

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 sunkeners 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.¹

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.

¹ Roots, ancestry, traditions, cod stocks, stock vocabulary, etc.

