Negda and the Gourd Baby

Judith Boogaart

Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus/vol1996/iss1/27

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Amaranthus by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.
Judith Boogaart  Negda and the Gourd Baby

Toes curling against the brown earth floor,
sweat easing down her rigid back,
Elena stands among the others in the clinic

and watches Negda speak, her prop
a baby fashioned from a brightly painted gourd
with dark holes for eyes, mouth, buttocks.

As she speaks, she tilts the gourd baby
this way and that, so water spouts from the holes,
and from her lips words shoot out: dysentery, cholera.

The words slither down Elena’s slick back
and pierce her soul, wounding more deeply
than any Contra bullet could.

For this is how Elena watched her brother die:
crying, vomiting, purging himself of life over and over,
until the loss of fluid left him too weak to cry.

And now, to hear that she might have rescued him,
dragged him back from the precipice of death
with her bare hands, hands which could have

gathered the wood, lit the fire, fetched the water,
eyes that could have watched until it boiled.
All of her, hands, arms, feet, legs, eyes,

all guilty of sins of omission that killed her brother.
It is too much. She stumbles out toward the pounding
summer sun, but it can’t crush her rock-cold heart.