

# NEWFIE ooo NEWFIE Newfie newfie

By Richard **K**ostelanetz

## WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest Editor JOEY CRUSE writes:*

There are many things about Richard Kostelanetz's "Newfie" that I could say. Some I will say here and some I will not. But what I will do, to the best of my abilities, is paint a picture for you about why you ought to take the time and consider his piece as an artifact of literature, the literary mind, and a celebration of its subject.

Although growing up in northern Illinois, I currently reside smack dab in the city of New Orleans – Kostelanetz is a bit of "yankee," as they say down here, living in New York. I have been to Canada once. My brother played hockey, and while we were in Detroit for his traveling team my mother felt it important to cross over into Windsor so her boys could say that they have been to Canada. None of us had passports and the border patrol, being kind, said that it was fine to go into town, spend three hours, and come back – which was the plan. I say that not to let all the contents of my purse out, but to explain that I lack some of the basic fundamental knowledge of the country above me. There's farmlands in the West (and apparently the best weed in the world), the French are middle-right, and as you go east there is an island called Newfoundland. My point being that, at no point in time, what follows is not meant as condescension through a lack of education, but as the best explanation I can offer for what your about to delve into.

Which is where we begin.

"Newfie," as I was told by the editors of *Fleas on the Dog* (thankfully, because I would've never known), is a slang term for the folks of Newfoundland – i.e. "newfies" would be close akin to Americanisms such as "hillbilly" or "redneck" or "yellahammer" or "sheep-fucker" (some overlap is bound to exist). As Kostelanetz will point out to you on page 7, "superior literary humor is jokes that many readers miss, not because they found the material unfunny but because comedy has simply passed them by," and, continuing in the same vein, "superior folk art, including literature, is a wealth of inventions so audacious that no individual could have made all of them up." Succinctly written, these lines tell us a few things: 1) that this piece is meant to be humorous, 2) the piece is meant as a collection of folk(lore) representing a larger idea, and 3) presumably, that if the humor is lost upon you then you are being slightly judged as a human that comedy has passed by (presumed a little too intentionally and unfairly in my opinion).

Simply put, the piece below is a collection of images and places. Each page consists of a map of Newfoundland at the center, surrounded by four places (I say places as they vary in categorization as hamlets, designated places, cities, national parks, abandoned towns, islands, bays, etc.) in alphabetical order to the B's (I'm sure that if this a continuing project then there are many more names that could be added to the list). When you look at this piece for the first time, as I did, you'll more than likely just go, "why?"

My job here is to explain, to the best of one individual's subjective ability to create meaning, the exact why of this piece and my, at times begrudgingly, acceptance of this work as uniquely important.

I looked up every. goddamn. place. within this work on Wikipedia. Name by name, page by page, flipping my computer upside down (because style dictates over readability), trying to find a pattern, a through line, a sense of common ground. I've learned more about Newfoundland in the past twelve hours that I would probably never have needed to know (no offense to Newfoundlanders): one of the earliest indigenous tribes to inhabit the island were called the Beothuk and they had iterations of cultures as long as 500 years, as some suggest, since as early as 1 A.D. – a culture that has basically been declared extinct due to the usual brush ups indigenous people had with Europeans: disease, starvation, loss of lifestyle, etc.; that, contrary to many American beliefs, Harbour Bay can be classified as the first permanent settlement in North America - 24 years before Jamestown and 2 years before those losers in Roanoke got lost; that in 1981 Angel's Cove (now named Patrick's Cove) had 51 inhabitants all with the last name of Coffey; that, on order of Henry VII, an Italian named John Cabot was the first to start settlement of the island, around 1497, under the British name even though the Vikings (L'Anse aux Meadows holds the only known Norse archaeological evidence outside of Greenland) were there around 1000 C.E.; that the French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Basque were all using the area as a fishing ground since the 16<sup>th</sup> century; that the space was technically a British colony until ratified as a Canadian state in 1947 (as Kostelanetz points out in the beginning); that in WWI 5,482 men went to fight overseas and that, of those, nearly 1,500 were killed and 2,300 wounded; that they had their own unique Irish language, now extinct, *Talamh an Éisc*, as well as a not so much used any more Scots Gaelic dialect; that there are lighthouses, national parks, North American relics/history scattered throughout the entirety of the region; and there is so much, much more.

Which brings me to Kostelanetz's comedy. While "newfie" is slang for a group of people who stayed largely independent from Canada, his piece relishes in the history, culture, development, language, the legitimate uniqueness of a place that has prided itself on being self sufficient in such isolated conditions. The comedy behind this piece is that "Newfies" are no joke. I presume a bit obstinate and set in their ways, but having explored their history as this piece will force you to do (and it will, or again, you'll be sitting there scratching your head, as I did, going, "why did this man do this to me again?") it will unveil itself as a rich history, a piece of artwork masked as literature, a performance of repetition and resonance which marks places on a map that you more than likely haven't been to, will never go, or that don't even exist anymore.

You will have your reservations, but the work, all be it pushed upon you by the author, will lead to gems that you would not have expected.

And it for that exact reason why I would suggest taking a moment to look at this artifact of Canada, this artifact of language and place and destination. Kostelanetz, when allowed enough space, apparently all of Newfoundland, WILL allow your mind to create beauty where, on face value, there is only small ironies.

### **QUALITY QUOTABLE(*for the love of language*):**

Alderburn...Archie Campbell's Cove...Angelbrook...Black Cove Fogo...Baie de Loutra...Benoit's Siding...Black Island, Bay of Exploits...Boswarlos...

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *See text.*

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Individual entries on Richard Kostelanetz's work in several fields appear in various editions of **Readers Guide to Twentieth-Century Writers**, **Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature**, **Contemporary Poets**, **Contemporary Novelists**, **Postmodern Fiction**, **Webster's Dictionary of American Writers**, **The HarperCollins Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature**, **Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians**, **Directory of American Scholars**, **Who's Who in America**, **Who's Who in the World**, **Who's Who in American Art**, NNDB.com, Wikipedia.com, and Britannica.com, among other distinguished directories. Otherwise, he survives in New York, where he was born, unemployed and thus overworked.

**EDITOR'S BIO:** Joseph Cruse is a writer, an actor, a bad painter, and teacher. Recently graduated with a masters in Rhet./Comp., when not getting into trouble he explores New Orleans, sprays graffiti scenes of movies onto canvas, and doesn't exercise. His other short story work has been featured in Phree Write and Viewfinder Magazine; while spacklings of poetry can be found at Cacti Magazine and W.I.S.H Press. His story **She Was Australian** appears in this issue (fiction).