

New Mexico Quarterly

Volume 23 | Issue 4

Article 10

1953

The Lion-Tamer

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Recommended Citation

Kadow, August. "The Lion-Tamer." *New Mexico Quarterly* 23, 4 (1953). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol23/iss4/10>

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THE LION-TAMER

Always our fear jumps from the veering car,
 the flower-pot fallen from far, or the hiss
 of a snake in the dark, but there they are
 all rolled into five lions, an abyss
 of bars, and ourselves unsafe inside the star.

If he should fall beneath a lion's claw,
 if he should spill the tasteless blood upon the saw-
 dust floor, if he should wastefully withdraw,
 our hateful tongues would lap at the bleeding flaw.

Instead we clap for the foolish staring eye
 nine inches from a hunching kitten's maw
 and say we looked at death and did not die.
 This is so nearly true the smaller children cry
 for the clown's long fingers soft on their hurtful awe.

THE THEFT

Above the burning bauble, his mind turns
 till theft becomes a promise of repose
 beyond the common cowardice. He yearns
 to fold it inward like a secret rose.

He hesitates. His doubting fear will show,
 his hand betray him like a virgin boy
 disrobed by love. He quickens, turns to go—
 then all his senses to one end deploy.

Outside he breathes as from an act of love,⁷
 swiftly, the air's soft peace. He goes
 wrapped in his triumph like a furry glove,
 and in his pocket rocks the shining rose.

AUGUST KADOW