

CHAPTER V

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***“No.... it isn't that I want to be alone,
But that everyone's alone - or so it seems to me,
They make noises, and think they are talking to each
other;
They make faces, and think they understand each
other.
And I'm sure that they don't. Is that a delusion ?”***
- Celia

Now we are transported from the world of The Family Reunion into the world of The Cocktail Party, from the world of the M^hchenseys into the world of the Chamberlaynes, from the world of Agatha, Mary and the aunts and uncles into the world of Reilly, Julia, Peter, Alex and Celia. Here in The Cocktail Party the atmosphere of party is there, there is psychological loneliness, the nervous breakdown, the spiritual anguish, the sense of despair, insanity, the sense of sin and expiation, the sense of service and sacrifice. In this play, too, T. S. Eliot was preoccupied with the depiction of human drama beneath the social and public masks of parties, symbols of social unity. But these parties end either in failure or in fiasco : social unity, it seems, is difficult to achieve. If at all, it can be had by some compromise between the members of it.

The Cocktail Party (1949) is Eliot's second play dealing with contemporary setting. It sketches the fashionable life of the

Chamberlaynes and their friends. The surface of the play exhibits all the features of a comedy of manners, the silly party, the urban setting, the trivial chatter, but at a deeper level it is something more than the comedy of manners as it has the seriousness of love and a deep sense of despair. It is a play in three Acts.

The play opens with a cocktail party in the drawing room of Edward Chamberlayne who is a lawyer. His wife Lavinia, who herself proposed to give a party on the same day, is not present in her house. Celia Coplestone, Alexander MacColgie Gibbs, Peter Quilpe, Julia Shuttlethwaite and the Unidentified Guest (who is actually Reilly) are the guests of the day assembled to join the party. All of them request Julia to tell the story about Lady Klootz and the wedding cake.

Edward does not know all the guests. He has no idea as to where his wife has gone, but he lies to them that she has gone to her aunt's house in the country as the latter is seriously ill. The Unidentified Guest knows that Edward is in a mood to talk to him and that he, being a stranger, can talk more frankly. He inquires about Edward's married life and knows that he is not happy with his wife, and that the reason for her disappearance is not known. She may not return at all. He promises Edward that though he is a stranger to him, his wife will be back in twenty-four hours if only he will promise not to ask any questions about her whereabouts. The conversation is interrupted by Julia, who comes to search for her glasses. The Guest starts a song. Naturally, she

thinks of him to be 'a dreadful man.' Alex wants to take Edward out for dinner but the latter shows his inability to go out.

Edward is in the same flat sitting alone, playing cards. He tells Celia that he wants Lavinia back. She feels sorry for him because his life with Lavinia, she thinks, will not be a happy one. According to him, the fortune of man is predetermined, to be happy or unhappy does not depend upon the individual.

On the afternoon of the next day, Edward and the Guest are in the same room. Lavinia is about to come. The Guest reminds him of the decision he had taken. The wife whom he knew is dead; now he is meeting an entirely different person. Celia, Peter, Julia and Alex have all come in response to the letters received by them. Peter is going to California where he has got a contract for making films, and Celia also is going out somewhere.

Lavinia is back, she is surprised when she knows that someone has sent telegrams from Essex. The Chamberlaynes are left alone, talking of previous life. According to Lavinia, Edward has no sense of humour and so she has also lost that sense. He complains against her that she had behaved towards him as if he was nothing or nobody. She suggests that he should consult a doctor as he is on the edge of a nervous breakdown. But he replies that if he goes to a doctor, the doctor will be of his choice and not the one recommended by her.

Several weeks later, Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly, the psychiatrist is busy instructing the nurse secretary about two appointments. Julia, Alex and Reilly have planned in such a way that both Edward and Lavinia should come to consult the doctor separately. Edward is before the doctor. He feels himself an insignificant personality with the lack of decision-making power. He can no more live with her, it is intolerable; but at the same time he cannot live without her. In order to understand the whole situation Reilly calls another patient, Lavinia. He tactfully makes them discuss their problems in his presence. They both have been in love : one with Peter and the other with Celia. In both cases love has come to nothing. The parting words of Reilly are "Go in peace / Work out your salvation with diligence."¹

Celia, disillusioned, comes to consult him. To Reilly's inquiry of her relations with Edward, she replies that she has no one to blame for her trouble. In the beginning the love between Edward and Celia was sweet and promising, later on she finds that they are strangers, making use of each other for selfish ends. Reilly tells her that her condition is under control, but the form of treatment must be of her own choice. She must go on a long journey to a strange place with faith, courage and determination.

Once again Edward and Lavinia, after two years, are giving a cocktail party in their flat. They have worked out a solution to their troubles and are leading a happy life together. Except Celia, all the

previous guests are assembled to join the Chamberlaynes and they have the similar drawing-room chatter. Unfortunately, very soon they receive the serious news of Celia's death. Two years ago, Celia had joined very strict order and was sent to Kikanji as a nurse to look after the plague-stricken natives. There she was killed by the natives. The Chamberlaynes feel guilty and responsible for her death. Reilly assures them that no responsibility for her death lies on anybody as her death is a natural consequence.

They all leave Edward and Lavinia together. Thus ends not only the party but also the play.

The Cocktail Party, a Three-Act play in a modern setting, begins with a party and ends with a party. It shows the signs of Eliot's mastery and maturity as a play-wright. It was very popular in London and New York and "was a landmark in the revival of poetic drama."² As for the themes of it, there is a diversity of critical views and opinions : choice-making, meaninglessness in life, nihilism, religious view of life, domestic discords, separation and consequent reconciliation and understanding, and so forth. According to Virendra Roy, "The Cocktail Party is a play of repentance and atonement, through which belief in Christian love within marriage and saintly martyrdom is affirmed."³ K. S. Misra rightly touches on the main theme of this play in the following words : "The play deals with the reconciliation between an estranged husband and wife after a brief period of separation caused by the

sudden departure of the latter with the intention never to return.”⁴ In addition to the above mentioned themes of the play, one is also led to say that the loneliness of modern man is also one of Eliot's major concerns, for one notices that the text of the play is loaded with such terms as ‘alone’, ‘lonely’, ‘separation’, ‘solitude’, ‘isolation’, ‘estrangement’ and so on. Obviously enough, this play provides us with the fertile ground to explore the five facets of alienation under discussion.

I

The Cocktail Party is a highly entertaining play with enough of suspense and surprise to keep up the interest of the readers. However, it is also a complex work of art with layers within layers of meaning. Alienation is one of the themes which is revealed to a greater extent in this play. The setting of the play is urban and the story faithfully mirrors the ennui, the boredom and frustration in the contemporary wasteland society and civilization. This might be the consequence of the alienation of these characters from God.

The play consists of a cocktail of characters : average human characters – Edward, Lavinia, Peter and Celia; guardian characters – Reilly, Julia and Alex. The average class is not the believer in God. The people of this class choose an ordinary human path on account of their simple choice or “Affirmative choice”. On the contrary, the guardian

characters always think of others and their safety. They satisfy themselves by doing good to others.

The alienation of the characters from God is basically not in their dialogue or conversation but we notice it in their behaviour and their routine course of action. Edward Chamberlayne and his wife, Lavinia have been married for half a decade, yet they do not understand each other. Each blames the other. Lavinia is of the opinion that her husband is a man incapable of loving; on the other hand Edward feels that his wife is a woman whom nobody can love. But to prove their ability of loving and being loved, Edward takes recourse to Celia and Lavinia prefers Peter Quilpe. Edward receives a shock due to Lavinia's sudden disappearance. He now finds that he has taken her and himself too much away from each other. It seems that both are living unhappy married lives perhaps because of their total disregard of God.

They have forgotten all about the Divine. They are spiritually sick, and directionless. However, their spiritual sickness is cured by Sir Harcourt Reilly, who under the mask of a psychiatrist, performs indirectly the role of the father confessor. The Cocktail Party is not of the salvation of an individual but of a group. The agents of the salvation are Reilly, Alex and Julia. They guide the Chamberlaynes and their circle in their quest for a secure foundation for their future. Reilly is a pivotal character around whom other characters move. In his capacity as a psychiatrist, he is the fashionable modern substitute for the priest,

and his psychiatrist coach is the substitute for the confessional box. He brings them back to life, not by the use of physical force but by the force of spirit and mind. All these guardians bring about spiritual change in the others and can bring people back to life, spiritual life. These guardians are the Divine instruments through whom the mistaken or misleading characters find a way in the darkness.

Edward and Lavinia are brought into the Reilly's consulting room. He does not really know his wife nor does he know himself. Therefore, he is keen on getting her back to know himself and Lavinia in the real sense. Edward says to Reilly at the party :

I must find out who she is, to find out who I am.
And what is the use of all your analysis
If I am to remain always lost in the dark ?⁵

Lavinia, who is practical, has suggested to him that he should see the psychiatrist. Reilly makes arrangements so that they come together, he strips them to all pretences and makes them ~~to~~ see and realize how much they have in common. After their self realization, they both blame themselves. The Admission in the spiritual sanatorium is a shelter to the people like Chamberlaynes, who imagine that they need a withdrawal from everyday life. Reilly who is the spiritual guide to them gives an idea and assures the guarantee about sanatorium.

They return refreshed;
And if they believe it to be a sanatorium
That is good reason for not sending them to one.
The people who need my sort of sanatorium
Are not easily deceived.⁶

The faith in his sanatorium means the security that they cannot be easily deceived. Faith in God and living with Him is meant to be safe. Earlier Edward and Lavinia found in a critical situation of not having any intimacy between them. Reilly knows both are ill and finds several symptoms to a marked degree and comments : "And one of them is an honest mind."⁷ because "That is one of the causes of their suffering."⁸ They are not loyal to each other and this is something against God. God does not occupy even a little place in their flat as well as in their life. In short, when they come in contact with the 'guardian', they begin to change themselves. Reilly claims that they will forget worst in his sanatorium and in the process of forgetting, it will alter their condition. They will be changed persons. The faith can lead them to right direction. He is trying to bridge the distance between them and God. Reilly is just an angel appointed by God as their Guardian to watch over those souls; his sanatorium is an establishment for the treatment of diseases, particularly spiritual sickness .

Celia Coplestone is a young lady of great charm belonging to the social circle of the Chamberlaynes and she is Edward's mistress. The shock, which she receives when Edward decides to abandon her in favour of his wife, shatters her illusions about herself and her way of life. She is aware of her solitude and loneliness and thinks that all friends and human relationships are mere illusions. She is willing to do anything for being normal once again. Being a member of sinful

to her : "Go in peace, my daughter / Work out your salvation with diligence."¹⁰ She has chosen the toughest way, the way of 'loneliness and communion', the saint's way which leads to a painful death. She joins the active pursuits of an austere nursing sisterhood, and is killed by the natives. Sainthood in her expresses itself that she is in the service of others, and it is proved even at the cost of her life. Though Celia is one of the components of the Chamberlayne circle, she is different from them. Her spiritual re-birth left them far away from her as well as God. Faith and loyalty to the partner and friends are uncommon in the Chamberlayne Circle. But doubting others and believing the stranger are peculiar characteristics of these people. Materialistic and practical views of these people have severed them from God. However, they have been transhumanized in that they are helped by Celia's martyrdom. People who choose the ordinary way, they find themselves in the society or their family but on the other hand they become rather an alien to God owing to their communion with God which remains out of the way.

Celia has found her way through atonement by following the 'Negative way of saint'. But others have followed the 'Affirmative' way – repentance, a way of love, reconciliation and self-realization which made them to bridge the distance between them and God. D.E.S. Maxwell's following sentences support Celia's intention :

Reilly's advice to her, that her choice mean's 'loneliness – and communion, and Celia's demeanour throughout the

scene, suggest that she is committing herself to complete withdrawal from a world that has ceased to have any meaning for her, that she intends to devote herself to a life of prayer and meditation.¹¹

In The Family Reunion Harry leaves his family to become a missionary whereas in The Cocktail Party Celia steps a little further : She has the higher goal, she leaves her family and the society to dedicate her life in the service of plague-stricken people.

II

The vision of The Cocktail Party "is not that of a humane – 'Incarnational' and 'sacramental' – Christianity, but approximates to a radical division of existence into spheres of Nature and Transcendence sharply separated from each other where the transcendent is not merely approached by way of the disclosure of Nature's essential imperfections, but finally embraced as a – literally – desperate alternative to the latter's graceless essence."¹² Like man's alienation from God, his alienation from Nature also occupies a little space in The Cocktail Party.

Edward thinks that Peter is going to America. But to the Chamberlayne circle's enquiry, when Peter tells them that he is going to California, Lavinia suggests to Celia that she should go with him. According to her, the place is so beautiful that "people who go there never want to leave it."¹³ But Celia is not interested in California and its

climate. She is going away somewhere from them. Her plan is fixed, so she requests Lavinia that it should not be postponed. She is interested neither in climate nor in Nature. The problem of these characters is that they have been living in urban areas or in fashionable area like London. When Celia is inquired about her parent by Reilly, her answer gives an apt picture of the older generation sticking to the countryside and its Nature in these lines :

Oh, they live in the country,
Now they can't afford to have a place in town.
It's all they can do to keep the country house going :
But it's been in the family so long, they won't leave it.¹⁴

Her parents have the sense of roots which do not allow them to leave the house as well as Nature. On the other hand, Celia lives in London. She shares a flat with her cousin who is abroad at the moment. Celia's family wants her to come down and stay with them. She cannot even imagine the very idea of living in the country. If she accepts the proposal to live in the country, then she has that way an opportunity to bridge the gap between her and the Nature there but being a girl of modern era she does not want to be in Nature's company.

Peter Quilpe has artistic tastes and is interested in music, poetry and film-making. He has also to workout his own spiritual salvation which lies in making a 'choice' and accepting all the limitations of that choice. He has to choose between his staying in England and

reestablishing his largely imaginary relationship with Celia and his going to California. Eventually he chooses Hollywood - a fashionable site of artificial life where only money-making and make-believe are given more importance. Where as California is a state with a mountain fringe along the ocean. It has a splendid valley, glacial lakes, meadows, and tumbling waterfalls are widely seen there. Plant and animal life is as diverse as the sixth natural Geographical division. The range of plant life extends to the creosote bush grease wood, mesquite, yucca and giant cacti of the Sonoran zones through pines and cedar sequoia and redwood fir aspen hemlock. Nevertheless Peter is fascinated by Hollywood. He prefers an artificial life to Nature. His commercial vision leads him to the fashionable place for making money. Birds, redwood valleys, grizzly, remnants of glaciers in California are unable to attract his attention. In his case his liking for the filmy world alienates him from Nature.

Julia, Alex and the Chamberlaynes live in the urban area. They seem severed from Nature. They are enjoying the cocktails as well as the pleasures of the city life to such an extent that they are ultimately bored with that sort of artificial life. At the end, we notice that Edward and Lavinia are happy on account of their declaration to live away in the remote area, probably, in Nature's company which they have lacked in earlier.

III

"In The Cocktail Party, as in The Family Reunion and The Waste Land, Eliot proceeds by indirection; he ensnares his audience. To speak of his work in these terms is to point again to the conditions which govern communication between the contemporary artist and society. The characteristic situation of the modern artist, which – despite boredom and natural misgivings – we continue to describe as "alienation" is particularly relevant to an important problem in modern drama",¹⁵ says Denis Donoghue. Almost all the characters feel alienated from the society of which they are constituents.

The action of the play is set in contemporary London, and most of it takes place in the London flat. The Cocktail Party is really a cocktail of a variety of characters who are involved in the idle drawing room chatter.

Edward Chamberlayne and his wife, Lavinia (who is absent at the moment) are the hosts of the party. The Unidentified Guest who is one among the guests wants to remain a stranger. He is not interested in telling who he is. According to him, when one tells his secret to a stranger, one invites the unexpected. So he prefers to "remain the stranger."¹⁶ Keeping the secret about himself, he isolates himself from society. In Julia's opinion the Unidentified Guest is not a good friend of Edward but he is a dreadful man. Though they are drinking together, it

is strange that Edward does not know anything about him. Like the others, he is a mystery to him :

Julia : You don't know ! And what's his name ?
Did I hear him say his name was Riley ?
Edward : I don't know his name.
Julia : You don't know his name ?
Edward : I tell you I've no idea who he is
Or how he got here. ¹⁷

Two persons drinking together but unknown to each other ! Edward does not know his name, he has no idea as to who he is or how he got there. They are isolated, at least Edward is isolated from him. The Unidentified Guest's (who is Reilly in reality) opinion is that we are never, at one moment, the same as we were at the previous moment and we may not remain the same the next moment. Man, with all his unspoken dreams and desires, remains a mystery to others. The Unidentified Guest rightly says that "We die to each other daily. .../ To pretend that they and we are the same / Is a useful and convenient social convention / Which must sometimes be broken. We must also remember/ That at every meeting we are meeting a stranger."¹⁸ According to him, it is impossible to pretend that we are not strangers to each other. It will, of course, be difficult for Edward to meet his wife as a stranger, but it is, perhaps, still more difficult to keep up the pretence that they are not strangers. It means that they are strangers without any emotional attachment. The Unidentified Guest represents a higher spiritual and intellectual level and as such can guide the other

characters and can help them in solving their dilemmas. Here are his words, spoken in a philosophical tone and tempo, which bring out how man's self-importance and self-esteem isolate him from others. He says that people today are lost in constant efforts to think well of themselves. Such people think that they themselves are very important in the community. They make their own separate class and thus alienate themselves from others. His role as a psychiatrist also separates him from his patients in that only he can guide their destiny.

Here are his own words :

”
 Half of the harm that is done in this world
 Is due to people who want to feel important.
 They don't mean to do harm - but the harm does not
 interest them.
 Or they do not see it, or they justify it
 Because they are absorbed in the endless struggle
 To think well of themselves.¹⁹

Edward Chamberlayne does not know all the guests. Reilly is a mystery to him. His wife, Lavinia, has not mentioned the names of the guests invited to the party. He seems to have been disturbed already and wants to be alone, he prefers isolation. He wishes Alex and Peter good night. He requests them to shut the door so that the door should be locked. Latching the door means imprisonment to him. Now he has totally cut himself off from the world outside.

In Act I, Scene II, we again find him in his isolation. He is alone, playing patience. The door bell rings, Celia enters and inquires, 'Are you alone?' He is unable to know what has happened, or what is going

to happen. He replies 'I want to be alone.' In fact, he is surprised at her entry as he wants to be alone to puzzle out the problem arising from Lavinia's mysterious disappearance. Later on, the conversation between Edward and Celia fails miserably. On her inquiry about Lavinia, he answers that there is nothing else to do but wait. There is a dreadful silence when neither he nor she can utter a single word. Then Edward says : "Oh, my God, what shall we talk about ? / We can't sit here in silence."²⁰

After Lavinia's coming home, she and Edward discuss their earlier faults and follies. Edward tells her that she insulted him for not getting enough work, but in due course the briefs began to come in. She found it inconvenient "That I should be always too busy or too tired / To be of use to you socially."²¹ Lavinia is prepared and wants Edward not to peep into the past life of reproaches and misunderstanding. Edward, then, in the same mysterious link (which Lavinia calls a nervous breakdown) philosophizes on aloneness, a permanent trait of humanity, in these words, which remind us of Harry, in The Family Reunion, for whom 'hell' is the other name for isolation, aloneness, separation and alienation :

There was a door
 And I could not open it. I could not touch the handle.
 Why could I not walk out of my prison ?
 What is hell ? Hell is oneself,
 Hell is alone, the other figures in it
 Merely projections. There is nothing to escape from
 And nothing to escape to. One is always alone.²²

Later on he prefers a hospital to his own house, which is hell. He confesses to Reilly :

She has made the world a place I cannot live in
 Except on her terms. I must be alone,
 But not in the same world. So I want you to put me
 Into your sanatorium. I could be alone there ?²³

His repeated desire for being 'alone' throws ample light on his present condition.

Reilly also points out to them that when love is absent in the life of man and woman, their ultimate lot is loneliness caused by their isolation from each other and also from the rest of humanity. Towards the end of the play Edward and Lavinia plan to move into a remote house to escape from the parties and committees where social masks, social conventions and the prepared faces make our life not only artificial and superficial but also tedious and monotonous. Under such circumstances they desire for a life of intimacy and privacy :

Lavinia : And we can be alone.
 I love that house being so remote.
 Edward : That's why we took it. And I'm really thankful
 To have that excuse for not seeing people;
 And you do need to rest now.²⁴

Miss Celia Coplestone is really an embodiment of a lonely life. Celia and Edward love each other but their relationship does not grow into anything solid or secure. Her future hopes and dreams are all broken by the news of Lavinia's return and by her actual coming. A disappointed beloved becomes a patient and comes to Reilly for

treatment. In her discussion of her own case with Reilly, she says : "I don't hear any voices, I have no delusions - / Except that the world I live in seems all a delusion !"²⁵ She also tells him of two symptoms – an awareness of solitude and a sense of sin, the former is specific, the latter, special. She speaks of aloneness thus :

No. I mean that what has happened has made me aware
That I've always been alone. That one always is alone.
Not simply the ending of one relationship,
Not even simply finding that it never existed -
But a revelation about my relationship
With everybody. Do you know -
It no longer seems worth while to speak to anyone !²⁶

And a little lower in the text she again harps on the same point in these lines :

No... it isn't that I want to be alone,
But that everyone's alone - or so it seems to me.
They make noises, and think they are talking to each
other;
They make faces, and think they understand each other.
And I'm sure that they don't. Is that a delusion ?²⁷

She comes to realize that her love for Edward was just an illusion and a delusion. Her love for Peter was never profound. She tells Reilly that if we are unloving and unlovable, we are alone; and if we are alone, the lover and the beloved are unreal. She feels utterly lonely in the world of unreality and lies. In this world the deceiver is no more real than the deceived. She speaks to Reilly of Edward's loneliness by using the simile of a child lost in a forest, and wanting to go home. She says :

Like a child who has wandered into a forest
 Playing with an imaginary playmate
 And suddenly discovers he is only a child
 Lost in a forest, wanting to go home.²⁸

In contrast to Edward and Lavinia, who make a choice of becoming reconciled to each other, Celia chooses the path of spiritual freedom and upliftment, which "requires faith/ The kind of faith that issues from despair."²⁹ Whichever the choice one makes, loneliness is inevitable, as Reilly points out. Hence Edward, Celia and Lavinia are all alone and lonely, wherever they are and whatever they do. Reilly throws light on the condition of both types of people thus :

No lonelier than the other. But those who take the other
 Can forget their loneliness. You will not forget yours.
 Each way means loneliness..... and communion.
 Both ways avoid the final desolation
 Of solitude in the phantasmal world
 Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires.³⁰

Celia then reacts by saying that she is, then, in hell, echoing the words of Edward and Harry, quoted in the earlier context in this chapter. Her deliberate choice of the saint's way distinguishes and isolates her from the others in the play. Her service to the plague-stricken people in Kikanji and her ultimate sacrifice through death by the natives of Kikanji raises her above the others and highlights her alienation from the world.

Almost all the characters in The Cocktail Party are socially alienated. Even to the party, a symbol of social unity, people come with

their own dreams, illusions and delusions and consequently the primary purpose of the party is defeated. As each one has a pretence of this or that sort, the genuine social contacts just cannot be established. There at the parties man is alone and lonely even amidst the many.

Peter Quilpe belongs to the social circle of the Chamberlaynes. He has artistic tastes and is interested in music, poetry and film-making. He has to choose either settling in England or going to California. Eventually he chooses Hollywood. It means that he is leaving the circle of the Chamberlaynes. It is probably now difficult for him to contact all of them and so he will live a life of isolation, far away from them.

Thus Edward, Lavinia, the Unidentified Guest, Celia Coplestone and Peter Quilpe are the characters who are alienated from each other and from their society. They are not only 'alone' but sometimes want to be alone. Some of them admit the time-proved fact that all are alone in this world. Indeed aloneness is a badge by which man is identified here on this earth.

IV

Like social alienation, family alienation is also most powerfully voiced in The Cocktail Party. Mr. Edward Chamberlayne and his wife are the hosts of the occasion. It is funny and surprising that one of the hosts does not recognize all the guests and that the other is not

present at the party. Edward has no idea as to where Lavinia has gone. But he lies to them that she has gone to her aunt's house in the country. She has disappeared in a mysterious way and her disappearance has given Edward a rude shock. Celia, Julia, Peter, Alex and the Unidentified Guest are assembled to join the party. Julia wants Edward alone for some serious conversation with him and now she finds a golden opportunity as Lavinia is away.

Edward is in a very difficult situation as he cannot give the proper explanation of Lavinia's departure. He says that she has gone to her aunt whom Julia does not know and who is a recluse, leading a lonely, secluded life. The aunt is isolated not only from society but also from the family, as can be noticed in these lines spoken by Edward : "No; another aunt/ Whom you wouldn't know. Her mother's sister /And rather a recluse."³¹

The Chamberlaynes are the only two members in the family – Edward and Lavinia. They married five years ago, and yet they are childless. The following conversation reveals their matrimonial relationship :

Unidentified Guest :	How long married ?
Edward :	Five years.
Unidentified Guest:	Children ?
Edward :	No.
Unidentified Guest:	Then look at the brighter side. You say you don't know where she's gone?
Edward :	No, I do not. ³²

The fact that they are still childless speaks a lot for their conjugal relationship and eventual alienation. Edward in distress does not know how to answer various queries about her whereabouts from friends and relatives and acquaintances. His helplessness and the feeling of shame are voiced in his own words which bring out his dilemma :

But how can I wait, not knowing what I'm waiting for ?
 Shall I say to my friends, 'My wife has gone away' ?
 And they answer 'Where?' and I say 'I don't know';
 And they say, 'But when will she be back?'
 And I reply 'I don't know that she is coming back.'
 And they ask 'But what are you going to do ?'
 And I answer 'Nothing'. They will think me mad
 Or simply contemptible.³³

Edward does not remember what she is like. If he were to ask the police to search for her, he does not think he could even describe her; he doesn't have even any idea as to what she was wearing when he saw her last. The following words of Edward point out the fact that something is rotten in the matrimonial life of the Chamberlaynes :

I no longer remember what my wife is like.
 I am not quite sure that I could describe her
 If I had to ask the police to search for her.
 I'm sure I don't know what she was wearing,
 When I saw her last.³⁴

These words tell us that there is a big gap of communication between the husband and wife. They are living under one and the same roof but unfortunately are divided by a wall of misunderstandings. They are merely two separate individuals just living together, without any link or

love between them. The absence of such a link or love in their life has pushed them into the world of loneliness.

Edward cannot be happy with Lavinia. He understands now that the course of his life was determined long ago and that any attempt that he makes to escape from it can only be unreal and deceptive, merely an attempt at changing the reality, which is bound to be frustrating. In short, their married life has not been a happy one. They have frequently indulged in quarrels and so Edward says to Celia :

I don't think I was ever really in love with her.
If I have ever been in love - and I think I have -
I have never been in love with anyone but you,
And perhaps I still am.³⁵

Lavinia is his wife whom he does not love, he loves Celia who is not his wife. Though disloyal to Lavinia, he is not loyal to Celia; consequently, he is estranged from both for some time. Even when they are physically together and live as husband and wife, his affair with Celia enhances the psychological gap between them. They are not happy in their married life.

In the third scene of the First Act, we notice that Lavinia complains that Edward is a man without humour. She has spent five years of her life with such a humourless fellow and the result is that she herself has lost all sense of humour. In fact the emotional attachment in any couple is indispensable. Her sense of dissatisfaction in her husband's company proves that they are not emotionally attached to

each other. She is offended at his illicit relations with Celia and feels herself insecure and inarticulate. She is depressed on account of the loss of love in her life. During the span of five years each followed his or her bent of mind, just mindless of the other; each tried to make the other follow him or her. The moment Edward was offered something that he wanted, he demanded something else. Edward's refusal of her choice explains how, as husband and wife, they were two poles apart :

Then why did you always make me feel insignificant ?
I may not have known what life I wanted,
But it wasn't the life you chose for me.³⁶

Edward charges her with making him feel quite insignificant, by using him and his career as a sort of public background to her life as a successful hostess. In her eyes, he is almost nothing or nobody. They seem to have been in conversation without any communication. Lavinia tells him that he is on the edge of a nervous breakdown and must consult a doctor. Edward clears himself to her that if he has to go to a doctor, the doctor will be one of his choice and not the one recommended by her. It is a kind of distrust. He cannot believe his own wife ! Faith, mutual trust is the foundation on which a family stands safe and secure. The Chamberlaynes are not loyal, intimate and faithful to each other. Naturally, each of them centres his or her love on the person outside the family.

Peter Quilpe has artistic tastes and he is in love with Celia. He finds that they have common interests and so they often meet and

sometimes go together to concerts and to the pictures in the picture gallery. In spite of their taking tea and dinner together in hotels on several occasions they have also failed to understand and judge each other properly. Their fashionable love has failed to promise any family life for them. Peter confesses to Edward :

But those moments in which we seemed to share some
perception
Some feeling, some indefinable experience
In which we were both unaware of ourselves.
In your terms, perhaps, she's lost interest in me.³⁷

Peter now realizes that Celia does not want to see him as she has become a different personality. When she is seen, she seems to be lost in some secret, exciting thoughts which he cannot share. Peter, the lover is alienated from Celia, his beloved and thus they are deprived of the prospective family pleasures.

Celia stays in a flat shared by her with her cousin who has gone abroad. Celia's parents live in the country. Both Celia and her cousin are severed from their families. Celia's family alienation is writ large in her words spoken to the psychiatrist :

I share a flat
With a cousin : but she's abroad at the moment,
And my family wants me to come down and stay with
them.
But I just can't face it.³⁸

Towards the end of the Second Act Reilly, while rendering guidance to Celia, speaks of his concept of 'a good life' of adjustments

to each other in the daily course of life. Many people choose this ordinary, simple routine course of life because they have neither courage nor capacity to pine for what is not with them. The husband and wife in modern times do not understand each other and yet breed children whom they do not understand and who will never understand them. Modern men and women have taken sex as a matter of pleasure. Reilly says :

They do not repine;
 Are contented with the morning that separates
 And with the evening that brings together
 For casual talk before the fire
 Two people who know they do not understand each other.
 Breeding children whom they do not understand
 And who will never understand them.³⁹

Is our family life different from what the passage says about it ?

V

The text of The Cocktail Party, like that of The Family Reunion, is pervaded with such overtly used terms as 'self', 'identity', 'personality', 'illusion', 'delusion', 'self-deception', 'madness', 'insanity', 'fear', 'sin', 'nervous breakdown', 'insecurity', 'despair' and so on. Eliot's constant preoccupation with these terms and the concepts behind them speaks volumes for the fact that modern man should pay serious attention to them. Eliot was convinced that it was through self-realization that one could achieve god-realization, the need of our time. In other words, man must first know himself in order to know the others, the external

world around him and God. Hence we must attempt to know who and what we are. This process of gaining self knowledge is hard and painful; and the only alternative to it is self-alienation. The success in gaining it brings the spiritual awakening of Harry and Celia.

Man is a bundle of experiences which teach and train him, change and check his behaviour. Every moment is a new experience which may shock us or shape us. Whatever the effect, there is either addition to or subtraction from his self. We see, in The Cocktail Party, that the major characters like Edward, Lavinia and Celia are unable to see who and what they are. Hence they feel the need for the psychiatric treatment of Reilly. Their assumption of several roles and their desire to live at several levels at one time leave them soul-shaken and soul-broken. They are jealous and suspicious of each other; they deceive each other and come to know only too late that their malady has assumed a serious form, though curable and healable. Eliot was seriously aware of this diseased mentality of modern humanity and hence has given ample weightage to it in this play not only by pointing out the malady but also by showing the remedy for it, the sanatorium.

In the light of the foregoing general comments, let us now discuss the case of Edward. Edward is a lawyer, and the husband of Lavinia, a sociable lady. He finds it very difficult to cope up with her demands and desires; he does not like the imposition of her will on him. They are at discord. Lavinia disappears from her house for some time

to 'shock' Edward and to make him realize, in the emptiness of his life, his faults. Her running away from home provides Edward an opportunity to look into himself a bit closely and at himself from a distance. Lavinia's disappearance has turned his mental world topsy-turvy, and made him face difficulties in facing the people curiously enquiring of her. There is something concealed in his mind that wants release. He says to the Unidentified Guest : "But I don't know who you are. This is not what I expected./ I only wanted to relieve my mind / By telling someone what I'd been concealing."⁴⁰ In his conversation with the Unidentified Guest, Edward admits that he and Lavinia were used to each other, loved each other. But he does not understand why she went away without any explanation and at a moment's notice. It is all a mystery to him and he does not want to remain in it. The Unidentified Guest then makes a long, almost philosophical speech on personality. According to him, Edward's being in a mystery amounts to the loss of his personality, humanity and to the reduction of him to the status of a lifeless object. When man, the subject becomes an object, his self-alienation knows no bounds. This reminds us of Sartrean psychoanalysis. According to Sartre, "It is only in a very direct and complicated way that I can be said to exist as an object for myself. I exist in a direct and simple way as an object for other people. They see me as part of the furniture of their external world. They observe my behaviour. I, seeing them see me, and knowing that they observe my

behaviour."⁴¹ Reilly repeats the same that one is the subject, the centre of reality in hospital while one talks to the doctor, the surgeon and the matron; but when stretched on the table one is a piece of furniture in a repair shop. The significance of this speech makes it necessary for us to quote it fully :

Yes, it's unfinished;
 And nobody likes to be left with a mystery.
 But there's more to it than that. There's a loss of
 personality;
 Or rather, you've lost touch with the person
 You thought you were. You no longer feel quite human.
 You're suddenly reduced to the status of an object -
 A living object, but no longer a person.
 It's always happening, because one is an object
 As well as a person. But we forget about it
 As quickly as we can. When you're dressed for a party
 And are going downstairs, with everything about you
 Arranged to support you in the role you have chosen,
 Then sometimes, when you come to the bottom step
 There is one step more than your feet expected
 And you come down with a jolt. Just for a moment
 You have the experience of being an object
 At the mercy of a malevolent staircase.
 Or, take a surgical operation.
 In consultation with the doctor and the surgeon,
 In going to bed in the nursing home,
 In talking to the matron, you are still the subject,
 The centre of reality. But, stretched on the table,
 You are a piece of furniture in a repair shop
 For those who surround you, the masked actors;
 All there is of you is your body
 And the 'you' is withdrawn. May I replenish ?⁴²

Towards the end of the second scene of Act I Edward announces to Celia that he has never been in love with Lavinia, advises her to have a man of her age for marriage. Celia is totally puzzled by his strange behaviour and asks him what he means by it. Then he tells her

that "The one thing of which I am relatively certain / Is that only since this morning / I have met myself as a middle aged man/ Beginning to know what it is to feel old."⁴⁸ In his leaning towards old age he feels acutely his alienation from his youthful, meaningful self of dreams and desires. When Celia asks him if he can be happy with Lavinia, his wavering mind, his self-division and his indecisions get expressed in the lines which merit consideration :

I see that my life was determined long ago
 And that the struggle to escape from it
 Is only a make-believe, a pretence
 That what is, is not, or could be changed.
 The self that can say 'I want this – or want that' –
 The self that wills – he is a feeble creature;
 He has to come to terms in the end
 With the obstinate, the tougher self, who does not speak,
 Who never talks, who cannot argue;
 And who in some men may be the guardian –
 But in men like me, the dull, the implacable,
 The indomitable spirit of mediocrity.
 The willing self can contrive the disaster
 Of this unwilling partnership – but can only flourish
 In submission to the rule of the stronger partner.⁴⁴

In the scene of reunion, Edward and Lavinia still blame and accuse each other. Edward tells her that they are still in a trap and charges her that she is still imposing her will on him : "You are still trying to invent a personality for me / Which will only keep me away from myself."⁴⁵ What he means to say or suggest is that she is the great threat to his new self. This feeling finds its horrendous expression in the following words spoken by him to Lavinia :

O God, O God, if I could return to yesterday
 Before I thought that I had made a decision.
 What devil left the door on the latch
 For these doubts to enter ? And then you come back, you
 The angel of destruction – just as I felt sure.
 In a moment, at your touch, there is nothing but ruin.
 O God, what have I done ? The python. The octopus.
 Must I become after all what you would make me ?⁴⁶

In the consulting room, on Reilly's query of Edward's malady, the latter, in the manner of Prufrock or Harry, gives a vent to his confused, oscillating and divided mind. As he puts it, he cannot live with her, he cannot even live without her. Her absence was vacancy to him but now her presence is not paradise to him. Here are the words of confession of this lawyer, the psychological sinner :

We had not been alone again for fifteen minutes
 Before I felt, and still more acutely –
 Indeed, acutely, perhaps, for the first time,
 The whole oppression, the unreality
 Of the role she had always imposed upon me
 With the obstinate, unconscious, sub-human strength
 That some women have. Without her, it was vacancy.
 When I thought she had left me, I began to dissolve,
 To cease to exist. That was what she had done to me !
 I cannot live with her – that is now intolerable;
 I cannot live without her, for she has made me incapable
 Of having any existence of my own.
 That is what she has done to me in five years together !
 She has made the world a place I cannot live in
 Except on her terms. I must be alone,
 But not in the same world. So I want you to put me
 Into your sanatorium.⁴⁷

Celia, of all the characters in the play, is the most innocent and hence suffers the most. Her life resembles that of Harry in that she is also made a scapegoat. Separated from her parents as she is, she

It's not the feeling of anything I've ever done,
Which I might get away from, or of anything in me
I could get rid of – but of emptiness, of failure
Towards someone, or something, outside of myself;
And I feel I must .. atone - is that the word ?
Can you treat a patient for such a state of mind?⁵¹

Reilly, a little later, tells her that her condition is curable only if she could be restored to human condition. She must make a choice between two paths, and she chooses the path of a lonely sufferer in search of salvation. The need for salvation is the outcome of her self-alienation. She prepares herself to sacrifice her will and life; "through action and suffering Celia may find her atonement. To atone is to reach "at-oneness"; and that is the goal of the mystic also."⁵²

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