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Suicide Note, California Condor

Stephen Ely  
Trumpeter

California Condor  
there is no place for us in a world like this.  
Soon we will be joining your ancestors  
and the world you have known  
for fifty million years  
and the world I have known for twenty  
will wipe us from its memory forever.  
But in these final moments  
as we wait to die, incredulous and defeated  
I will try for us both to remember our lives.  
Magnificent bird  
your vast obsolescence  
rode in from the lumbering Eocene  
already archaic when loping man  
was straining to rise from all fours.  
The death pangs of the dinosaurs  
meant nothing to you -  
the birth pangs of the molten continents  
too, within your vast embrace.  
In a changeless world  
where time was measured in millions of years  
you were perfect -  
in ponderous retreat from the slow encroachment of  
glaciers  
or the ponderous regaining of ground in the million  
year  
melt  
equally you thrived  
right on into history  
until the Spanish and the Yankees voices  
sounded in the sun-scoured canyon  
with the bullets and bulldozers  
poison and snares  
that are driving you into extinction.  
Now,  
as I sit and watch  
this terrible programme on TV  
there are twenty five  
California Condors  
alive on this planet  
and all of them  
held in a cage at the San Diego Zoo.  
This year  
is the first in fifth million  
in which a new California Condor

has not been born to the world  
and the future of the species  
is vested  
in twenty five feeble vultures  
too old, confused and weary  
pampered by desperate people  
in a chicken wire hutch in the desert.  
They have come  
from perfection to obsolescence  
in a microsecond of their massive history.  
And here am I, writing poetry.  
It seems so little, so poor.  
And indeed I am defeated.

I cannot bear to live  
in a murdering world  
whose only civilization is death  
whose only culture, destruction.  
And I cannot bear to live  
in a world without the California Condor  
torn down from the sun  
like a ripped banner  
a ragged black cross  
of its own unbearable absence  
wrenched from the heart of its soaring skies.

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