

SELLING THE EARTH AND EVERYTHING ON IT

Last night, at the town council meeting, what was it we were trying to save? One council member dozed; the other four were glassy eyed; bored with arguments they'd disposed of months before. The air in the brand new, stale, utilitarian chamber smelled of done deals. And anyhow, what do citizens know? "We appreciate your sincerity," one member says. "Yes, and you've brought a lot of emotion to the issue," says another. "But you don't understand the figures." The tongues of the grass, though they be without number, don't speak to them. They've had our figures. And the grass has no rights. Trees have no rights. The fat, baseball capped developer with his shirt-tail hanging out and suspect financing, and who addresses council members by first name, makes that clear. "If there's an alfalfa field there now or a stand of trees— anyone who buys from me will know up front that that's not going to be an alfalfa field or trees very long. I bought this land to build on." So the deer in the meadow along the nearby creek have no rights, the creekwater no rights, nor the air. No rights for the hare or the hawk, red-headed woodpecker, white-throated sparrow; no rights for the fox. And the farmland disappears and then the farmer, and then.... If, as Paul Valery once wrote, "Politics is the art of keeping out of the process those who will be most affected by it," then I guess you could say we got politicked. And pretty good, too. By day, young brokers roar on the floor of the exchange. By night, to our north, suburbs metastasize. Circuit boards of a trivial and pointless future. As we file out— Goodbye, Goodbye —across the frozen parking lot to our separate cars, thank god it's dark and cold and winter's first hard snow is blowing.

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