

Mars Ultor

Ernest Hilbert

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Before they had a fleet
Romans rowed on logs
As they prepared to meet

Carthage. Treaties, public
Or secret, do little when
The border of the republic

Is breached without notice:
More tug of war
Than elegant chess.

Some ask: Is *virtù* virtue?
After reconciliation, consensus,
Appeasement, the coup.

Ernest Hilbert works at Bauman Rare Books in Philadelphia, where he lives with his wife and son; www.ernesthilbert.com, ernest@everseradio.com. He has published three collections of poetry, *Sixty Sonnets* (Red Hen Press, 2009), *All of You on the Good Earth* (Red Hen Press, 2013), and *Caligulan* (Measure Press, 2015), which has been described as “brutal yet beautiful” and defined by “pleasure, clarity, and discipline.”

Some rely on law,
But law relies on guns,
Or must withdraw.

Brutes push their way to power,
But the filthiest barbarian
Also wants the throne an hour,

And dons a crown, marks affairs,
Nods under a golden branch until
A stronger one turns up the stairs.