

Since The Death of Faust

In the yellow distance Gretchen
spins and spins, relentless
since the death of Faust. We ride
a crowded elevator and part
on the tenth floor into classrooms
we rule the way generals rule
modest but unlovable nations.
You teach a language no one
not native ever learns to speak
while I unlimber equations
to students for whom calculus
triggers crimes against humanity.

Gretchen loves us as little or much
as the rest of our species. The thread
she spins has so entwined us
that if we break it we'll bleed
a green and disgusting liquid
from organs we hope not to meet.
Our students grunt in their hides
and play with cell phones, testing
in code no living intellect
can break. We see them wither
in shades of purple the sunset
envies and ripening grapes
emulate. They'd rather not learn
and Gretchen would rather not spin
but the devil had his way
and we must honor his demands.

After class we brave the crowd and meet
grinning like mannequins. Textbooks
anchor us to our professions
but Gretchen's threads hustle
like barbed wire in no man's land,
snarling around us as we duck
into the coffee shop. We're shy
as ever, language and the language
of mathematics parsing us
into stark funereal gestures
no one but Gretchen expected us
to wield against each other
in such frankly sculptural ways.