

## Two Poems by Ernest Hilbert

**Ernest Hilbert**

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### Liberty Leading the People

It is not palaces that burn, so much  
As raw materials within, draperies,  
Furniture, rugs, books, clothes, gilded clocks,

Sometimes, a plump viscount or once  
Quick footman; but the palace itself, like  
Castles and temples before it, remains

A charred chassis, to be weighed once again  
With laughter and candles, food, computers,  
And sports cars when times finally cool down.

**Ernest Hilbert** is an antiquarian book dealer in Philadelphia and host of the blog and video show [www.everseradio.com](http://www.everseradio.com); [ernest@everseradio.com](mailto:ernest@everseradio.com). A former editor of *Contemporary Poetry Review* (2005–2010), his poems have appeared in *The New Republic*, *American Poetry Review*, *Parnassus*, *Verse*, and *The New Criterion*, among other journals. His debut volume of verse is *Sixty Sonnets* (Red Hen Press, 2009).

**“Ice Dwellers Watching the Invaders”**

—oil painting, William Bradford, ca. 1870s

The ship is locked beneath frozen mountains.

It crunches by inches against white floes,  
Its masts are bare cold poles of long-stripped tents,  
Its silhouette a stalagmite, its rows

Of furled sails, half-mast, sagging like bellies

Over the black pedestal of the hull.

Five seals splash and plunge near the icy shore.

Tubes of blood and blubber, they oar

The arctic waters, float in the ship’s reflection

As it leans and groans on the frozen

Depths. In its dark hold are harpoons, clubs, a gun.

Snow that took the color of the late sun

Just as easily accepts its absence.

Nothing seems to happen. A polar bear

Is unconcerned with the peculiar presence.

No thing would dare challenge

The terrible essence of his deadly kingdom.

What could kill more easily? And what for?