

THE GREEN PARK: A NŌ PLAY

(Based on the subplot of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*)

Waki: A Clergyman
Shite: 1. An Old Woman
2. Lucrezia Warren Smith

Scene: London

(A stylised tree stands center-stage and musicians are seated on folding stools upstage.
The *Waki* enters, wearing a black cassock.)

Waki. It is late, (*Shidai*)
I must hurry.
They will be waiting
and are in such need of help.

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and are in such need of help.

I am a clergyman, a parish priest, (*Nanori*)
returning through St. James' Park to my cure of souls.

How beautiful (*Michi-yuki*)
it always is
after Evensong.
The Abbey, uplifting;
outside, the stillness
of a clear summer night;
a pale, gold light
softens the sweet air.

(*He circles the stage.*)

Shadows lengthen across
the grass among the trees;
Waterbirds nest
beside the silver lake; a
path of flowers
through a forest glade;
a green thought
in a green shade

A green thought
in a green shade.

(*Waki advances downstage.*)

Oh! In my reverie I've crossed the Mall
and entered The Green Park quite unaware.

(*Tsuki-zerifu*)

(*The Shite enters, wearing a mask, chignon, and a full-cut gown of reddish-purple silk with bell sleeves. She carries a broken branch of elm with a few leaves on it.*)

Shite. I live nearby
but when the evening
is spread out against the sky,
I am more at home
among these trees. (Issei)

I look for peace
in this deserted place: the
haunt of lovers,
refuge from corrupting care.

Fear no more
the furious winter's rages,
for the human voice
can quicken trees to life
and the excitement of the elms,
rising and falling -
their leaves alight;
colours thinning and thickening,
from blue to the green
of a hollow wave,
like plumes on horses' heads -
brings on an ecstasy. (Sashi)

All my life
I have made my way
to this solitary spot.
The world has raised its whip!
Where will it descend? (Uta)

I can stand it no longer.
I cannot sit beside him
when he stares so
and does not see me
and makes everything terrible:
sky and tree -
children playing
dragging carts,
blowing whistles,
falling down -
all are terrible.
He is selfish, and I
am not happy without him.
He makes one so solitary;
there is no one I can tell.
My wedding ring is loose,
the fingers have grown so thin.

My wedding ring is loose,
the fingers have grown so thin.

Waki. What a sad sight,
that woman, angular and old,
Who talks to the trees
in the gathering twilight. (*Mondo*)

Shite. Why should I suffer,
I have done no wrong.
He isn't himself;
he says cruel, wicked things,
talking to himself,
talking to a dead man.

But who is it
who acts this strangely?
She must be deeply troubled
and in need of help.

Shite. Septimus Warren Smith
pointed in agony, in relief,
my wedding band was gone.
The bond was cut.

Waki. But what are you saying;
What exactly happened?
How has all this
come about?

(A chorus of six or eight men in cassocks and surplices, carrying red hassocks, enters and they kneel.)

Shite. Experience changes that innocent oval
to a face, lean, contracted, and hostile.
The European War had tutored him:
"There are no lasting emotions."

(The Waki seats himself on the ground, down-stage right.)

Chorus. The Great War put an end
to the intoxication of poetry, extinguished the
fluttering red-gold flame, infinitely ethereal
and insubstantial; exposed the bestiality
of eating and copulation, of
eddying whims and vanities
without lasting emotions.
His comrade was killed and
he felt nothing! (*Sashi*)

Shite. There died a myriad;
and he too was destroyed,
the man who finished
a masterpiece
at three in the morning (*Kudoki*)

and ran out to pace the streets,
 who fasted one day
 and drank another,
 who devoured Shakespeare, Darwin
 and Bernard Shaw.
 He fought bravely
 and won promotion.
 He survived
 to marry without love,
 to experience
 sudden thunderclaps of fear.

He did not want to die; life
 was good – the sun was
 hot, and he grasped
 a greater truth.
 But visions
 plagued him;
 an old woman's head
 in the middle of a fern –
 his dead friend
 without mud or wounds.
 Even the doctors pursued,
 prescribing a hobby and exercise.
 He had to escape
 or they would get him.
 He flung himself, vigorously,
 violently, from the open
 window
 onto the area railings.

(*Uta*)

Once you falter
 men pursue you

(*Kuri*)

Chorus. They hunt in packs, scouring
 the desert.
 They desert the fallen
 and vanish into the wilderness.

Shite. Human nature is remorseless;
 the soul knows no defence.

Chorus. The rack and the thumbscrew are
 applied without pity.
 Limbs are exposed,
 wounds laid bare.

Shite. The unfeeling worship conformity and
 penalize despair.
 They love to impress, to impose, their
 own features
 on the face of the populace;
 to feast on the wills of the weak.

(*Sashi*)

Chorus. His was not *(Kuse)*
the slow sinking
of a waterlogged will.

(She dances.)

His body was macerated,
nerve fibres alone were left,
spread like a veil
upon a rock.
The elms beckoned,
the leaves were alive
and connected by millions of fibres
with his own body.
They fanned it
up and down.
When the branches stretched,
He, too, made that statement.
The sparrows fluttered,
rising and falling;
the white and blue
led by black branches –
Sounds made harmonious
with premeditation;
the spaces between,
significant as the sounds.
And, in his delusion –
the most exalted of mankind;
the criminal
who faced his judges;
the victim
exposed on the heights;
the fugitive;
the drowned sailor;
the poet
of the immortal ode;
the lord
who had gone from life to death.

Shite. His soul had been forced. *(Rongi)*
An indescribable outrage.

Chorus. Closeness drew apart.
Rapture faded and he was alone

Shite. It was more than a shilling
thrown into the Serpentine.

Chorus. He had flung it all away.
Death was defiance.

Shite. Fear no more
the furious winter's rages.

Chorus. There is an embrace in death,
an attempt to communicate.

