## Bearings

My grandfather performs a rite at the table: his hand, the windrose of a compass, is setting up the cardinal points of the earth – the pepper shaker the Cape at Isle aux Morts, the salt shaker the steeple of Corpus Christi, his bible the storm-hewn, sea-stack Pinnacle, and six tricks of cards – the sunkers of Dragon's Tail. (I see them from the thwart during clear weather). In the waves of the wood-grained table he draws two invisible lines that criss-cross from Cape to Dragon's Tail and Pinnacle to steeple – these the needles that mark the family berth – the shoals where we set traps and make our livings from cod we catch and cut and cure and trade –

And this was the centre from which all things turned. This berth-right, this axis mundi, handed down from father to son didn't hold, so I left it behind.

I steered clear of fishing gear, paid no mind to ledgers and stocks.<sup>1</sup>

NE in the blackthickoffog of lobby-parties *I* sailed, floundered, flustered, failed from black-tipped grapnel hooks baited with hash or fishing trips to the shooter bar down at The Strand, and back to Dorset Street to hot-knife, then crash, or record the captain's log – the death, the love, of a Bowater friend or re-read myself awake with my Northrop Frye stash.

SW drifting

drifting

like a ghost-net my-soul

drifting through late-night spliffs and classical Hebrew scrolls or gigging at house parties and after-hour holes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Roots, ancestry, traditions, cod stocks, stock vocabulary, etc.

SE drinkin' doubles down at the Trap<sup>2</sup>, or lured by sirens singing at The Ship,<sup>3</sup> yet saved by some poet's waxing devotion thick as molasses and shaving lotion about the time he drank a pint of Guinness with Seamus Heaney after the Pratt Lecture and after cheddar and chardonnay.

NW at the Salvation Army Thrift store, down to change for socks from cursèd campus sunkers – not Homer's Clashing Rocks – but the Dining Hall Iliad and Corte Real Odyssey.

And these four mad rhumb lines mark out my vices and degrees.4

And still as lonely and lost as a buoy cut off

and shunted far out to sea.

Until jigged by needles, by rememberings of grandfather at the table, the windrose, lining up the cardinal points of the world where I find my true north, my histories, my lines, my lineage, my oldest bearings.

 $<sup>^{\</sup>rm 2}$  Trapper John's is a downtown pub in St. John's.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The Ship is the unofficial artists' pub in downtown St. John's. Seamus Heaney did the Pratt Lecture in 1993 and after the Wine and Cheese did go to The Ship.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> A rhumb line is a path with a constant bearing measured relative to true or magnetic north.