

cocks her head, stirs a pot, shifts the baby on her hip.  
The radio plays an old song, she weaves gently.

Turning now to look over her shoulder  
the rhythm of many things in her eyes

in her feet an old soft-shuffle:  
pick and unpick, weave it strong as old string.

I've a small grubby heart in my hand,  
a fist-full of words,

needles that scrape like sour twigs.

## MARGARET DIESENDORF

### SAINT GEORGE ON FOOT

(ICON. NOVGOROD SCHOOL. 14TH CENTURY)

Having shown him as he speared the dragon,  
on his fiery mare, proud, heroic,  
the artist fell into a reflective mood:  
it occurred to him that even heroes  
had to come down to earth once  
deeds were done and the waves of  
public acclaim withdrawn from the shores  
of fame.

He'd show Saint George on foot.  
It made him smile as he dipped the brush  
in the ochre paint.

What he  
was about to show: this man facing  
a truth of life, namely that the  
speared dragon was likely to rise  
again without or — within.  
Was not the long, pink cloak assuming  
the dragon's shape as it billowed  
from his neck?

He'd better paint in  
the weapons: bow and arrow, spear  
and sword, head bowed in humility,  
in this down-to-earth penury  
despite the guilt halo which had stuck,  
get him ready to mount again that horse  
(if it had survived the venomous breath);  
dragons, after all, were as like  
to attack again, as their knights to fight.

## MARGARET DIESENDORF

BLESSED VIRGIN THILASUSSA

(WITH DRINKING CHILD)

ICON. BYZANTINE, ABOUT 1500

He had taken it into his head to paint her  
with the child drinking. It created a problem;  
Byzantine ladies didn't bare their breasts in public;  
intimacy was strictly a private matter.  
Well (he thought), I shall darken their skin, make them seem  
more oriental; she was, after all, from the  
region, semitic like her husband. Thus the dark  
hue & the soft, almond-shaped eyes. But the nose  
proved stubborn, insisted on a straight, Greek profile.

To the breast then . . . in black ivory. He'd have to  
lay bare just the minimum, to pass through a slit  
in the elegant, blue dress; but then the wilful  
child, with both his tiny hands got hold firmly of  
the round, smooth hill, locking his teeth to the milky  
nipple; content, mother & child gave the artist  
now an amused look, meaning: we do as we please.