

FRA ANGELICO'S "ANNUNCIATION" AT SAN MARCO

Clare M. Rossini

Imagine: an angel whose wings imply
The colors of the world. No wonder
Mary's head inclines, not wanting
To miss a word, her book half-dropped
From her hand in her surprise
At such a visitor.

If angels had not traditionally been
Thought of as male, one might mistake
These two for sisters: their plaster robes
Stained from the same palette of pink,
Their hair swept off their faces, falling
In similar curls.

But they keep their distance, as does Dominic,
The saint behind the pillar in the yard,
Who from the Renaissance looks on shyly,
His hands held formally in prayer,
His black and white habit austere
Next to the angel's wings, the venial
Pink lingering, not yet redeemed,
In Mary's cheek.

The monk whose cell this painting lit
Would take Brother Dominic's posture
As a model for his own when contemplating
This event, which looms with penitents
And spires. And probably, a prayerful stance
Is appropriate; how often, after all,
Are we promised saviors?

Still, it may have been more instructive
If the saint had been braver,
And reached out to finger those wings—
Just inches away—and let us know what
An angel's made of.