

Rachlin and Bundschuh: Poems in Dialogue

ELLEN RACHLIN, JESSICA BUNDSCHUH

David and Goliath

(Regensburg 1573)

As if he were Palestrina,
when Bocksberger paints,
crowds gather, early as dawn,
blanketing Town Square
and the napping guard won't
sweep them from the Hall's
steps where I labor on its doors.

The façade might be
the painter's canvas, but
no decision in this town
happens without passing
through my bronzed doors, grand
as the gates of New Jerusalem.

Yet, the painter's acolytes form
a semi-circle by his scaffold
like a choir praising God above.
Their eyes strain upwards
at the crude dyed outline of

David taunting Goliath, and
the bearded man grasping
in one hand a thin palette and
in the other, a pig-hair brush.

Their collective backsides spread
outward and into my doorway.
They're dumb to the danger:
my belt-pouch still bulging
with unhammered nails,
my hammer swinging centimeters
from their upturned heads.
The painter god they worship
won't protect them.

Traveler half a millennium hence:
Look for my iron nails, each one
half the length of your palm.
Those slender bits of iron
will have rusted a deep golden red,
yet they hold a bronzed door
ten-fold the size of a man.

Then consider the Hall's façade,
squint your eyes for as long as you like,
but you won't see David or Goliath
or even hint of Bocksberger's
pompous azurite paints
the children prefer to mix for only
a guilder rather than help me for two.
But those tiny nails, wrought from

my heart, will still hold off
a giant set of doors.



Early Working Girl

—chronology of a blacksmith's wife & a medieval nail

Ellen, let us meet in neutral Regensburg
at the Gothic portal of the Old Town Hall
below the armored figures of Protection

& Defiance & outsmart a band of male
blacksmith enthusiasts bound to envy
our accidental discovery: a medieval nail,

rusty cousin to the Cloisters Collection
at the Met; *our* nail falls from a metal door
at the entry of a stone stairwell, greedy

for the double journey of my linty pocket &
our transcontinental poem exchange,
an iron testament of this woman who forged

the nails of the Crucifixion—though how
male historians discovered an ‘ugly crone’
bent those nails out of iron is anyone’s guess:

the blacksmith’s wife commandeers an apron,
her husband’s, & selects a piece of
wrought iron bar she evens on all sides, forges into a point,

hammers into a hot slug of red metal &
flattens to form a nail head she holds flush
against the edge of the anvil, then hammers

again & again into a wide spatula shape
that’s bent down & folded backwards—ah!
Only then does she exhale & peer skyward

into a dusty, aproned future of working girls
& divine that her 15th-century nail might land
on a poet’s desk & into a three-legged tercet.

About the Authors

Ellen Rachlin is the author of *Permeable Divide*, *Until Crazy Catches Me* (Antrim House), as well as two chapbooks – *Captive to Residue* (Flarestack UK) and *Waiting for Here* (Finishing Line Press), and winner of the IBPA Benjamin Franklin Silver Award, and a finalist in the Best Book Award and New Women’s Voices series. She serves as Treasurer of the Poetry Society of America.

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