Chapter IV: The Cocktail Party

The Cocktail party (1949) is a drama of an estranged couple, Edward Chamberlayne and Lavinia Chamberlayne, due to their infidelity, incompatibility and mutual deceit. The husband has an extra-marital relationship with a society girl named Celia Copplestone. The wife has a similar relationship with an upcoming writer Peter Quilpe. Lavinia’s young lover defects and begins to love Celia. Lavinia becomes upset and consults a psychiatrist who advises her to disappear on a day for which the couple is to host a Cocktail Party. The play begins at this point. The psychiatrist, Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly along with two of his accomplices Alexander McColgie Gibbs and Mrs Julia rehabilitate their lives. The couples are made to realise their mistakes and to reconcile to live together again. Peter was assigned a job in Hollywood. Celia Copplestone chooses to live a religious order. She dies in a tribal insurgency. Her death evokes guilt and fertilises the lives of the rest.

T.S. Eliot’s The Cocktail party is based of Euripides’ Greek tragio-comedy, Alcestis. In Alcestis, Admitus, the king of Thessaly, incurs a curse by god Artemes, and is destined to premature death. God Apollo, who is a
benefactor of Admetus, negotiates with gods and brings a respite that if some one dies in his place Admitus will be let free to live. Admitus tests one by one all his friends, relatives, and even his old parents; they all refuse to die for him. Admitus' young queen Alcestis volunteers to die. On the appointed day of her death, Apollo tries to persuade god of death to let Alcestis live up to her old age; He refuses. Alcestis extracts a promise from Admetus that he would never marry again to set a stepmother on her two children; and she dies. When the preparations for her funeral are on, Heracles, the semi divine hero of Greek epics, enters his house. Admitus conceals his grief, takes him as a guest and arranges for his entertainment in guest quarters of the palace. Admetus buries Alcestis. In the mean while Heracles comes to know about Alcestis' death through servants. He fights the angel death, and restores Alcestes to Admetus again. Modern Greeks do not practice their ancient religion; yet they, especially women, believe that Alcestis is a goddess who can bring tranquillity and happiness in their married life. Thus Alcestis myth has continued to attract artists. Eliot too is fascinated by it.

The Cocktail Party is a successful drama because it consciously helps the modern man to protect our most ancient values and institutions namely house and marriage. And it also tells about age old value of welfare of society by spiritually well developed elders, and their knowledge of meaning of life and how it must be lived happily according to our potentiality. It will be timely to begin with the contemporary conditions that are harmful to persons, family and house. Industrialisation, liberalisation and globalisation have made men to migrate to cities in search of jobs. City men never kept to a single job or place; they move quite often in pursuit of better job. Commuting, travelling and relocating have become their second nature. Such persons never make acquaintance with their neighbours. Persons moved frequently
and neighbours remained strangers to them. Thus these persons severe their relationship with the society. This phenomenon is called alienation. With rapid industrialisation, countries are plagued by chronic and degenerative diseases which may be called as diseases of civilisation. They are principle killer diseases like heart diseases, cancer and strokes due to polluted environment. These together with boredom, monotony, noise, and result oriented heavy work schedules produce a mental disorder. Main problems of modern life are 'Worry, upset, conflict, uncertainty, anticipation, hilarity, social pressure, status shift, and life style modification cause stress.' Very recently it is discovered that this stress is responsible for many psychological and social disorders. His has resulted in violent crimes, accidents, suicides, and alcoholism and drug abuse.

'The family has been called the giant shock absorber of society. It is a place where bruised and battered individual returns after the battle of the world.' It is a stable point in an increasingly flux filled environment. Person well adapted to stress, find stability zones in spite of severe stress in his life.

These stability points are, a good tightly woven relationship with his wife, continuing ties with parents, old college friends interspersed new acquaintances.

Thus the house and family are in grave trouble if they are not properly nourished and supported. Now let us proceed towards the significant and important play of the century.

Death and resurrection of Alcestis is not possible in modern world. 'Then Eliot evaluated the characters of such husband and wife in a contemporary setting and undertook to

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2 Ibid, p, 75.
3 Ibid, p, 421.
reconciliation of such couple through Sir Henry’. Meanwhile he dignifies one eyed Reilly into Sir Henry, the psychiatrist, bestowing on him some of the Herculean characters, the Celia’s martyrdom and Henrys premonition about it. Carroll Smith describes the play thus:

Eilot begins the play as a comedy of misdirected love affairs, marriage triangles, and later transforms it into an exposition of Christian love and marriage.⁶

In the prologue of Euripides’ Alcestes, the god Apollo salutes the hospitable house of Admetus. After 1950 the condition of the society has seen tremendous pace of change and deterioration of moral values. House is no more an institution now; it is rendered only as a dwelling place. Family was once full; it is now truncated.

The scene begins in the drawing room of the Chamberlaynes’ London flat at the early evening where a cocktail party is on. Edward, Alex, Julia, Celia, Peter and an unidentified guest are present. Alex addresses Julia with a symbolic statement ‘there were no tigers’. The tiger in Eliot’s Gerontion is a symbol of Christ and becomes a powerful symbol of absence of religion and presence of sterility. The party symbolises the act of humans being consumed by the divine. Paul Duson notes that in the state of salvation, gods live in a constant symbolic relationship with humans. This relationship is symbolised through the activity of eating and being eaten. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad explains:

The whole world verily is just food and the eater of food’⁷

The concept can be better explained in the Christian ritual of communion where, wine and bread are eaten by

devotees as blood and flesh of Jesus. In return, Eliot's Gerontion describes Jesus as a Tiger who devours the devotees. 'The Tiger jumps in the new year ... us he devours'. The Cocktail Party also symbolises the Holy Communion where, the cocktails represent wine and the titbits symbolise bread.

The party is a modern version of hospitality. Hospitality is a virtue. Virtuous are rewarded. Company of good persons makes one good, these ideals are universal values relevant to all times and place from which modern men can mould their ideal and happy married life. The true hospitality is the willed expression of a life that is full, happy, and relaxed. 'It is most impressive manifestation of the code of conduct in society ... and marks its practitioner as a civilised person'. In both the plays the hosts are weak and the guests are strong. The outcome of hospitality is strong help the weak. Casual Party conversations point out that Edward's wife Lavinia is not present as a hostess. Her husband Edward is upset and is not serving as a good host. He lies about the absence Lavinia that she has gone to attend a sick aunt in Sussex; no one believes it. He has neither her address nor her telephone number. All guests begin to leave the party one by one except the unidentified guest. Edward requests him not to go away and replenishes him with Gin. This spirit of hospitality is an identical situation comparable to Euripides' Alcestis, where on the day of Alcestis' death, Heracles arrives at the palace of Admetus. Admetus hides his grief and without revealing, who was dead in the palace, accepts him as a guest and arranges for his entertainment. Before the stranger guest Edwards reveals that his wife has left him and he does not know where she is now. The stranger calls it an occasion and asks for some more Gin. In Alcestis, Heracles

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8 'Gerontion', Eliot. T. S, Selected Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1972) p, 32
9 Op cit, p, 75.
drinks wine, puts an olive gourmet on his head and sings merrily without knowing who was dead in the palace. To contain him, a servant had to tell about Alcestis’ death. Here in *The Cocktail Party* Edward himself reveals to the guest that his wife has gone away and was not returning to him. The world of *The Cocktail Party* is the sterility: The Waste Land.

The play shows an empty, superficial society of the title, a world of temporary relationships, transience and bright sophistication ... and also of deception.¹⁰

At this point the unidentified guest analyses the situation. Edward and Lavinia are married since five years and are childless. He suggests that Edward could see better side of Lavinia’s desertion. Now Edward can marry any woman whom he may like to marry. Edward says that there is no woman in his life and similarly there is no man in Lavinia’s life as he knows her. Edward shocks unidentified guest by revealing his intention to have his wife back to his life. At this juncture we may confirm that this situation is similar to that of Euripides’ *Alcestis*. Here Eliot builds an unusual assumption that Lavinia’s walking away is comparable to Alcestis’ death. The arrival of an uninvited guest on the day Lavinia’s desertion is like arrival of Heracles at Pherae on the day of Alcestes’ death. The stranger does not accept the decision of Edward to have his wife. This does not match the condition of *Alcestis*. It is to be remembered that Heracles tries to convince Admitus that another marriage will set his miseries to naught. So also does the unidentified guest.

Edward is annoyed at the blunt statements of the guest:

> Unless you know about us a good deal more than appears, your speculations rather offensive. (CPP. P, 361),

The guest warns Edward that:

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To approach the stranger, is to invite the unexpected, release a new force. CPP, p, 361

In Euripides' *Alcestis*, the approach of stranger, that is, the angel of death, set off numerous events: death of Alcestis, an unbearable grief to the Admetus, admonishment of his old parents, arrival of Heracles, his fight with death and restoration of Alcestis back to Admetus. Since Edward is approaching un-identified guest who is not acquainted to him, audience may assume that some dramatic action is near by.

The unidentified guest begins to lure Edward towards the advantages of a single person. In the morning and evening Edward will find enjoyment of freedom, without a consistent critic( the nagging wife); life will become cosier and cosier and he may become jealous of his wife, for having the courage to break the relationship and finally asks a straightforward question ‘do you love your wife’? Edward has no direct answer; but intends to say no’ in a round about way:

We took each other for granted,
... Why speak of love.
We were used to each other... (CPP. 362)

They simply lived together without love. So it is in the case of Admetus in *Alcestis*. If he had genuine love for Alcestis, he would not have consented Alcestis to die in his place. He liked to live longer, reluctant and afraid to die. Loveless marriage, marriage for social respect, dowry, property and other ulterior purposes ends up similarly. The Greek sentiment worships splendour and light that is enjoyment of pleasures of youth. So Heracles suggests Admetus:

‘Another woman, a new marriage will console you’.

The unidentified guest explains that, living without love leads to loss of personality: it reduces human nature to the status of an object- a living object, like a piece of furniture in a repair shop, There is only body with no human living in it.
The condition Admetus was also similar. Admitus has promised Alcestis that he would not marry again to enjoy worldly pleasures and will live a life of mourning. He was afraid to die; and wanted to live longer, even though it is against the Greek value of life. Enjoyment of youthful pleasures, nobility and a heroic death are the chief values of Greek life. Pindar states that "the first thing to strive for is well being; second share is a good reputation, but one who happens to have both wins the top prize." Moreover, he was afraid to die; so people will abuse him as a coward who sacrificed his wife for his life. There is no pleasure and no nobility left in him. Then what is the use of living? So Heracles tells Admetus: "people will call you mad".

Amidst his misery, Edward replenishes his guest with gin; asks his advice as to what to do at present. The guest asks Edward to think about what he really is, what he really feels, what he is really among other people, and then, to wait. This suggestion points to the position of Admetus before ancient Greek society, that is "ridiculous". Edwards feels it also:

Wait! But waiting is one thing impossible
Besides, don’t you see that it makes me ridiculous? (CPP. P, 363)

The guest concludes that the embarrassment will serve him better. He needs it; 'resign yourself to be the fool you are'. (CPP, P, 363.) Social embarrassment of a husband in any society whose wife has disappeared, without telling her husband where she is going and when she is returning makes him a centre of mockery and disgust. The growing civilisation has made marital partners misunderstanding each other. Edward goes on introspection.

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12 Ibid, p, 712.
A healthy introspection in detail about his or his wife is likely to develop in him the resistance against the stress. The modern psychiatry is nothing but helping the patient to undergo journey of self exploration which has received excellent inexplicable results to reduce tension. The tension of being alone is relieved by holding conversation. The gravity of misunderstanding between them is so great that Edward confesses:

I no longer remember what my wife is like.
I am not quite sure that I could describe her
... I don’t know what she was wearing when I last saw her. (CPP. P, 364)

Edward now realises the importance of knowing and understanding between the couples. At last he determines that ‘I must find out who she is, and who I am’ (CPP, p, 364) It is human when we do not understand another human being. But to force him to make himself to be understood by us will only make him depressed and distorted. Many modern husbands and wives exert such pressure on their spouses. We can not turn other as we desire. Wife’s departure makes Edward to be aware that he does not know her, and without her he does not know himself:

He begins to understand how much he depended on her just in the superficial sense, but in the sense that his existence is bound with her.13

Edward actually has no respect for any woman, let alone love. Lovelessness towards Lavinia is obvious. He has no liking for Celia also. He tells Peter that Celia’s poetry is good to those who like her face only! He treats Julia as ‘dreadful old woman’. He has forgotten that chivalry is respected value of his society. Christian society respects woman because she is the mother of mankind and mother of Jesus is a woman. Edward firmly decides that he wants his Lavinia

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back. The unidentified guest promises to bring her back within twenty four hours. This scene confirms that the play has its origin in Euripides' *Alcestis*, where Heracles fights angel death and brings her back. The guest lays down a condition that Edward should not ask the whereabouts of Lavinia when she returns. Even if he asks, she will not answer it. The play has its own psychological and thematic reasons for this condition. In *Alcestes* she was marked for death by angel, consecrated to Hades, the abode of the dead. So the pollution of death remains till the third day, and it is also believed that the soul of the dead wanders around its dead body for three days, before it abandons it. So Alcestis will not talk for three days. Some scholars, like Varral, conclude that the relationship between Alcestis and Admetus will be strained after her revival; hence angry Alcestis remains mute as its symbol. And *The Cocktail Party* is the extension of this conception. Edward's indecision marks him again with Admitus, who consented to the Alcestis' offer to die in his place, but on the appointed day of her death, asks her not to leave him.

Rose up o unhappy one, and do not leave me! 
Call upon the mighty gods to pity.\(^{14}\)

Confused Edward can not make out that to have Lavinia back is his own decision or it is merely the guest's suggestion:

I was not sure I wanted her; and now I want her. Do I want her? Or is it merely your suggestion? (CPP. P, 364)

This confusing dialogue is taken from Alcestis. Heracles brings a veiled woman, reveals that he has won her in a wrestling match and persuades Admetus to hold her hand and lead her to palace, and keep her in his palace till he returns. Admitus reluctantly holds her hand and turns his face away from her. The veiled woman is nobody but revived

\(^{14}\) Op Cit, p, 816.
Alcestis. Thus Admetus got back Alcestis by the persuasion of Heracles. The indecision of Edward is just a projection of Eliot’s ‘poetic Profrock’. However the unidentified guest confidently guarantees that Lavinia will be at home within twenty-four hours. At that time the door bell rings. Julia and Peter enter. Julia had come to look for her glasses which she thinks, she has left at Edward’s flat. The unidentified guest sings a song by which Julia feels insulted. This incident reminds Heracles in Greek play Alcestis. Heracles is a traditional satirical figure in Greek Drama; he always appears to be in a state of ‘Bacchus jollying’.\(^{15}\) She enquires about his whereabouts. But Edward asks Julia to open her purse to see if there are her glasses. They are really there. Julia goes out. Peter remains in the flat as he had something to tell Edward. Heracles comes to know about Alcestis’ death only when he gets drunk and begins to sing. So it is not a co-incident that the unidentified guest is the counter part of Heracles; and is symbolically confirmed by his song after his drinks. Perhaps under the influence of drinks Edward revealed the fact about Lavinia and himself.

Admetus did not entertain Heracles casually but as a religious duty to shelter, feed and respect guests. Hospitality to guests is a value of Greeks next to worship of splendour and brightness. Chorus admonishes Admitus for admitting Heracles as a guest, when such a calamity has fallen up on him. Admitus asks that if he had driven away a guest, who has come to his house and city, would the chorus have praised him more. One more ill would have been added to those he had, if his house is called inhospitable. ‘My roof knows not to reject or insult a guest’.\(^{16}\) Chorus admires Admitus and hopes some good will come out of it. With this spirit of

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hospitality Edward entertains the unidentified guest though he knows that he is a stranger. The party in *The Cocktail Party* itself is symbol of the last supper of Jesus, in which cocktails represent the blood of Jesus and titbits as his flesh. Their consumption is Holy Communion. The unidentified guest acts as priest and hears to the confession of Edward and prescribes reconciliation as religious penance. All religions, even remote tribal cultures, give esteem importance to cordial treatment of guests. It is almost being called a human heritage and a value of life. Indian culture esteems a guest equal to god: ‘Athithi devo bhava’.

Peter confesses before Edward that he loves Celia; after showing some interest towards him, she seems to have lost interest in him. He wants Edward to talk to Celia about it. He says that Celia will listen to Edward because he (Edward) is an elderly man. Before leaving Peter requests him not to tell Lavinia about his love affair with Celia. Meanwhile Alex also comes to Edward’s flat to cook a dinner for him.

As soon as Peter leaves Celia Copplestone hurries into the flat to collect her umbrella that she had deliberately left behind. Edward is upset at her arrival; he can not explain why but he would like to be alone. Celia plainly states that Lavinia has left him; soon everybody will know about this; And that she is glad about it. ‘Does not that settle all our difficulties’? This statement reveals clearly that Edward and Celia are secret lovers. Celia is too happy at the walking away of Lavinia. She also attempts to elevate the spirit of Edward by consoling him that:

You do not hold to that silly convention that The husband must be always one to be divorced. (CPP, P, 374-75.)

Edward shocks her by telling that Lavinia is coming back. Celia can not understand if it is a kind of trap. She gets a bad smell from the kitchen. Alex had kept something cooking on
the oven that Edward had forgotten to switch off. It has spoiled the food with the saucepan also. Celia goes to kitchen. Julia re-enters the flat to invite Edward to supper. Celia from the kitchen shouts. ‘Edward it’s ruined’. (CPP. P, 376) It is the relationship between Celia and Edward that is really ruined. Julia puts on Apron and goes to kitchen. Celia and Edward continue their conversation. This relationship has no parallel in *Alcestis*. But it is the objective correlative of Edward’s reluctance to die, and wishing to live longer. Here to enjoy excess sensual pleasure, outside the marriage, is to be considered as a will to live longer. Some scholars express their opinion that Eliot has split Alcestes into two parts: Lavinia and Celia. Lavinia as the one that reflects Edward’s own personality and Celia as that of Alcestis who sacrifices. Edward explains to Celia that the stranger who was present in the party told him that Lavinia is returning because he wanted her back. Celia abuses the stranger as ‘devil and attributes his bewitching power to spell Edward to desire Lavinia back. The conversation is broken by the interruption of Julia from the kitchen; she shouts that ‘there is nothing in the place fit to eat’. (CPP, P, 377.) She finds only half a bottle of champagne. She leaves the flat inviting Celia for supper. Celia at first does not take seriously of the fact that Lavinia is coming back. But when she understands that it is the conscious choice of Edward due to some internal change in him, she becomes disillusioned under humiliation and self disgust. Actually she passionately loved Edward though there was no chance of marriage in future. She abandoned future and lived in momentary happiness as if her life was a dream. During the party when Julia enquired persistently about Lavinia she finds an opportunity. Lavinia has deserted Edward, he will be free; she need not be in mere dream. She can marry Edward and be happy:
...then I discovered that dream was not enough; ...I wanted something more... (CPP. P, 379)

When she finds Edward really wants Lavinia back and Edward wants to terminate their relationship, she laments that she can neither have dream or its fulfilment. She felt humiliated because, it is something she did for herself:

Humiliation- it’s something I have done to Myself.... I dare say you deceived yourself. (CPP. P, 380.)

She was only a passing diversion to Edward. Edward also reveals his condition. He truly loved Celia; and never loved Lavinia. But this can not go on permanently. Ever since Lavinia left him, he begins to feel like an old man. He has lost the desire for all that was most desirable. His condition is comparable to Admetus who realised that life without Alcestes was not worth living. He feels that he would have been wiser if he had died rather than allowing Alcestis to die. But in Edward the change is not passionate but spiritual and psychological. Celia seriously asks Edward:

What shall your life be? Oh Edward! Can you be happy with Lavinia? (CPP, p, 381.)

Genuine concern for Edward can be felt in her pleading, which reminds us of Alcestis’ love for Admitus; it makes him good. Edwards reply is equally honest. 'No, - not happy' it really turns out as such:

My life has been determined long ago.
And that the struggle to escape from it is only make-believe, a pretence. ... What is is not or could be changed. (CPP. P, 381)

Here we can see the Greek wisdom; gods control the fates of human beings. One can not overrule them. If they attempt to do so, more severe will be the repercussions. Oracles used to convey the will of gods. And they were always realised, though in whatever way people tried to avoid them. Human beings are greedy; they run after desires. Edward’s
relationship with Celia was such a desire, born out of greed; more enjoyment of sensual pleasures. It is a symbolic representation of Admitus' desire to live longer and reluctance to die as gods ordained. The reason behind greed is uncontrollable desire for possession beyond the control of intellect. Edward describes the tendency of desire thus;

The self that can say 'I want this-or want that.
The self that wills—he is a feeble creature. CPP 381

Human mind is of dual nature. Upanishads call it dual nature of soul. The one that desires physical entities, commands sense organs and mind to get it. This is called human aspect of embodied soul. There is the other one which isolates itself from the embodied soul, is tougher self, obstinate who does not speak and does not argue. The embodied soul has to come to terms with this tougher self (the divine aspect)

Eliot's poetry seem to have two 'voices like 'you and me' in Profrock. Edward calls it a guardian. Upanishads call it paramatma: the divine soul. The willing soul can contrive the disaster of this unwilling partnership but can only flourish in submission to the rule of stronger partner. (CPP. P, 382) Modern men lead ego centred, competitive and goal oriented life. They measure their living standard by the quantity of material procession and move more alienated from their inner world. 'No amount of wealth, power or fame will bring genuine satisfaction and it becomes infused with a sense of meaninglessness, futility and even absurdity'. This is cultural madness.¹⁷ This is nothing but submission of the human aspect of the soul, which craves for Celia and the tougher partner which ordered to bring back Lavinia. The tougher self wins. So Edward wants Lavinia back. In the case of Admetus also it was the same tussle between reluctance to die, and to live longer; so when Alcestis offered to die for him, he accepted it. After Alcestis' burial, he found out

life without Alcestis was not worth living. He wished for this trouble. He lost nobility, men mocked at him as a coward. His whole life had become a waste, in the light of Greek values of life. In the eyes of the Greeks Admetus is mad. Now let’s consider the position of Edward before Celia who is still under the spell of desiring will. She has lost all respect for him:

What I heard was only a noise of an insect ... I looked, and listened for your heart, your blood. ... And saw only a beetle in the size of a man. (CPP. P, 382)

Celia goes on introspecting and finds that what she thought of Edward was only her projection: what she imagined to be. But he suddenly changed to a mummy. That is the state of Edward in the eyes of the world. Celia finds that she was using Edward to her selfish need. She feels sorry for Edward. In a sense she had created a god in man’s image and the real man could never have lived up to it.18

He is on the verge of mental breakdown and she asks Edward to consult a doctor. The necessity of separation is imminent. However this change of heart leads to reconciliation: to part as friends. They break all emotional ties and drink wine to the health of guardians. Celia thinks Julia as her guardian. Thus symbolic figures of guardian angels are given as a naturalistic group of peoples in Chamberlaynes’ social circle. ‘The spiritual advisor is now more naturally the psychiatrist, the modern counter part of Heracles’.19 In Alcestis there are two such counter parts- Apollo and semi-divine Heracles.

Julia, Alex, and Reilly make up a group of guardians. This concept has undergone even more metamorphosis from their initial strives. They are the spiritual guardians for the rest

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19 Ibid, p, 124.
of the characters. According to Christian theology, the guardian angel is appointed by God to look after a person’s spiritual welfare, to keep him off from evil temptations and to bring those who have strayed from their right path, back to the ways of God. Eliot thinks these characters as ministers and duly gives them special ritual libation at the end of the second Act. However Edward considers his tougher self as guardian.

These guardian characters in *The Cocktail Party* provide comic relief in between two serious discussions; thus fit into both secular and spiritual worlds that the play depicts. They prevent reconciliation between Celia and Edward; and promote one between Edward and Lavinia; eliminate and rehabilitate Peter in far off Hollywood in California.

Scene third is in the same room; late afternoon of the next day. Edward is alone. He goes to answer the doorbell. Unidentified guest arrives and reminds Edward that he has made a decision yesterday; Edward asks if he thinks that Edward has changed his mind. Unidentified guest reminds that it is too late to change the mind and Edward is bound by his decision; He is not free.

Your moment of freedom was yesterday...
... It is a serious matter.
To bring some one from the dead. (CPP. P, 384)

Edward is puzzled as it was only a day that his wife had left him. Here two things are to be elaborated. The first one is the idea, ‘to bring some one from dead’. This idea is taken from *Alcestis* where Heracles fought with the angel of death, rescued Alcestis and handed over her back to Admetus in a dramatic passion. Here in *The Cocktail Party* death is only metaphorical. Lavinia’s desertion is thought to be equal to death and her returning back to Edward is equal to bring some one back from death. From this point onwards Eliot deserts *Alcestis* all together and changes the plot into a crypto
Christian play. The reason for selecting this point for deviation is observation of many Scholars, like Varral, is 'mute Alcestis'. Heracles handed over a veiled woman to Admetus, and pulled down her veil to show real Alcestis; astonishingly, she does not utter a word. Heracles enlightens Admetus that, Alcestis will not speak for three days. According to Greek sentiment the soul of the dead person remains in the vicinity of the body for three days before it embarks on its journey to under world. Heracles explains that:

You may not hear her voice until she is purified from her consecration to the lower gods and until the third dawn has risen. Lead her in.\(^{20}\)

It is to be remembered that In *Alcestis*, death entered into the Admetus palace with a sword and by cutting few hair consecrated Alcestis to the Lords of under world.

The three day muteness of Alcestis is clever and ingenious invention to glorify her resurrection amidst the stillness of the tomb.\(^{21}\)

Some scholars like Varral raise two important issues over mute Alcestis, at the end of the play showing a cleavage between the couple. Admetus had promised not to marry again; but he accepted the girl from Heracles. This will be regarded as infidelity. It will put Alcestis' sacrifice a waste. That is why angry Alcestis did not speak at the close of the play. Eliot took this line of thought and trans-created it in *The Cocktail Party*. Therefore the actual action of the play begins after unidentified guest delivers Lavinia and disappears. Eliot extends Heracletean conception of ubiquitous physical change into realm of psychology.


We can not step twice into the same river, because water has flown on, but because we have become different persons in the meantime.\textsuperscript{22}

This implicates that passage of time and place may change the persons. Even if we come to know a person intimately at one moment, we must not assume that we know that person next moment, because he may be changed. None of us is the same man in old age that he was in neither youth; nor the same on the morrow as on the preceding day. Our bodies are hurried along like flowing water; every visible object accompanies time in its light; of the things we see: nothing is fixed. We go down twice into same river, but yet into a different river.

'Ve die to each other daily'. (CPP, P, 384.)

In fearing, lest someday we may die, every instant means death out of previous condition. So we die to each other daily. 'At every meeting we are meeting a stranger'. This statement betrays the source of the play: Euripides' \textit{Alcestis}. In \textit{Alcestes}, Heracles brings resurrected Alcestis with a veil on her face. Heracles introduces her to Admetus as a stranger; a young woman whom he had won in a wrestling match. And he wants Admetus to keep her in his place till he returns. In \textit{The Cocktail Party}, Lavinia's motive in leaving Edward is only to administer a shock. She was brought back by Henry as Alcestis was brought back by Heracles. 'Lavinia has metaphorically died (separated) on his behalf is no less than that of Alcestis' death for Admetus'. She disappeared to provide a chance for Edward to makeup his mind to decide whom he wants, Lavinia or Celia; not both of them.

... I thought if I died,  
To you, I who had been only ghost to you,  
You might be able to find the road back  
To a time when you were real... (CPP. P, 396)

Lavinia arrived to hear two important news, both Celia and Peter are going away. Peter is going to California to pursue his writing for Hollywood. Celia does not disclose her destination but speaks to Lavinia to remember herself as one who wants Lavinia and Edward to be happy. Lavinia consoles her saying that they would manage as they have been in the past.

But when everybody left, Lavinia and Edward fall back to their old habit of nagging, provoking each other and again fall apart. Both suspect that one is trying to dominating the other. They never loved each other, but rather pretended to be doing so. Lavinia informs that she deserted him to give a chance to find himself what he does want. The unidentified guest explained all the possible decisions he could take by his own choice. Edward now repents for making a wrong choice of wanting Lavinia back:

> There was a door and I could not open it. I could not touch the handle. (CPP. P, 397)

Now he finds himself in a prison. It is like a hell; what is hell. Hell is oneself:

> Hell is alone, the other figures it
> Merely projections. There is nothing to escape from and nothing escapes to. One is always alone. (CPP. P, 397)

'To feel alone' is one of the ills of the modern civilization; this feeling is called alienation. It is a mental condition where a person thinks that no one wants him. And he wants nobody. To live a balanced and contented life, four bonds are necessary. They are confidence in self, a good relation ship with his family, with society and, lastly spiritual relation ship with God. Modern civilization and technology have made modern men secular, devoid of God. Frequent migrations on jobs have alienated man from his society. When his family relationship does not give love, he will feel alone. When loneliness becomes unbearable he will
loose mental balance. This is what exactly happening to Edward. Lavinia reads his mind and advises him to think about her also. Unmindful of her complaint Edward goes on talking to himself:

It was only yesterday that damnation took place. And now I must live day by day, hour by hour, for ever and ever with it. (CPP. P, 397).

That is what one gets if he pursues blindly the sensual pleasures. Edward's illicit love with Celia was nothing but blind persuasion of sensual pleasures. The *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* say about such people thus. Senses can not be satisfied by providing more and more sensual pleasures to them. They give an example: a fire cannot be quenched by providing more fuel to it. The unsatisfied craving for pleasure, when not satisfied brings anger. The anger makes a man mad. Such is the condition of Edward as Lavinia rightly says: 'I think you are on the verge of a nervous breakdown'. C.P.P 397

This condition of Edward has a parallel in *Alcestis*. Admetus is a changed person while returning from funeral. But even before it, he tells Heracles 'dead or not dead she (Alcestis) troubles me'. After six lines he says:

One who is going to die is already dead, and the dead is nonexistent.

Thus he denounces his wife and laments, 'I should have died, and I have escaped my fate, only to drag out a wretched life. Only now I perceive it. . He asks the chorus:

'O, my friends, what then avails if that I live, if I must live in misery and shame'

Heracles said the same words as Lavinia said to describe the condition of Admetus, 'Men will call you mad'! (CGD.p,

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24 Ibid, 50
When Lavinia suggests Edward to consult a doctor, while Celia also made similar suggestion, he has responded in the same manner. He said to Celia; 'I would need some one greater than the greatest doctor'. To Lavinia he answers 'I don't need a doctor'. In the opinion of Eliot, doctors are capable of curing sick, guilty mind. This situation has nothing to do with illness. This state is the outcome of sin. The problem is spiritual; hence, needs spiritual treatment. We may remember Lady Macbeth who asks the doctor 'can you cure the mind sick with sin? Over and above Lavinia taunts Edward? 'Indeed, and has the difference nothing to do with Celia going to California with Peter'. He bursts open with anger and calls her an angel of destruction.

And then you came back you
The angel of destruction just as I felt sure
In a moment, at your touch there is nothing but ruin, (CPP. P, 398)

Eumelus, son of Alcestis, laments at the death of his mother: 'And your death, o mother, destroys our house'. (Alc.)

Act two begins at Sir Henry Harecourt Reilly's Psychiatric consulting room. Alex meets Reilly, who is actually the unidentified guest at the Chamberlaynes' cocktail party, and informs that, on his recommendation Edward would come to consult him. He also tells Reilly that Edwards is now living at his club. Edward recognises Reilly and begins to go back. But Reilly persuades him to sit down and talk about his problems. Pouring one's heart out subsidises stress with whom a person thinks he cares for him. Unhappy married life leads to mental disorders. This is called the family therapy which began in 1950 and was successful. Henry's words that, 'the single patient who is ill by himself is rather the exception'... (CPP. P, 405). These words remind us of Edward's unhappy family life is the cause for his distress.

26 William Shakespeare, Macbeth Ed. Ashok Chopra (New-Delhi: Living Media India Limited) III: 40
Edward begins to narrate his mental condition. Edward thinks that he has ceased to believe in his own personality. He is obsessed by the thought of his own insignificance. He wanted his wife back because she has bewitched him with her obstinate, unconscious and inhuman strength. When she had left him, he began to dissolve and cease to exist. That is what she has done to him. Now he cannot live with her; that is now intolerable. She has made the world a place he can not live in except on her terms. Now he wants to go to a sanatorium where he will be alone. He is suffering from death of the spirit.

That condition is similar to that of Admetus after the burial of Alcestis. He could not live with her because of his imminent death. Now she is dead. Without her, his palace has become a void. He cannot live in society because of his cowardice of letting his wife to die in his place. The people will talk: 'is Admetus a man'? His very existence becomes non existent because he cannot live up to the standard of Greek values; he could aspire for none. Edward is living in his club; he can not live there more than seven days. He cannot go to a hotel, the scandal of divorce may spread; and he cannot live at his house with Lavinia. And for that reason, he insists on Reilly to send him to a sanatorium, where he can be lonely.

But Reilly is thinking other wise. 'The single patient who is ill by himself is rather an exception'. (CPP. P, 405) 'Family therapy is based on the assumption that the cause of the mental disorder is in the entire family system and should therefore treat it within the context of the family'.

Patients are only pieces of total situation. He needs to know much more than what patients disclose themselves. This is true of all times.

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The condition of Admetus was the sum of circumstances like Artemis' curse, Apollo's negotiation, the reprieve; none coming forward except Alcestis, her death and enlightenment. Reilly knows Edward is not honestly revealing complete facts. He has to explore for more facts. Even though Edward protests, he introduces another patient with similar symptoms. That patient is none other than Lavinia, who had consulted him two months back. Reilly calls them self deceivers who have lied to him, omitting important facts; Edward concealed his secret relationship with Celia. Edward protests not to disclose it before his wife who does not know about it. Lavinia now reveals that there is none who does not know about it. Lavinia also had lied to Reilly. She had revealed to Reilly this act of her husband was the cause of her mental breakdown. But she had failed to mention that the actual cause of her nervous breakdown was the defection of her young lover, who fell in love with Celia Coplestone! That lover was the young writer Peter Quilpe.

When Lavinia deserted Edward, he discovered that he does not really love Celia; and doubted that if he was capable of loving anybody. It results in a distress and the fear of impotency. On the part of Lavinia, when her young friend deserted her for a younger girl, it was a shock to her. She wanted to be loved. She had come to know that no one had ever loved her. She began to fear that no one could love her.

Both faced similar isolation, a man who finds himself incapable of loving and a woman who finds that no man can love her. Reilly convinces them that, if they reverse their thinking pattern, they can live together. They consent. He bids them farewell with these words: 'Go in peace. And work out your salvation with diligence'. (CPP, P, 411.)

He thus completes the task of Heracles in Alcestis - returning dead Alcestis back to Admetus. It was not that simple; he makes himself convinced that Admetus was noble
enough to receive her back. He veils the dumb Alcestis, asks Admetus to keep her in palace, till he returns. Admetus refuses, he only accept her without turning towards her. Reilly as a psychiatrist takes his own long procedure to do it. Reilly is confessor priest and psychiatrist bundled into one.

Though their episode looks so simple it has mythical, spiritual, religious and psychological intonations. In every society, it is the woman that makes highest sacrifice, to keep her marriage and house intact. In Alcestis myth, only Alcestis dies for Admetus; though his own parents refuse to do so. She makes that sacrifice because she loves him; the other reason is not to render her children fatherless, if she did not do so, though reluctantly. In The Cocktail Party also it is Lavinia who takes initiative to test what Edward really wants. It is Celia that makes the highest sacrifice, so that these couple may begin to live a new life. Research in three folk tales, preserved in German, Greek, and American folklore contain the element of basic situation in the Alcestis myth. According to Albin Lesky, if these folk songs are stripped off their individual development, the kernel will be:

On the wedding day of king, death comes to the bride groom; death is willing to accept a substitute. But both the kings' parents refuse the sacrifice; finally the young bride intervenes and follows the death, to save the life of her beloved.\(^{28}\)

The Cocktail Party had a success because the majority of play goers liked marriage being kept intact without resorting to divorce, and making adjustments and adaptations by mutual consent of the spouses. It is still recognised that the spiritual and the religious virtues keep the marriages intact. Chamberlaynes returning to married life again is the essence of Charles Williams' affirmative way of life for salvation. In

the history of Christian mysticism from the time of writing attributed to Dionysius Aeropagite there have been traditionally two paths by which the soul could come to God; they are the Negative way and the Affirmative way. According to this the world is an imperfect image of God. Thus all created things are to be accepted in love as the images of the divine. Marriage, in this light, is the Affirmative path. Charles Williams described this way as the way of poets and lovers, and he cited Dante Algheri as the leading exponent of this path. This way is the doctrine of romantic love, he felt that:

For the lover, the image of the beloved at the moment of first falling in love is an image of the divine perfection. It is ideal behind the complex plan of *The Cocktail Party.*

John Heath Stubbs writes in his introduction to the work of Charles Williams, that monasticism saved Christianity as a result of the condition accompanying the fall of Roman Empire. Today European civilisation is faced with analogous situation.

Christian values must be upheld and preserved by a different kind of organisation of an essentially 'lay' kind, of Christian living and working in the world, yet under law of grace.

Affirmative path is prescribed for Chamberlaynes, because, the problems of their marriage are not from psychological sources but in an abiding spiritual deficiency. They were not suited for the second path; so nothing was mentioned about it by Reilly. The tenets for Chamberlaynes are making best of bad job. As Reilly puts in:

Learn to avoid excessive expectation, become tolerant of them and other. Giving and taking, in a usual action, Become tolerant of themselves and others are contented with the morning that

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separates, and that evening that brings together. (CPP. P, 41)

The above lines are English translation of just essence what thunder said in 'The Waste Land'. Datta, Dayadwam, and Damyatha are the path of a family to move away from their domestic waste lands. Again these Sanskrit words are a part of parting benediction of Prajapthi Brahma to his disciples in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The story goes like this. Gods, Demons, and Human beings begged Prajapathi Brahma, to give them his parting benediction after the prescribed period of learning in his hermitage. He uttered a single syllable 'da' and asked them to meditate about its meaning.

Gods are endowed with noble qualities; yet they are excessively sensuous. They, like characters in a high comedy have nothing to do but to enjoy heavenly pleasures. They understand that the syllable stands for Damyatha: restraining sensuous desires. It is good for them. Lavinia and Edward wanted more sensual pleasures than their marriage partners could give; they resorted to extra- marital relationship. The result was disillusion. Hence restraining is the remedy for them: Damyatha.

Human beings are greedy and are hoarders of material things. They collect wealth and other worldly things far more than their needs. The real use of wealth is either in enjoyment or to give it in alms to the needy. The humans are misers; they understood the meaning of the syllable da as Datta, to give out: to give in alms whatever they have hoarded in excess; it is good for them. Lavinia and Edward are plain human beings. They are hoarders of love lavished by others. Edward enjoyed the love of Celia and Lavinia that of Peter, but both do not reciprocate it. They can not love anybody. Hence they should compensate this lovelessness by exchanging material things expected by each other. Hence they are to practice - to give and take: Dutta. Principle of give
and take becomes a highly personalised process that not only helps individuals, to crest the currents of change in their own lives but also help to bind the entire society together in the kind of love net work, as an integrated system based on the principle of ‘I need you as much as you need me’.  

Demons have enormous physical power, so they are cruel in nature. They understood the da as damyatha. To be kind about other fellow beings. The mutual treatment between Lavinia and Edward is cruel. They quarrelled, taunted, insulted and deceived each other. They have to correct their behaviour with mutual kindness: Dayadwam. Thus ‘da’ triads: ‘Datta, Damyatha and Dayadwam’ are universal values to be practiced by all for their own good. And they help to keep the spouses happy and to live in peace. Indian astrology classifies human beings including man and woman into three groups, Ganas. They are Deva (divine), Rakshasa (demon) and Manushya (human). Marriage between spouses of same class is superior, between Deva and Manava, Deva and Rakshasa is tolerable, while between Manava and Rakshasa is a taboo and not auspicious. Marriage partners, in India, belonging to different classes invariably follow ‘da triads’; so Indian marriages are long sustaining, though they may be mediocre.

Eliot has used the themes or patterns of exoteric and esoteric paths of religion in his poetry and plays. In The Cocktail Party we find Eliot using the both. The exoteric path of religion is popular ritual religion. It is theological, developed through myth and poetry, and is concerned with devotion and observance. It is aimed at the improvement of moral life and offered through transmigration, a temporary heaven where the human beings enjoyed the company of gods. The pious people who follow this path are called Devotees.

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The devotees know and worship Brahman in the exoteric theological form. The path of the devotee is lower one. The devotee must be guided by a man spirit, who is not a human being to the realm of Brahman. Eliot's conversion itself was based on his recognition of himself as a devotees rather than a sage, and he accepted an exoteric, world of myth, allegory, devotion, religious observance, and insight of that recognition. In this play Reilly describes these two paths to Celia. The first path is that of the devotee.

Reilly bids farewell to Chamberlaynes with following words: 'Go in peace and work out your salvation with diligence'. These are the words Buddha used to conclude his sermons *Refuge unto Yourself*; Eliot considered the *Nikayas or Saint's stories*, as common wisdom of mankind. The full meaning of this statement can be understood by referring to the meaning of life according to Buddhism, in comparison with medical diagnosis and remedy. The diagnosis is that there is suffering in the world (Dukka); the remedy is suppression of that pain through the cessation of desire, which can be attained by mental discipline. Before such discipline can be enjoined, the patient must be convinced of the diagnosis. And this conviction can come only through deeper awareness of suffering which Buddha calls compassion. This can be directed straight to Eliot's words in 'East Coker' 'to be restored, our sickness must grow worst'; this seems to Europeans as allegory of Christ's crucifixion. Edward and Lavinia learned the lessons only when they underwent humiliation and suffering.

The presence of Henry is like a horned man as 'Raglan shows in Egyptian ritual, the horned man, was the divine king embodying fertility'. In a ritual of initiation and rebirth, he is a figure symbolised by the power acquired by the newborn initiate. He would be a doctor as well. One could speculate

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on the ritual implication of Sir Henry’s curative treatment of Edward. He recreates for Edward, a satisfactory relationship with his wife. That is, he affects a ritual marriage. This is comparable to Heracles’ handing over Alcestis back to Admetus, by forcing him to take her by hand.34 ‘Both of them need to submit making best of the past; to cease wishing for what can not be had and thus to attain what is actually within reach’.35 There is something of a parable in Eliot’s idea of choices which are the duty if each person is made to follow his calling. Edward and Lavinia’s choice is to become reconciled and carry on their lack lustre marriage.36

After Chamberlains exit, Julia meets Reilly and tells him that she has brought Celia to meet him and Celia is ready to make a decision. Julia retires to an adjacent room till Reilly is done away with Celia. Alex also will join her later. Reilly’s nurse secretary shows in Celia.

Celia feels that she has met Reilly some where. Reilly discloses that he was at Edward’s last party at the insistence of Mrs Julia Shuttlethwaithe. Celia begins to report herself. She has come to him in desperation. She has no one to blame for it but herself. She is in no delusion; but she feels the world she lives in is all in delusion. There is something wrong with her; if it is not so, and then there is something wrong with the world itself. She would do anything that Reilly would tell to restore to normality. An awareness of solitude is the thing that is worrying her. It is not simply the end of an illusion, or being ditched (by Edward) what has happened has made her aware that she has always been alone. One is always alone. It is a revelation about her relationship with everybody. Every body is alone. She judges that people make a

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34 Ibid, p. 218.
noise and think that they are talking to each other; they make
faces, and think that they understand each other. Her second
symptom is a sense of sin.

Reilly asks Celia to elaborate what is that she calls
sin. She feels that it is emptiness, of failure towards
someone, or something outside her and that she should atone
for it. She eagerly asks Reilly if he can cure a patient with
such a state of mind. This reminds us again of the Lady
Macbeth’s famous words, ‘Canst thou not minister to a mind
diseased’? The doctor after observing Lady Macbeth declares
that ‘More she needs divine than the physician’. Reilly wants
to clarify her opinion about her relationship with that man
(Edward). she reveals that she thought that she was giving so
much love to him; and he to her. Giving and taking seemed
right for them together. Then she found they are strangers.
Did they simply make use of each other? There was neither
giving nor taking. She wonders if they loved something
created by their own imagination. Are they all, in fact
unlovable and un-loving? Then one is alone and if one is
alone, then lover and beloved are equally unreal. The dreamer
is no more real than his dream.

Celia’s mental state is better explained in terms of
India’s famous Advaita philosopher Shankara Bhagavatpada
whose teachings were known to Eliot through Paul Duson’s the
Upanishads and the system of the Vedanta. Shankara’s
influence on Eliot can be felt in ‘Gerontion’. His teaching
can be summarised thus. ‘Only God is real and the world is
unreal’. (Brahma sathya jaganmithya). He gives his famous
comparison about illusion (Maya). A person given over to
illusion sees a rope; he perceives it as a serpent. When this
illusion is removed by the love of God, the embodied soul
identifies itself with God and merges with God. This is

Wiliam Shakespeare, Macbeth Ed. Ashok Chopra (New-Delhi: Living
Media India Limited) III: 40.

salvation. For the removal of illusion, the love of impermanent worldly things, persons and life must be given up, which are to be replaced with knowledge, devotion and renunciation. In *The Cocktail Party*, Celia adored Edward in place of god and showered her devotion on him. It is a misdirected love towards created beings. It is bound to be disillusioned. When Edward deserted her and decided to have his wife back, she felt delusion, solitude, and failure. She should have tried to possess God, instead of trying to possess Edward. Therefore she suffers from the feeling of sin, for which she wants to atone.

Again Shankara explains two paths of devotion: the path of a devotee, which is already explained in the context of Chamberlaynes' reconciliation, and the path of a sage. This path is vividly explained by Shankara as an esoteric path. The sage possesses an immediate consciousness of the identity of his own self with Brahman, and also of the illusory nature of the whole extended world.

For Shankara the path of a sage is reserved for the few who are the strong.\(^{39}\)

However the two have the same goal: the union with God. A sage has in his death consciousness of the oneness with Brahman, and is undisturbed with the fate of the physical body. Reilly, after knowing the knowledge of her selection, deliberately asks what she thinks of Edward and her relation with him. Celia's answer reveals how worldly and weak is Edward:

Like a child who has wandered into a forest,  
And suddenly discovers he is only a child  
Lost in a forest, wanting to go home. CPP. P, 416

Reilly responds that 'Compassion' may be already a clue towards finding her own way out of the forest. (CPP 416)

Celia answers that the memory of her useless searching for the

treasure in the forest which was not there, perhaps nowhere, will haunt her. Reilly consoles her by saying that disillusion can become an illusion if she rests in that thought. In a nutshell Celia asks Reilly to cure her from:

I want to be cured of a craving for something I cannot find and the shame of never finding it. (CPP. P, 417)

Reilly says that the condition is curable but the form of treatment must be of her own choice. Reilly gives her two treatments to select from. He can reconcile her to human condition that Chamberlaynes selected. But Celia refuses that path since she says: 'in fact, I think it would really be dishonest'. She can not live a married life with anybody else. Then Reilly says there is other way if she has the courage. It is unknown and needs faith, faith that issues from despair but ends in possession of what she has sought for in the wrong place. The statement made earlier by Celia confirms that they need the advice of one who is more than a doctor.

Then what kind of doctor Sir Henry is? Eliot in 1923 wrote a review named The beating of a Drum, where he briefly discusses that ritual source of fools in Shakespear’s plays is derived from the ritual shaman, the medicine man and the doctor who revives dead knights. Henry answers to the description of both fool and doctor. His addiction to apparent nonsense in Act I belies the gravity of his role; he has the figurative madness of the prophet.

Courageous lady Celia selects the second treatment: renunciation in the Indic thought; while it’s Christian counterpart is Charles William’s the Negative way of life. Followers of the Negative way believe that God may be reached by detaching the soul from the love of all things that are not god or according to St John of the cross:
To divest oneself of the love of created beings
Celia selects the negative way which is difficult.\textsuperscript{40}

'The Cocktail Party represents the three acts as the
three phases of human mind. Act I shows the state of
indifference to God’s will. Act two shows memory, the use of
memory for liberation through the agency of Sir Henry and Act
Three presents the two conditions of attachment and
detachment'.\textsuperscript{41}

When Celia asks Reilly which way is better, Reilly
answers:

Neither way is better.
Both ways are necessary. It is also necessary.
To make choice between them. (CPP. P, 418)

Just as no one can do wrong things of sin except with an
exercise of free will, so no one can desire the fulfilment of
his option to atone it by a personal choice. Reilly decides
to send her to his sanatorium. Celia’s excitement about a new
path temporarily reduces. She had known about Lavinia being
sent to a sanatorium. But she had returned to ordinary life.
Would she be also called back to everyday world? Reilly
assures her:

I am very careful whom I send there; ‘Those who
go not come back as they did’. CPP. P, 419

He was actually sending her to death; and to abode of god
there on. In the \textit{Bhagavad-Gita}, Lord Krishna describes his
abode to Arjuna thus ‘Where the sun does not shine, neither
moon nor fire, once gone there no one returns; such is my
abode’. Reilly does know of her fate (death) which will be
explained in the Act Three. He sends Celia: ‘Go in peace, my
daughter; work out your salvation with diligence’; (CPP. P,
420) this suggests Buddhist conception of renunciation.

\textsuperscript{40} Carroll Smith, \textit{T.S.Eliot’s Dramatic Theory and Practice: from
p.157.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p, 158.
Spiritual solution to secular problems need not be viewed with scepticism and be dismissed as superstition and blind belief. Transpersonal psychology is concerned with recognition, understanding and realisation of non ordinary mystical experiences. 'Its concerns are close to spiritual traditions, bridging psychology and spiritual quest. Jung has accepted spirituality as an integral aspect of human nature and vital force in human life'.

With reference to the source of the play, Alcestis, we don’t find a character like Celia. It seems Eliot has split Alcestis into two parts. Lavinia is the one who was restored to Admetus and Celia was the other who makes the sacrifice; let’s remember what Celia says to Lavinia in Act one; scene two:

Lavinia......... I may not see you again... (I wish) you and Edward to be happy. (CPP.p, 389)

Alcestis declares to Admetus before she dies that:

To show you honour and at the cost of my life—that you may still behold life farewell. Live happy.

Alcestis proclaims before dying that, she could have lived, if she desired and let Admetus die. Then she says:

I might have lived and wedded any in the Thessaly I choose and dwelt with happiness and royal home.

Eliot has taken this inner desire of Alcestis and devised Lavinia’s extramarital relationship with an Youngman called Peter Quilpe. Thus Alcestis’ latent desire was actualised by Lavinia. In both the cases, however, pursuit of excessive sensual pleasure produced only sorrow and disappointment.

‘Celia abnegates her will in the service of holiness. Celia in

42 Fritzof Capra, Turning Point (London: Flamingo) 1982
44 Ibid, p, 687.
submitting to 'the tougher self', accepts suffering through action. This is akin to Beckett's 'perfecting of will'.

The path of a sage is for only those who practice austerity and faith in the forest; who live on alms and without passion, and 'go through the door of the sun' to find genuine immortality. The primary aspects are what truth is? And 'how shall I escape the endless repetitions of worldly experience'? Salvation meant escape through insight into an eternal timeless reality. Path of a saint is unknown so 'it is a journey blind'. It is a way of loneliness and communion. Henry confesses before Julia that he knows nothing about 'terror of the journey' or 'the process by which a human is Transhumanised' and 'suffering before illumination'.

Grover Smith comments that this path is described in the Ascent of Mt Carmel. However 'Celia has to cross through the valley of derision, the way between scolding hills. It is a journey out of darkness through darkness'.

Celia departs from Reilly’s consulting room, Julia was asked to come in. Reilly discloses that Celia will go far, very far; Julia knew she would. Both Reilly and Julia are worried about the life of Lavinia and Edward: a model to modern couple, who would lead a life without real love and understanding. A glimpse of this life is shown in Act II. Reilly explains it again in the following words:

... What they have to go back to?
To the stale food mouldering in the larder
Stale thoughts mouldering in their mind
... Mirror to mirror, reflecting vanity. (CPP. P, 420)

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47 Ibid, p, 42.

They also discuss the difficulties that Celia may face in her new life; agree upon her innocence, humble nature, her patience and capacity to suffer. Alex joins them. They drink for the health of Chamberlaynes and Celia. Chamberlaynes are named as:

Let them build the hearth under the protection of the stars. Let them place a chair by each side of it. May the holy one watch over the roof. May the moon herself influence the bed'. (CPP. P, 422)

Hearth is identified with house and family. Among Greeks, hearth was regarded as a goddess. Alcestis prayed to the Goddess of hearth to grant good life to her surviving children. Here in The Cocktail Party, libation is given to the good and contented life to Chamberlaynes. Alcestis then goes to her bed and bid the bed farewell. The marriage bed represents youthful pleasure, children, and fertility. Chamberlaynes were childless. The moon that represents goddess Venus may develop mutual love and children.

They also drink for the health of Celia who is on a journey. They pray to God to watch over her in road, mountain desert, labyrinth and quick sand to protect her from the voices, visions, tumult and silence. And they also discuss that Alex has done something good to Peter Quilpe, about a writing job in Hollywood, with his connections at California.

They seem to belonging to a secret religious order to help the individuals in their spiritual struggle. They may be called as guardians; Celia has already accepted Julia as her guardian. Reilly is the guardian of Edward. Alex is guardian to Peter Quilpe. They may be called in Julia’s own words good Samaritans. The Guardians seem to be members of the select group, whom, Eliot calls community of Christians.

Even in The Christian society he says; it is only from smaller number of conscious human beings, the community of
Christians that one would expect conscious Christian life on its highest social level.\textsuperscript{49}

The community of Christians is not an organisation but a body of indefinite outline; composed of both clergy and laity, more spiritually and intellectually developed. It will be their identity of belief and aspiration, their background of common system of education and common culture, which will enable to influence and be influenced by each other, and collectively to form the conscious mind and conscience of the nation.\textsuperscript{50}

The members of this group are not necessarily highly gifted either intellectually or spiritually, but need to understand spiritual issues which are the qualification for exerting the kind of influence required. Such persons can be as deceptive in the manner. This gives Eliot good warrant for making excellent comedy out of them. William Arrow Smith suggests that 'the guardians of the Christian Idea are 'one eyed in the kingdom of blinds' nothing more exalted than that.'\textsuperscript{51} Persons resembling or following these ideas are working for the betterment of mankind serving food, shelter, literacy, medicine, health care, protection, transport from the areas of disaster and war round the world in the form of non profit, Non Governmental Organisations. (NGO) they work purely on the humanitarian considerations, serve people belonging to all religions. Such organisations and more spiritually oriented persons to work for them are needed now.

'It can be inferred that Reilly, Julia and Alex are the spiritual guardians of the rest of the characters; Comedy is transformed into an exposition of the Christian love and

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, p, 150.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p,150.
Eliot's necessity of creating guardian characters is influenced by Christopher Dawson's book *The Making of Europe* which has also influenced Eliot's social thought. He considers Western Europe as a common civilisation, which originated from two sources: Classical culture and the Germanic tribal system. The human material out of which modern Europe came was barbarian and his tribes. The essence of barbaric society was kinship. It was consistent with high ideal of personal freedom and self-respect and yet evoked an intense spirit of loyalty and devotion on the part of the individual tribesman towards the community and its chief. It's moral and spiritual development was for more advanced of its material culture. Eliot called this small community as 'Community of Christians'.

Greek mythology has such small groups of mortal, semi divine and divine personalities, who co-habit as a community quite often. For example god Apollo incurred wrath of Zeus and served as herder in Admetus' court, who was a human being. Admetus treated him well. A bond of loyalty was created between Apollo and Admetus. When Admetus incurred a curse of premature death, Apollo negotiated a concession that if some one dies in the place of Admetus, he will be allowed to live. Alcestes dies for her husband. At that time the Heracles comes to palace of Admetus as a guest he was treated well. He brings Alcestis back from death.

Members of this community help the spiritually sick people to get back to the God's path. Such groups, Eliot thinks, can preserve the threatened ancient values for posterity. Many believe that:

This can be done, not by return to monastic ideal but, by some organisation of an essentially lay kind

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of Christian living and working in the world, yet under the law of grace.\(^54\)

Three guardians project the tougher selves of Edward, Lavinia and Celia. They do not ban the possibility of nurturing of Peter. In The Cocktail Party Eliot finds no human relationship which is satisfactory in itself. 'Those who think they love can not marry; those who have married only endure each other. 'Both of them need to submit making best of the past; to cease wishing for what can not be had and thus to attain what is actually within reach'.\(^55\)

Act Three begins at the drawing room of Chamberlaynes where Lavinia is seen overseeing the preparations for a Cocktail party. Their casual exchange of greetings and compliments symbolically reveal that they are now living happily, forgetting their treacheries against each other. From their conversation it is learned that they have bought a house far away from city and they are eager to move away to live in that suitable place. Both Edward and Lavinia are relaxing a bit before party begins. The myth of sterility underlays The Waste Land, Eliot admits one in the play The Cocktail Party. Edward says to Lavinia in the beginning of the act III, 'You need to rest now'. Evidently the marriage is going to be fruitful.\(^56\) It is a clue to show that Lavinia has broken her baroness and has conceived. The last act of the play takes place after seven years of actual marriage between Lavinia and Edward, the common ritual period. It would be a simple matter, to contrive an elaborate and parallel path through the waste land, to fertility myths cited by Frazer and even Grail.


legend, to bring emotional reconciliation between Edward and Lavinia, is a new life for both of them.

Alex and Julia come to the party a little earlier. Alex has story to tell about strife among natives in a remote island called Kinkanja between Christian converts and heathens. Then Peter Quilpe, who has just arrived from California, joins the party. He is working on a film. He could get a good role for Celia in their new film; he asks the whereabouts of Celia Coplestone. In the meanwhile Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly also joins them. Then Alex discloses that Celia is dead in that insurrection in Kinkanja between the Christian converts and heathens. Celia had joined a religious nursing order. She was asked to go out to a remote country called Kinkanja, and was stationed with two other sisters at the criticised village in time of plague and pestilence. There was an insurrection by the heathens who resented the Christian natives. Celia refused to leave the dying natives of plague; she was captured by raiders and crucified very near an ant hill.

When the shock of the news abated, Henry discloses that he had the premonition of Celia's violent death. In *Alcestis*, everybody new that, since she volunteered to die for her husband, she would die on an appointed day. Henry discloses that, when he met Celia first at the party, he had seen an aura or a bright shadow around her. It is the premonition of death:

That was her destiny... so all I could do was to direct her in the way of preparation. (CPP. P, 437)

He also illustrates 'Magus Zoroaster meeting his own image in the garden, 'that apparition he, saw lies bellow the grave. Death unites them'. This incident reveals the inevitability of her death but death is a part of life. Greek tradition believes that the noble death that makes other to live is the heroic death; and it is the befitting answer to
the invincibility of death. Such death gives meaning to the life. Here life and death unite meaningfully.\(^7\)

Celia's death brings repentance in Edward and Lavinia. They blame themselves for her death. Lavinia repents for being spiteful of her. Edward feels himself equal to half a dozen savages who killed her. Chamberlaynes accept that the blood of the saints and martyrs is on their hands. Peter also repents that he thought only for himself. Reilly pacifies them describing Celia's death as triumphant one; for she died for others. But he was not responsible for her triumph; but as responsible for her death as Chamberlaynes. Celia has set a standard by which others will try to live. She has also borne witness to a deeper reality than that of the ordinary life. The witness of her suffering is necessary because of the sin of the world. Celia's blood has brought them closer together as it has tied them to Peter. The life of the spirit is invigorated and the bonds of the society are strengthened.\(^8\)

The play is a divine comedy the characters come to themselves in a dark wood, where the straight way is lost and are set on right path towards the fulfilment ordained for them in divine providence.

In his original script Eliot had written that the natives of Kinkanja had constructed a tomb for Celia in her memory. But later, he changed it because this act becomes imitation of Becket myth. In the last scene of the *Alcestis*, chorus sings an ode describing the tomb of Alcestis as a holy shrine. Passers by departed from the path and visited her tomb. The Chorus sings that let not the grave of Admetus' spouse be counted as mere tomb, but revered as god's and be greeted by all who pass by. The wanderer shall turn from his path saying:


She died for her Lord. She is a blessed spirit she is now, Hail O sacred Lady, be our friend, thus shall men speak of her. (CGD. P, 110)

There is an unnamed power who speaks within the heart and conscience of every character of the play is the true centre of the play. Chamberlaynes have to live with these memories and make them into something new. Only by accepting the past, its meaning can be altered. Julia intercedes, and makes a statement:

Celia chooses a way of which the consequence was Kinkanja, Peter choose a way that leads him to Boltswell and he has to go there... (CPP. P, 439)

Peter remembered that experts from Hollywood would be waiting for him; he excuses himself by promising Chamberlaynes a visit next time. Julia now reminds Chamberlaynes:

... And now the consequence of the Chamberlaynes’ choice is a Cocktail Party. They must be ready for it. The guests must be arriving at any moment.

Lavinia is reluctant to face the guests. But Reilly reminds that it is her appointed burden and the party would be a success. They all leave. Eliot wants some stoic spirit among modern men by giving the example of guardian characters which he has borrowed from Heracles and his labour. Heracles was the slave of Erichtheus, and was on his way to tame the fierce horses of Diomedes. He has completed his seventh task of overcoming Cretan Bull. He was a man of action bound to his duty; he pretends not to like it, but carries out it as his duty, but not in any way emotionally involved with his work. ‘Drink and be merry for tomorrow you will die’. His capacity to love is unlimited. Genuine Mental Health manifests in those in which one’s identification with ego is playful and


concern for material health is pragmatic. This is an affirmative way of life; this is an emphasis on present moment, and awareness of spiritual dimension of existence. Edward explains Lavinia what he understood of all these happenings:

I think Sir Henry has been saying
Every moment is a new beginning;
And Julia, that life is only keeping on;
And some how, the two ideas fit together. CPP, 440

The door bell rings, Chamberlaynes get ready to welcome guests. In Alcestis Heracles bids farewell to Admetus, as Henry did to Chamberlaynes', asking him:

And you Admetus show as ever a Good man's Welcome to your guests. I go to fulfil the task set by the king. CGD. 715.

'Every one to his task' that is what the leader in the Rock says and that is what Krishna said to Arjuna; one should perform his duty as devotion which is the path of salvation.

It is hoped that turbulence of tomorrow, due to rapid change will drive the people deeper into their families. People will marry for stable structure. Dr. Irwing M Greenberg hopes:

Family serves as one portable roots anchoring one against the storm of change.

Our ancestors knew the importance of home and wife. To an Indian his house is no less than a temple. A wife is called goddess of prosperity to his house. Manu, the ancient Indian law giver, interprets in his Manu smriti law that:

Yathra naryasthu poojyanthe Ramanthe thathra
Devathaha.Grihini grihamuchyathe (Where, women are respected, there, gods are pleased and a wife herself constitutes a house.)

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