

"Gabriel"

by Adrienne Rich

There are not angels yet  
here comes an angel one  
with a man's face young  
shut-off the dark  
side of the moon turning to me  
and saying: I am the plumed  
serpent the beast  
with fangs of fire and a gentle  
heart

But he doesn't say that His message  
drenches his body  
he'd want to kill me  
for using words to name him

I sit in the bare apartment  
reading  
words stream past me poetry  
twentieth-century rivers  
disturbed surfaces reflecting clouds  
reflecting wrinkled neon  
but clogged and mostly  
nothing alive left  
in their depths

the angel is barely  
speaking to me  
Once in a horn of light  
he stood or someone like him  
salutations in gold-leaf  
ribboning from his lips  
Today again the hair streams  
to his shoulders

the eyes reflect something  
like a lost country or so I think  
but the ribbon has reeled itself  
up

he isn't giving  
or taking any shit  
We glance miserably  
across the room at each other

It's true there are moments  
closer and closer together  
when words stick in my throat  
'the art of love'  
'the art of words'

I get your message Gabriel  
just will you stay looking  
straight at me  
awhile longer