

FIRE SERMON

Shadow 1970

Judith Wright

“Sinister powers,” the ambassador said, “are moving
into our ricefields. We are a little people
and all we want is to live.”

But a chemical rain descending
has blackened the fields, and
we ate the buffalo because we were starving.

“Sinister powers,” he said:
and I look at the newsreel child
crying, crying quite silently, here in my house.

I can’t put out a hand to touch her,
that shadow printed glass.
And if I could? I look at my hand.

This hand, this sinister power
and this one here on the right side
have blackened your ricefields,
my child, and killed your mother.

In the temple the great gold Buddha
smiles inward with half-closed eyes.
All is Maya, the dance, the veil,
Shiva’s violent dream.

Let me out of this dream, I cry.
I belong to a simple people
and all we want is to live.

“It is not right that we slay our kinsmen,”
Arjuna cried. And the answer?
“What is action, what is inaction?
By me alone are they doomed and slain.”

A hard answer
for those who are doomed and slain.

“All is fire,” said the Buddha, “all –
sight, sense, all forms.
They burn with the fires of lust,

anger, illusion.

“Wherefore the wise man...”

“Be a lamp to yourself. Be an island.”

Let me out of this dream, I cry,
but the great gold Buddha
smiles in the temple
under a napalm rain.