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Freeland: Furiant, Not Polka

FURIANT, NOT POLKA

Charles Freeland

I stack the driftwood in the corner and search my pockets for the pipe I dreamt once I smoked, but which has never since materialized, hard as I might try to find it. Things like this ache beneath the skin. But only for a moment. And then it is time to replace them with duct tape and VCRs and those skinny fish that bite when you are careless taking them off the hook. Sometimes, the mattress begins to look like a barrel organ. Or the monkey that goes with it. That lights its own cigars and makes hand gestures that mean one thing in the Piedmont. And something else entirely in New Orleans. I notice the area between lakes has always been a favorite haunt of men who have no clear idea of what it means to be men. Who suspect it has something to do with the way you pronounce your words. Or which words you choose in the first place. Such as "skein". And "rabbit". And that variation on the verb form that makes it some other part of speech. Or confuses your auditor if he is standing more than a mile away. This is the point at which the self tends to go on vacation. It leaves the cleaning-up to its friends and neighbors. To those who love the self, but worry about it because of the way it behaves. Take, for instance, that man who locks himself in his shed, trying to create his own language, trying to fashion it *ex nihilo* the way you might invent a mouse trap on a planet where there are no rodents. Not even nutria. He makes use of letters and commas and poison. But mostly he relies on rubber bands. And those pictograms that look suspiciously like skeletons in houses.