

CANTO 19

Nearly submerged in the mug, my spoon trails cyclones:
how far down into the steaming creamed
mocha flecked with chocolate can I drive
the steep swirl? Polar wind drags at the roof
as the sunk pocket gullies to swiveling gleam,
and for one gulp swung power lines dim
inner day, sucking at the hum,
a great thing hanging shy of the controls,
the sputtering generator kicking in
through influxes of an immeasurable swell.
Down to the oak windbreak and the bog's
ice-lacy skirt, as out over decades
of centuries, the cocktail-holding stances
of my former attitudes
obscure the hale dead and veil with bouldery
massiveness my near-fatal illness,
having ears only for each other,
ignoring rupture with chumminess and slow fades.
Nicholas von Flüe, heartsick captain, paterfamilias
in his tight valley, the era of Jeanne d'Arc,
was pinned as if by his own sword
when a tall wanderer walked into his skull
and sang to him. And loved him.
Echo-imaging of the heart's action
shows it: mortars lobbing flame through blue draperies,
drumming white, yellow, orange,
all these pulsing the cornea
of the stranger. On him the bear shirt shone
the way a well-wiped sword sends
gleam bounding and scattering across the walls.

From "Span Two: Denarius."
John Peck, *Cantilena*. Shearsman Books, 2016. p. 107.
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