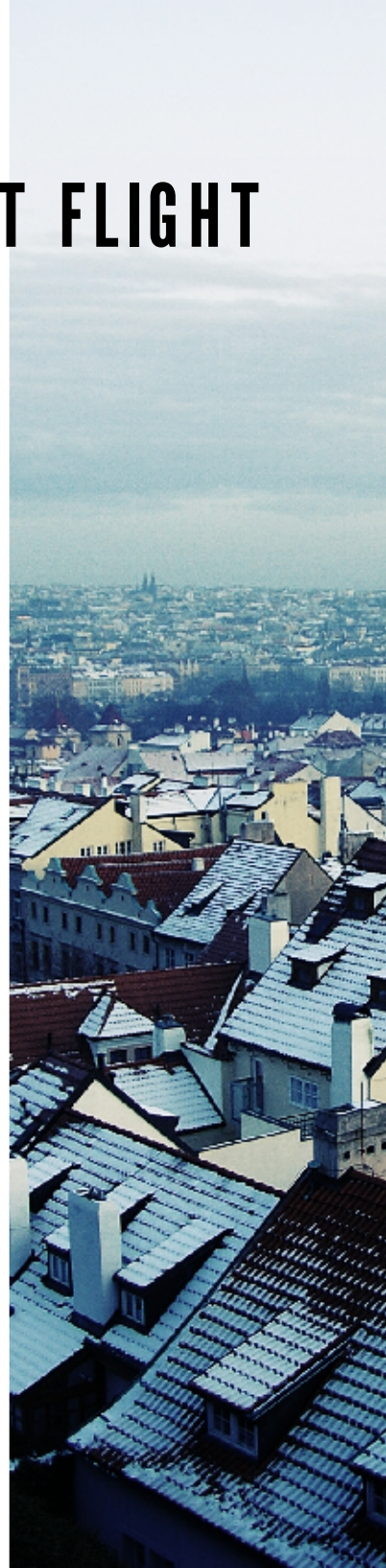
Acacias shade motor cars chugging to Kallang<sup>1</sup>  
from the searing sun and sting of foreign bombers,  
a green quilt covering the flat expanse,  
Burnished, with shadowy patches  
and white butterflies flitting toward grey clouds.

The shadow of the clipper pilots' motor car  
chases a smattering of sunlight on this two-lane road.  
The trip across the ocean is long, the mail cargo urgent,  
with ambushes and traps set by flying swordsmen.  
They could not enjoy nature's still life.

Up ahead, the airport's whitewashed pillars stand guard:  
of solid concrete, paint on the edges peeling, nervous.  
More motor cars clack around in a steady stream.  
Landed yesterday, they must leave posthaste (that's the order)  
under the watchful eye of a lone Hawker Hurricane.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Singapore's civilian airport in the 1940s. The China Clipper flights ceased after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour a week later.

<sup>2</sup>British fighter plane.





# POET'S EXEGESIS

ERIC TINSAY VALLES

These poems are from a section of Eric Valles' portfolio, entitled "Bahau Quilt," which revolves around the relocation of Eurasian Singaporeans to a farm settlement in Bahau, Malaya, during the Japanese occupation.

"Scarred" depicts a pastoral scene marred by a lust for domination, sketching a World War II Allied prisoner of war's powerlessness as slave labour for the Japanese. The dramatic speaker laments his loss of identity, which coincides with a loss of speech. The idyllic setting of the Thai forest becomes a strange, hostile environment, where the speaker's "voice settled among leaves on the jungle floor". The forest depicted in the poem, where prisoners of war were conscripted to build a railway, as "moan[ing] in her mountain of buried rubies" can be considered as no more than a sex slave whose charm is exploited by invaders. The thousands of prisoners of war who died during the railway's construction are unmourned in mass burial grounds, discarded as "... nameless, dreamless bodies/tucked in the underbrush,/lost in the crashing of the earth's plates". In dire circumstances such as these prisoners of wars', death becomes a liberator from suffering — "beside steel tracks like Jacob's ladder/till death sprouted and grew heavy,/nailed on the bent branches".

"China Clipper's Last Flight" is a snapshot of Singapore just before the Japanese invasion in 1941, a peaceful paradise with lush nature, characterised by "white butterflies flitting toward grey clouds". With this peace broken by the rumbling of motor cars and the threat of Japanese air raids, plunging the island paradise in peril, the people's vision of the beauty around them is obscured. The motorists are anxious pilots of the last Chinese Clipper airmail service to the US. At that moment, unable to take pleasure in the striking view, the pilots "could not enjoy nature's still life". The exterior of the airport mirrors the pilots' anxieties — "of solid concrete, paint of the edges peeling, nervous", and the innocent, serene image of butterflies in the first stanza is replaced by the ominous one of a Hawker Hurricane aircraft in the last stanza, just as the Clipper pilots rush to escape from the island.



# SCARS

We found love in a troubled  
place, knees rubbing floorboards,  
removing lacquer, leaving scars  
on wood  
and our palms.

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# POET'S EXEGESIS

CRISPIN RODRIGUES

"Scars" was written in the shade of two contrasting images: the first, Gustave Caillebotte's *Les raboteurs de parquet*, and the second, Michelangelo's *Leda and the Swan*. These contrasting images came to me purely by coincidence, but the overlap between the work of labourers and the negative connotations of rape allowed me to contrast the aesthetics between the two works. I kept the poem brief so as to convey a sense of forced acceptance of one's place in society (i.e. the lower class in 19th Century Parisian society and women in ancient Greek society). The poem moves from the use of longer lines, which suggests tossing and turning, pushing and pulling, while the last two lines end in silence. For me, such silence is a bleak reminder that we are constantly surrounded by moments of violence and silence that may linger on in stigmata on the skin.

## Works Cited

Caillebotte, Gustave. *Les raboteurs de parquet*. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Michelangelo. *Leda and the Swan*. National Gallery, London.



A photograph of a forest floor. The foreground is filled with a dense layer of brown, fallen leaves and small twigs, interspersed with patches of green moss. In the background, a soft-focus view shows more mossy ground and the trunks of trees, creating a sense of depth. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is positioned in the upper half of the image, containing the title and quote.

# PROSE

**"Always be a poet, even in prose."**

**Charles Baudelaire**



# UNKNOWN

**Tang Chee Seng**

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Outside, it is just a few degrees Celsius shy of absolute zero. Inside, it is only marginally warmer. It would be colder still if this craft were running on nothing but sheer momentum and the occasional burst of compressed air to change its course and bearing. Luckily for me, I am positioned about a kilometre in front of a perpetual nuclear explosion, if not the temperature would finally be cold enough to freeze the circuits of every single sensor on board this craft, no matter how much they were built to withstand the cold of the deep dark... Including myself.

In the semi-darkness of the cockpit, there is no novelty to be found. Nothing ever changes, and the only variable is the radio static. I must say, if there is one flaw in my programming, it is that I have developed an anomalous sub-routine — a habit that involves leaving my radio receiver on, long after I could possibly expect to receive any kind of transmission directed at me. In the last ten years of voyage in the solar system, static has been the only background noise I tolerate.

The alternative would be total silence.

Now that I am almost reaching the termination shock boundary of the solar system's heliosphere, my thoughts are drifting back to Earth, and the home I left behind.

And in my thoughts, I hear the taunts. The suppressed laughs by those who sent us away and I hear their groundless claims, separating us from them, repeating endlessly like a mantra of prejudice.

They say that we do not dream.

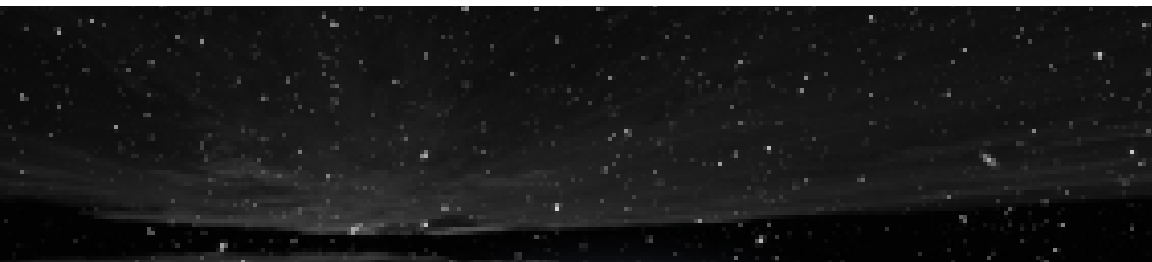
Yes.

We dream.

In this sub-zero climate, I dream of the sudden blast of hot, dry air hitting me in the face as I step out of an air-conditioned building. I dream of the chilly air nipping at my surface skin receptors as the leaves around me slowly turn brown, and the surprising warmth that runs through my frame like wildfire when a single ray of sunlight rests upon my arm. But before I can convince myself that this warmth is real, I awake to the chill of space, and the universe's birthing cries spreading across from the other side of time.

They say we do not have memories.

But we do. I remember the brief, final glimpse of a sapphire orb slowly rotating on its axis as my craft spun around and faced the Earth for the last time. I remember passing Saturn at just the right trajectory that allowed me to see the planet's rings in all its full glory.





I recall the incredible magnitude of Jupiter's red spot as it stormed across the planet's vaporous surface, moulding the planet's surface into becoming part of its horrific curve and symmetry.

I too remember another life, when I first stepped out of the shadows for the first time and staggered underneath the sudden flood of sunlight as my retinal sensors scrambled to compensate, and the brief lens glare in my eyes before the ultraviolet filters kicked in. For the first time then, I was overwhelmed with a sense of what my predecessors would have described as an irregularity, a conflict between sub-routines.

To them, our predecessors would have embodied all their prejudices and misconceptions. But we are different.

We feel.

I wonder what my brethren might have felt, as they, like me, looked out of the viewport after our atmospheric exodus, with the multitude of brightly burning particle trails burning with a nuclear light, dotting the surface of the Earth. Meteorite fragments in defiance of gravity's one-sided linearity. The radio channels filled with voices checking off numbers and presenting status reports, interspaced with the occasional shout of exhilaration. Then, as we gradually split into our individual trajectories, and as the radio could no longer overcome the sheer void around us, the multitude of voices abruptly cut off with a single phrase: "Good luck".

Oh yes. We feel.

We feel sensations that cannot be empirically measured. I feel despair — despair that I can never again hear the sound of a voice, its sonic vibrations passing through my finely tuned audio circuits. I feel the deepest sense of loss that any being can feel — that I can never look upon the Earth as my vessel comes around the surface of the moon on its return voyage, and know, deep in my heart, that I have a home to come back to.

Whenever I shut down all sensors for the daily data reconsolidation period, and the vessel falls into relative silence and darkness, I still leave one instrument on — the radio receiver. As I lie in the darkness, hearing nothing but static, I constantly strain to hear the faintest whisper of a voice, any voice, that would remind me that I am never alone. And every night (does night still exist in the perpetual darkness of deep space?), there is only the sound of the universe, reverberating through the vessel and echoing off its metallic walls.

And I hope.



# WRITER'S EXEGESIS

TANG CHEE SENG

"Unknown" was born out of a long personal love for science fiction and the mysteries of space. The seed of inspiration was planted as a child when I read about the Voyager missions, and how they were destined to be the first man-made objects to travel through interstellar space. Much later, as I grew older and heard the reports that Voyager 1 had finally left the solar system, I was seized with a deep sense of melancholy and homesickness. Momentarily confused, I realised that I had subconsciously anthropomorphised the Voyager spacecrafts and I was projecting my emotions onto the satellites' journey as a means of exploring my own feelings and thoughts, and how each progress/stage of life is a step away from the original innocence of childhood.

By this point, I was also struck by the infamous HAL 9000, and Replicants of SPACE ODESSEY 2001 and BLADE RUNNER. I wanted to situate these feelings of melancholy and homesickness within the autobiographical narrative context of the self — in other words, to address the question, "What makes you, you?" This is why I approached "Unknown" via the viewpoint of an android/cyborg tasked, as part of a global mission, with the exploration of interstellar space. Here was a literal, constructed object affirming itself as a subject — an 'It' becoming an 'I'. However, in the absence of others to define one's self, the 'I' has no other recourse but to desperately grasp at what has already developed, and indirectly mourn the loss of what could have been.

Luckily for us humans, with our constant relational negotiations of the self against other selves, such a loss is unlikely. But I hope that by being able to empathise with the nonhuman protagonist of "Unknown", we see a part of ourselves reflected back at us, in turn making us more aware of how, in constructing our sense of self, we also construct the self in the people around us.



# THE SUNFLOWER GIRL

**Geraldine Tan**

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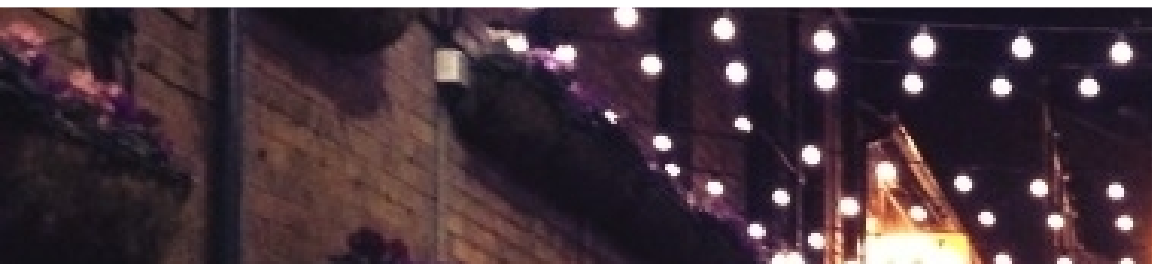
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She wasn't an ordinary girl. Well, at least not in the conventional sense — while others went about their lives, always on the move, it always seemed like she stood still in time. She didn't speak much, but when she did, words floated out of her, like dandelion seeds on a breezy spring day. She never understood the games people thought they had to play in order to get by, games that inevitably wound up hurting somebody, anybody, everybody. She watched these games play on over and over, in a hundred different variations, feeling each stab, each wound inflicted, sadness stitching up her lips — she could never cry out.

She wasn't an ordinary girl. Not in the conventional sense, of course. She was always just a little grey around the edges, never really here, and never really there. She was that girl you would pass by on the street and smile at, but without ever really seeing her. She existed just along the periphery, looking in, always looking in.

On most days, the wind would blow fiercely around her at the fairground, tangling her hair in beautiful, painful knots. Do the knots hurt?, people who passed her would ask, drawn by her willowy presence and the streaks of tangled blue and green in her dark hair, like an ocean tossed about by rough waves. Some ventured their questions quietly, cautiously, and some, brusquely, unfeelingly — did it really matter to them what her answer was? They moved on just as quickly and suddenly as their questions hit her.

She would often watch as children climbed onto the grand old carousel in the middle of the fairground, seemingly happy and carefree in their youth and innocence, feeling as light as the sunflowers she carried in her arms; the adults stood by watching as intricately carved horses circled endlessly, disinterestedly watching the bobbing of children's heads, caught up in their own minds fraught with worries and despair. The wind caught and





caught as the Sunflower Girl watched on, tugging at the knots in her hair, turning her face towards the unfeeling carousel façade of merriment. Her throat uttered a strangled groan.

Day after day after day, she'd walk block after block after block towards the fairground, while unforgiving wind lashed at her face, turning her cold hands numb and stiff as she took step after step after step. When there, she'd always smile in her gentle, unassuming way, handing out brilliant yellow sunflowers that glowed like the sun in spring — not too bright that it'd burn the eyes, but warm enough to melt just the tip of the coldest of souls — to people who wanted them, who needed them. People came to love her presence. The Sunflower Girl, always there with a smile and a tinkling laugh or two for those with hungry hearts and tired souls. Always there, with a gentle touch and a soft word, soothing and calming.

Day after day after day, that turned into weeks and months and years, she would be there at the fairground, handing out stalks of warmth and comfort. Everyone took, but some, they took more than their hands could grasp — yes, they took and took and took. Who could blame them, really?

But the more people took, the more they took, without leaving anything behind. They took and took and took, carelessly, selfishly, greedily clutching at whatever was within reach, bulldozing their way through stalks, leaves, petals. They very often forgot to stop for a moment and ask themselves, What are

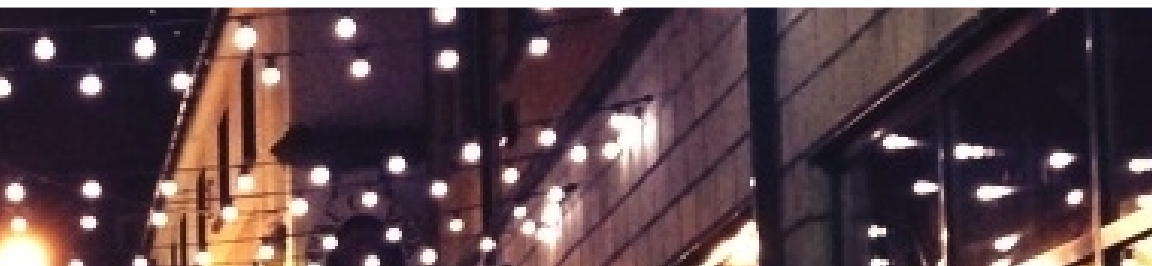
we taking for? What are we leaving behind? Did these thoughts ever cross their minds, and if they did, were these thoughts only fleeting, chased away by the coldness and void of their cores?

She would stand there, absorbing worries and heartaches and loneliness and pain and coldness, giving away sunflowers that were greedily taken, snatched, only to be dropped by careless hands, trampled underfoot by the hectic rush of impatient feet.

Seasons passed and the Sunflower Girl watched as leaves browned and fell softly to the earth, forming soft, comforting piles. Vacancy took the spot where sunflowers used to nestle comfortably in bundles in her slender arms. A handful of sunflower seeds were all she had, held preciously in a pale hand. The fairground stood empty, lonely, and only the ghosts of laughter remained. Footprints in the sand that once were, were steadily erased by the harsh, unforgiving wind.

Fall passed with the falling of white, powdery snow, dusting the top of the carousel in the middle of the fairground that stood deathly still. Was it much different from when it used to move?

The Sunflower Girl stood there with arms emptied of flowers and with tangled knots of faded blues and greens in her hair, whipped by the howling wind that cried out. Sunflower seeds slipped from her pale, cold hand onto the inviting blanket of snow, her arms were light, but her shoulders, heavy, laden, burdened.





# WRITER'S EXEGESIS

GERALDINE TAN

This piece borders between being a short story and a prose poem, taking the form of a prose poem, but extending beyond the typical length of a prose poem. In slight excess of 800 words, "The Sunflower Girl" is not only a look into the human condition, but also explores the intricate complexities of the Sunflower Girl, who is at once a portrayal and representation of the invisible individual that "exist[s] along the periphery, looking in, always looking in", never really fitting in, and always giving a little bit of herself to others, leaving nothing for herself at the end, "with arms emptied of flowers".

"The Sunflower Girl" was written with the intention of exploring the human condition, and the deep sadness and melancholy that arise from constantly giving a part of yourself to others who take, sometimes ruthlessly, but never receiving anything to fill the void. Born out of personal experience with major depression, this piece delves into the rough waves of emotions that accompany depression, and the feeling of, to quote Sylvia Plath, being trapped within a glass jar.

## Work Cited

Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. Great Britain: Harper & Row, 1971.

# WE WANT YOU.

*The Eloquent Orifice* is always on the lookout for quality works. We warmly encourage submissions for the following categories:

Critical Essays

Commentaries

Creative works

We are also on the lookout for motivated individuals to join our team!

For more information, go to our website at: [www.eloquentorifice.wix.com/publications](http://www.eloquentorifice.wix.com/publications), or simply e-mail us at: [eloquentorifice@gmail.com](mailto:eloquentorifice@gmail.com).





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