

The Hippo at the Bronx Zoo, Circa 1965

JAMES ARTHUR ANDERSON

The mouth opens like a dumpster lid
and, trained to toss, we all comply,
searching bags and sacks and pockets
for trash to fill that gaping yawn.

Some have come prepared:

heads of lettuce, carrots, apples and pears go in.
Someone lobs a banana, still in its blackened skin,
then some grapes, moldy bread, a chunk of cheese...

The rest of us offer what we can:

caramel corn, a bun, peanuts in the shell
and bright blue cotton candy on a paper stick.

I sacrifice my last piece of bubblegum
in the wrapper, Bazooka Joe and all.

Somehow, a cigarette butt falls in and people laugh,
but the hippo doesn't mind—it's all the same to him,
and once the ticker tape parade of chow has stopped,
he shuts his trap and churns the stuff to pulp,
watching us through half-closed eyes,
slopping together the wheat and the chaff
and swallowing it all like one bitter pill.