Sharon Olds contemplates the possibility of a coming Armageddon, as environmental artist Anne de Carbuccia mourns the destruction of our natural resources.

AGING WHEN THE END OF THE WORLD IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING

Near the end of the world, sound went, well before sight. All around me the visible—the black and white markings of the downy woodpecker like hieroglyphs, like characters in Hebrew, or in Arabic, coming in from the right side of the page as if from the future. When I walked I could not hear my footsteps, or the leaves of the November trees, something was shushing everything, it was the end of the world, reaching back like the silence when you leave a lover who’s impossible, but whom you love, or the quiet the day before your best friend dies—crows, crows, in the sky not calling, or the eerie absence of sound when you realize you’re smart, all along you’ve been smart, your ignorance has been the knowledge that you don’t know what you don’t know, like a form of intelligence, and now near the end of the world you understand things, you yourself eschatological, you sense the doctrine of final things. It is like a religious conversion—from non-belief in your own beauty and strength, to sudden belief—the light on the road no longer breaking out, blindingly covering the center of every dream, but you yourself are a light—it’s like falling in love with yourself, the one who had been the villain. When I understand that the world will end, that we will have made it unlivable for ourselves, the birds look so smooth, the sloped grey shoulders of the juvenile female red-bellied woodpecker perches motionless on the mound of the suet and sleeps, like a baby on the breast—head up, eyes shut, she sleeps, at peace, near the end of the world.