

Bright Yellow, Ketchup Red

I was crossing a street
when a bus driver
gave me the finger.
I wasn't driving
just crossing a street
with trees, leaves bright
yellow & ketchup red,
when a low ranking employee
of a small town bureaucracy
in an insignificant state
gave me the finger.
Did my face foretell
seven years of drought?
Was I scheming to bring back
the Monkees and the Cold War?
As usual I was lost
between the stuffed tomatoes
of my youth and a future
that says tick tick tock
boom boom. Lost
because I was living
the present I live
when I walk in the afternoon,
not the relaxed
self-assured present
of the morning,
or the contemplative present
of early evening, but
the present that makes me say
"Plastic! Plastic! Of course!"
to the teenager bagging
my groceries at Mr. D's.

So when the bus driver gave me the finger
I gave him the Italian arm.
The brakes screeched,
people inside jerked around
like carcasses
in a hot dog plant.
He stepped out shouting,
big mouth flashing,
but I couldn't hear a thing.
Still, I screamed back
fuck you, fuck you,
& everything changed.
I mean the present.
The present I was living then
was like a country song
with too many slide guitars,
like looking at old calendars:
October 12th, 89,
June 23rd, 91,
March 4th, 92,
what happened on those days?
I wasn't looking back,
but watching my life as though
from a helicopter
or a sewer hole.
The present was me, heart
pounding 140 a minute,
flinging fists & talking trash,
flinging hours at the universe,
headbutting my old friend fear,
kneeing the wide skirts of hope.