

## Election Anxiety

by Francesca Ryan

Being human. What does it mean?

A regular question; beating through my heart in search of an answer. Although I'm pretty sure the urgent question right now, is what the hell are we humans doing? A big one. And in these anxious days, we are waiting on the answer from the world's most powerful country.

How the hell have we come to this point? The Chinese curse goes 'may you live in interesting times.' As we witness the destruction that Homo Sapiens has wreaked on the planet, 'interesting' sounds like the deftest euphemism ever. An old teacher of my husband's remarked, "We call ourselves Homo Sapiens, the wise humans. Where do we get the cheek?" Rudi was a Viennese Jewish refugee from war-torn Europe. And yes, his gentle irony tugs at a ferocious fact. Our failure as a species to learn. Surely one of the most basic tenets of wisdom has to be that we are connected to each other. All of us. A truth Metaphysical poet John Donne knew.

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were, any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee."

My dear friend Margot works on the premise that if you want to know the bigger picture in a time of crisis "trust the poets." Meaning that they will give you the inner picture, the testament from the soul. Photographs and footage from the news cycle now have enormous reach, though it can be hard to trust the sources. Especially true now, in this era of weaponised social media. Taking notice of what the poets are saying won't give us a dopamine hit. Yet in the first World War, it was poetry that that could help me understand the visceral effect of mechanised aggression. Their testimony lodged deeper than the facts of my history lessons. Today, the words of the Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer hit home when my sickened eye skates over the horrors of atrocities in Gaza.

We are self-vaunted rational creatures from the Enlightenment on. We have scaled Promethean heights with technology and innovation. There is no doubting many of the resulting benefits. But did we throw the baby out with the bathwater? Elevating the supremacy human mind over all else has led to a peculiar idea: apparently perfectly rational. That we can leave behind the ecological devastation we have wrought on this planet and go camp out somewhere else. Mars, maybe.

It's a mad idea. But it doesn't have to make sense, it just has to sound like it does. 'Sense' has become disconnected to our actual senses. Our physical senses, our embodied selves, are inextricably connected to the Earth. Every molecule. Every breath we take. The fantasy of sustainable oxygenated existence elsewhere is a hubristic fantasy.

Whatever happens at the end of today, I will be sleeping in a warm dry bed having had enough to eat. I am truly grateful, when so many of my fellow humans are denied that basic right. It doesn't have to be like this. Will we ever come to our real senses, we humans? Maybe it will take a collapse; slow or catastrophic. Western civilisation has had a good run. But like the Roman and other civilisations, our time may have run out.

Tonight, I think I'll finish the evening with a glass of wine, and a bit of Alan Ginsburg's 'Howl.' Trust the poets.

*'They bade farewell! They jumped off the roof! to solitude! waving! carrying flowers!  
Down to the river! into the street!'*