***The Gauntlet Road***

My father is driving north through snow

from Orangeville on to Primrose, Shelburne, Dundalk

where beyond the big bend at the cemetery

it’s a straight run all the way

the old road scored

into the mind inside his mind

like some primal planisphere

or the photo of his daughter

stapled to the pickup’s visor

but tonight it’s falling heavy

and he’s flanked by drifts and stark

wind devils, tailed by blizzards

heading into whiteout

the weatherman reporting

more to come, a storm front

bearing down across southwest Ontario

so he’s looking out for signs

familiar shapes to guide him

since the centre and the shoulder lines

have dissolved in roiling columns

of hypnotic superfine grainflake

and he’s thinking what would Freddy do

(Freddy who signed up and made it back

from the war without a scratch

who’s not his brother but is more

a brother than the two who were)

wondering would he pull over

but keep the engine ticking

or hold to driving, snowblind

and all the while there’s this war inside his head

in the head inside his head

over how he doesn’t know

what Freddy or the rest would do

(not his father scaling dirt tracks

in his maroon Model A

or his son whose red Camaro

kind of surfs the 401)

because they’re not here

it’s himself alone this time

dicing the ice stung blacktop

he’s driven half his life

to that flare he’s got a bead on

up ahead but still a ways off to the left

that might be marsh gas

foxfire, daybreak, porchlight

or another winter barn gone up in flames

and the horses, those same ones

the Talbot kids rode bareback

through last summer

spooked and out there too

running just like him the gauntlet road.

***The Finger Bird***

When our daughter was five

my father invented the finger bird.

Creature of one too many

birthdays, Christmases

New Years spent apart

it flew up into his hands

with the gusto of a new species

sprung from joyful Borneos.

Just outside her sight lines

he’d play it, meaty thumb and index

tip to tip tap tapping

a silent lingo she caught the drift of

instinctively and ran with it

feathers streaming

through ecstasies of giggles

to this place now where aged sixteen

fingers flashing she talks to him

in sign languages

that private, long distance connection

irreversibly open.

***My Father’s Heart***

He wasn’t there when I was born

I wasn’t there the day he died

the pair of us latecomers

to one another’s entrances and exits.

So it was and yet when it came down

to speaking parts

long distance calls, darkling

redwood conversations

adlibs invented on a dime

we seldom missed the mark

our different languages

edged in equivalence -

*kokoro*, *corazon*

heart of hearts.

I have a bird inside my chest

to match his own arrhythmic animal

fluted wild wing creature

fluttering in electric flight –

the selfsame bird descended

spoke and settled

on the cusp of my arrival

at the hour of his departure.