Tom Haas
Artistic Director

Victoria Nolan
Managing Director

Indiana Repertory Theatre

and The Acquisition and Restoration Corporation

present

The Cocktail Party

by T. S. Eliot

Directed by Tom Haas

Costume Design
by Connie Singer

Set Design
by Ann Sheffield

Lighting Design
by Don Holder

Production Stage Manager
Joel Grynheim

Assistant Stage Manager
Augie Mericola

IRT Student Matinees are partially funded by TARGET

February 10-March 5, 1988

THE CAST

(in order of appearance)

Edward Chamberlayne	Ron Siebert
Julia Shuttlethwaite	Bella Jarrett
Alexander MacColgie Gibbs	Michael Lipton
Celia Coplestone	Lindsey Margo Smith
Peter Quilpe	Frederick Farrar
An Unidentified Guest	Alan Nebelthau
(later identified as Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly)	
Lavinia Chamberlayne	Amelia Penland
Miss Barraway	Emma Palzere
Caterer's Man	Dennis Mooney

Understudies:
Geoffrey Tarson (Edward); Deirdre Shula (Julia, Nurse); Emma Palzere (Celia, Lavinia); Dennis Mooney (Alexander); Alan Goldwasser (Peter); Brad Nelson Winters (Reilly); Dempsey Arnold (Caterer's Man).
Understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance.

Casting by Jason LaPadura

Act I
The Chamberlayne's flat.
Scene 1: Early evening.
Scene 2: A few minutes later.
Scene 3: The following afternoon.

INTERMISSION

Act II
Sir Harcourt-Reilly's office; morning, several days later.

INTERMISSION

Act III
The Chamberlayne's flat; late afternoon, two years later.

Running Times:
Act I: 70 minutes; Act II: 40 minutes; Act III: 30 minutes.

T.S. ELIOT

American Poet and British Dramatist

Any effort to summon bits of information describing the life and work of T. S. Eliot can easily coalesce into an experience in contradictions: hailed by many an English professor as the greatest English poet and critic in the twentieth century, many well-educated people are hard-pressed to name even one of his compositions. Long considered to be a poet whose work appealed only to the highbrow and esoteric, a collection of his obscure poems ("Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats") has become massively popular of late as the book for the smash hit musical, *Cats*. Born and educated in the United States, Eliot is regularly heralded as being the voice of post-World War I youth of England. Alternately described by those who knew him well (which included American expatriot poet Ezra Pound and British novelist Virginia Woolf) as excessively shy and extremely talkative, savagely humorous and inordinately modest, a lover of the Bible and of bourbon, Eliot, who summons a picture of the cloistered poet, actually worked nine to five as a banker and an editor for all of his creative life. The contradictions abound.

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis in 1888 (we celebrate the centenary of his birth this year) into a literary family hailing from New England. His grandfather was a Unitarian minister and the founder of Washington University. Tom, the youngest and most coddled of seven children, was frail and shy, preferring solitary reading to the more gregarious neighborhood games.

Following early studies at Smith Academy in St. Louis and the Milton Academy, Eliot went on to Harvard in 1906 where he breezed through his course work in three years, consuming vast quantities of Eastern and Western philosophical writing, and finding a special love for Italian Renaissance, Elizabethan and Jacobean literature. He edited the undergraduate literary magazine, The Harvard Advocate to which he contributed a few poems. Bertrand Russell, who taught him logic and later introduced him to the London literary world, referred to him as his "best pupil."

After Harvard, Eliot went to study in Paris at the Sorbonne for a year (1910-11) where he studied French literature and wrote his first significant poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," a portrait of

an aging man whose life has been frittered away between timid hopes and lost opportunities (odd subject matter for a 23 year-old poet). After another three years of graduate work at Harvard, Eliot won a travelling fellowship to Germany. Once there he barely managed to avoid being caught by the war, and soon departed for Britain, which was to remain his home for the rest of his life.

Eliot spent 1914-15 on a scholarship to Merton College, Oxford, and it was there that he met and married his first wife, Vivienne Haigh-Wood. Although they were to remain married until her death in 1947, they were legally separated in 1932 and Vivienne spent many of the intervening years in mental hospitals. The draining effect of her fragile health during the years of their marriage, and the guilt Eliot felt during their years of separation can hardly be overestimated.

Following the year at Oxford, Eliot took a teaching job at a prep school outside London—the first of many jobs which paid the bills but took him away from his writing. Shortly, he entered the world of finance as an accounts manager at Lloyds Bank of London, a job he kept for seven years while simultaneously serving as assistant editor to The Egoist (1917-19) and founder and editor of The Criterion (1922-39). He also contributed numerous articles to a broad range of publications.

Because of overwork in his dual career as banker and poet, Eliot was on the verge of a breakdown in 1920. During an enforced rest under the care of a specialist at Lausanne, he completed "The Waste Land," which was published in 1922 and dedicated to Ezra Pound who was instrumental in shaping and editing it. "The Waste Land" (originally titled "He Do the Police in Different Voices") expressed, with great power, the disenchantment and disgust of the postwar period and the universal predicament of man desiring salvation. It also broke every tradition of 19th century post-romantic poetry. With this poem, Eliot passed from notoriety among critics to fame.

In 1925, Eliot left the banking business to take over as director of the publishing house Faber and Faber, where he was to become a discriminating patron of young poets and novelists. During this period he gained an equal reputation as a critic, shattering old literary orthodoxies in series of critical essays. In 1927, at age 39, Eliot became a convert to the Church of England and a British citizen: from this point on he became increasingly occupied with sociological and cultural questions. In 1930 he published his first religious poem, "Ash Wednesday," a sternly beautiful statement of a man who had found his course.

Eliot was already established as a master poet, one highly esteemed by his contemporaries, when he turned his attention to verse drama in the 1930's. This was not a far reach for Eliot: many of his poems contain sections of dialogue, and his verse was often valued for its dramatic effect. Eliot's critical principles, his exaltation of objectivity and his belief in the social function of poetry drew him toward the drama, the most objective and the most social of the arts. His first full-length drama, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) was written on commission for the Canterbury Festival, and was a dramatic study of the martyrdom of Thomas Becket.

There can be no doubt that Eliot felt strongly about upholding the classical traditions of drama and preserving verse drama in the modern theatre. In 1939, his play *The Family Reunion* featured a modern retelling of the Orestes legend complete with a Greek chorus; part modern domestic drama, part mythical tragedy, this play contains some of the finest dramatic verse since Shakespeare.

World War II put a stop to theatrical experiments and Eliot turned again to poetry, producing what some critics regard as his finest single work, "Four Quartets" (1945). In it he explored the relationship between time and eternity and the cultivation of a selfless passivity which can yield a moment of revelation.

After the war, Eliot was awarded two distinguished honors: the rarely awarded Order of Merit by King George VI, and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. Eight years prior to his death in 1965, Eliot found personal happiness after many years of solitude, marrying Valerie Fletcher who had been his secretary at Faber and Faber.

The years after World War II found Eliot returning to his fascination with the theatre, writing three more verse plays based on classical themes, *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958). In these plays Eliot succeeded in modelling a poetic form that is so conversational that when spoken it does not sound like verse. These dramas function successfully on two distinct levels at once: one deals with the more obvious and everyday realities; the other encompasses a philosophical inquiry into the nature of human identity. With these dramas Eliot added to his list of accomplishments a convincing claim as the foremost English poetic dramatist of this century.

Notes from the Director

Describing Eliot's influence on the literature and theatre of the 20th century, Time Magazine wrote in a cover article in March 1950:

"Eliot's indirect influence is wide and deep, but incalculable. He has shown two generations of poets how to write. He has shown that a man can be both clever and religious. One compelling reason why the audiences crowd his *Cocktail Party* is that they recognize it, in the sense that people always recognize a compelling restatement of the old and certain truths. They like Eliot for being clever, and at the same time clear, but what counts most is the common sense, the humility and the hope expressed in it."

Although at the time that this was written *The Cocktail Party* was an indisputable hit on Broadway, this success must have come as something of a pleasant surprise to Eliot. It was the first time that his work had reached such a popular audience, and not without quite an effort on his part. Some two years earlier, he had sent to his friend and advisor Martin Browne the first draft of a play that he had titled *One-Eyed Riley*. On his own admission, Eliot hoped that this play might prove viable on the West End (London's equivalent of Broadway). This would mean a considerable departure from his other dramatic work which was overtly spiritual in its aim.

Eliot determined to use as a point of departure in constructing *One-Eyed Riley* the myth of Alcestis, in which Alcestis (Lavinia) determines to die to save the life of her husband, Admetus (Edward). Hercules (Reilly) comes to visit shortly after Alcestis has died and Admetus, being a kind and good host, tells him nothing of her death. Hercules makes something of a drunken spectacle of himself and finally is told by a member of the household that Alcestis is dead. Hercules repays Admetus's hospitality by restoring Alcestis to life. Reilly makes a specific allusion to the worlds of life and death by quoting another classical source in the play, Shelley's *Prometheus Bound*.

Determining not to be trapped by the myth, Eliot set out to construct a comic vision of the story that would succeed in the commercial theatre. He chose as his vehicle a cocktail party, a social phenomenon which correlated to the action of the myth and was also readily recognizable to a popular audience. Well before the play was finished, it was scheduled to premiere at the Edinburgh Festival in the early summer of 1949, and move on to a fall opening in London. Although Eliot was well established in the literary world, he was still a considerable gamble in the theatrical world and producer Henry Sherek attempted to guarantee the success of the production by securing the talents of Alec Guinness to play the role of Reilly.

Packed houses in Edinburgh responded immediately and positively. Desmond Shaw Taylor wrote in The New Statesman: "Eliot has written a dazzling light comedy which is also a tract for our times. . . . The result is lively, often cynical, sometimes profound. The wit sparkles and we begin to feel pleasingly sure that everyone will be turned inside out and upside down."

Shortly thereafter, Eliot granted a rare interview with the Glasgow Herald. When told that many audience members had not found his meaning very plain, he responded, "Perhaps I did not intend that they should." Eliot noted that if you can completely explain a poem with an exact correspondence between the deliberate intent of the author and the reception of the idea by the audience then it just is not poetry. And Eliot always wrote poetry.

Because Guinness was not immediately available for a long run in London (due to a film commitment) and no suitable theatre was available, Sherek determined to move the production from Edinburgh to Broadway first. Through this process, Americans had the rare opportunity to see the work of their renowned expatriot before the British themselves did. The press and public alike championed the play, heralding it alternately as a poetic masterpiece and as the funniest comedy in town. Eliot's skillful blending of Noel Coward-like drawing room comedy with an underlying spiritual significance drew crowds of every description. With 200 performances chalked up in New York, The New Statesman published this satirical celebration of Eliot:

Author, author, take your bow,
Cocktail Party is O.K. now,
Still it's a riddle how
Lowbrow and middlebrow
Mix with the highbrow at this highbrow wow!

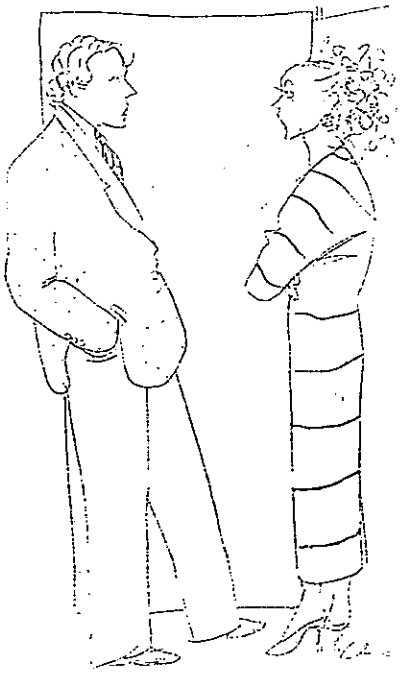
Tom Haas

After October 19, 1987, is "having it all" enough?

Almost everything about *The Cocktail Party* belies the fact that it was written nearly forty years ago. There is very little in the play that dates it—no political or specific social references that lock it in the time period of its creation. A few geographic references to towns in England give us locale, but without them, this play could take place in any urban area where proper English is spoken. Perhaps Eliot's own ambiguous citizenship (born in America, but British by choice) has something to do with the international feeling of the play, its "locationlessness."

But the play's "timelessness" is of great import to us in producing it today. The published script has virtually no stage directions—compared with the trend among twentieth century playwrights to write lengthy, specific stage directions, indicating every last detail down to the position of every stick of furniture and the shade of red of Blanche DuBois's dressing gown. Instead, Eliot gives us nothing—no physical descriptions of the characters' looks or apparel, no suggestions of what the settings should look like, no indications of floorplans, stage configurations or colors. What is printed on the page is poetry, and nothing else.

One might almost believe that Eliot intended to write a play that would age well, that would not be restricted in its impact by passing fashions and superficial social trends. Some critics have posited that the play in fact has grown in significance, that it has greater impact now than it did when it was written. We are equally concerned today about all the major issues raised by this play written in 1949: the health of our personal relationships, the impact of psychiatry, the fear of loneliness, the fulfillment of our personal destinies, the unsettling effect of government intervention in foreign affairs and our collective fascination and awe for self-sacrifice in a thankless world.



"I'd love to see you again, but not in mohair."

Two particular issues at the heart of this play are quite reverberative in these latter years of the 1980's: the search for personal meaning that finds its way into an expression of faith in a higher power, and the impulse to preserve marriage, given the option for divorce. In a world where the price of sexual freedom can be very high, divorce is no longer the cure-all for unhappy relationships that it was in the 1960's and 70's. The conseqence of freedom-seeking in those decades has now resulted in a resurgence of interest in faith and moral causes. These corollaries led us to set our production of *The Cocktail Party* in an absolutely contemporary world, not in the 1949 world in which it was written.

Eliot's prophetic wisdom has been further borne out by recent world events. The stock market crash on October 19 has done much to jolt us into an awareness of how dependent we have become on the material, rather than the spiritual, aspects of life. The success of the most recent SALT talks (limiting intermediate nuclear force weapons) suggest that while the fear of nuclear war may diminish, living in peace may prove more demanding than war.

Under these circumstances, *The Cocktail Party* seems to capture many basic concerns facing the generations that will survive into the third millennium. Eliot's play tells us—through richly-layered images—that we must look into ourselves for salvation, and learn to live with what we are, not what we can acquire. The peace treaty that Sir Harcourt-Reilly negotiates between Edward and Lavinia essentially demands that they lay down their guns and learn to live with one

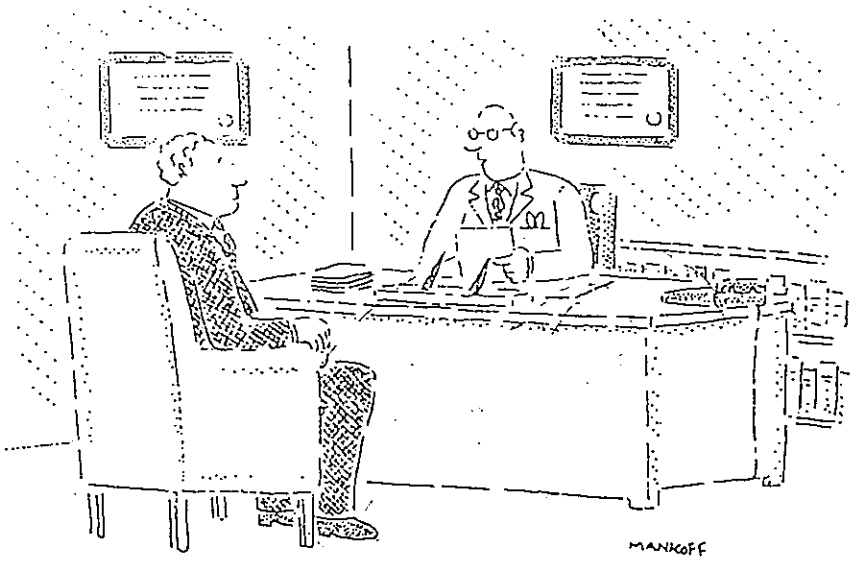
another's weaknesses. And the concern which Eliot so eloquently voices through Reilly:

You no longer feel quite human.
You're suddenly reduced to the status of an object—
A living object, but no longer a person.

—is certainly the essence of the modern dilemma, in which man often feels his "objectdom" in a world where objects are more forthrightly worshipped than humanity. This dilemma is especially apropos of our current decade, in which advances in technological communication point to the vastness of humanity and the insignificance of the individual.

Eliot proposes in *The Cocktail Party* that humanity might find a resolution to the dilemma by bringing love and self-knowledge into realistic perspective. While many of Eliot's earlier works suggest that ultimate happiness can only be found through the individual acceptance of faith, in *The Cocktail Party* Eliot's diagnosis is less formally religious: instead he dramatizes the possibilities for salvation that are inherent in each of us, and that can be drawn out by those who love and understand us—"the guardians," as Eliot calls them. These guardians (we might call them "psychic guides") have no specific religious affiliation; instead they are enlightened members of a community—enlightened in the sense that they have come to know and accept themselves for what they are, failings, buffooneries and all—who help guide others onto their self-appointed course.

Eliot subscribes to a tradition of Western thought in which there are two ways to embrace life—the Positive way, in which one embraces everything in life (the spiritual and the material), accepting one's unedited past and hence becoming a different, and more enlightened person; or the



"Nothing serious, Bob—just a case of the forties."

Negative way, which demands the dissolution of the self and all possessions in order to purify the spirit for the union with a higher power. Eliot suggests that both ways require the acceptance of one's ultimate loneliness—and only through this acceptance can one ever experience true communion with others. The result is that:

Both ways avoid the final desolation
Of solitude in the phantasmal world
Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires.

For some, the Positive way becomes merely the endurance of life, which leads eventually to acceptance and finally to security and support (the choice made by the Chamberlaynes); the Negative way means a journey into the unknown, where salvation is achieved through spiritual strength (the choice made by Celia). Eliot concludes that both paths are in harmony and, though diverse, lead to a common spiritual good.

Increasingly, contemporary theatre has shied away from addressing the problems of salvation as posed by Eliot. The theatre of spectacle and entertainment seeks to divert and dazzle the audience, to surprise and delight them. This is a largely superficial experience, suggesting that theatre cannot function as a mirror for the deeper dilemmas that face us daily. The "serious theatre" of recent decades has explored thoroughly the need for the psychological discovery of the self—but a discovery that is often accomplished at the expense of preserving familial and social relationships. But Eliot's vision suggests that positive self-exploration should lead one back into improved interpersonal relationships—that, in fact, to increase one's abilities to support and help others is the ultimate goal of self-exploration. The persistence of Eliot's view comes directly into focus today—more than ever, the search for harmony in life needs to address the life of the spirit. In light of this pursuit, *The Cocktail Party* is a new and prophetic play.

Tom Haas and Janet Allen

THE COCKTAIL PARTY SYNOPSIS

The plot of THE COCKTAIL PARTY, concerns domestic relations. Edward Chamberlayne, a barrister, is estranged from his wife, Lavinia. She is in love with a young film writer, Peter Quilpe. Peter is in love with Celia Coplestone, who writes poetry. Celia is Edward's mistress and is in love with him. Edward loves nobody, and nobody loves Lavinia. At the start of the play the principal characters, except Lavinia, are attending a cocktail party in the Chamberlaynes' London flat. As is discovered a little later, Lavinia without warning has left Edward that very afternoon. He therefore, fortified with the tale that she has had to visit a sick aunt, is acting as solitary host to Peter, Celia, and three other people of whom he knows only two -- Julia Shuttlethwaite, an impertinent gossip of an age no longer certain, and Alexander MacColgie Gibbs, an eccentric amateur chef and globe-trotter in some way connected with the Foreign Office. The stranger, known until Act II only as the Unidentified Guest, is Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, a consulting psychiatrist or analytical psychologist. In scene I, when the other guests have temporarily left after the party, Edward submits to questioning by Sir Henry, from whom he obtains a mysterious assurance that Lavinia shall come back. Afterward he listens to Peter confess his own disappointed love for Celia. In the next scene Celia breaks her emotional ties with Edward, and in scene 3, occurring on the following afternoon, Edward receives another brief visit from Sir Henry, who again makes his exit without revealing his name. Lavinia returns, and, after the departure of Celia, Julia, Alex, and Peter, who have shown up one by one in response to messages ostensibly originating from her, she and Edward renew their longstanding incompatibility.

Act II occurs several weeks later in Sir Henry's consulting room. Lavinia's departure and return have been part of a conspiracy arranged among Sir Henry, Julia, and Alex to reconcile the Chamberlaynes. Confronting Edward and Lavinia unexpectedly with each other, Sir Henry, who has been counseling Lavinia and whom Alex has tricked Edward into seeing, persuades them to have another try. In the latter part of the same long scene, after Edward and Lavinia are gone, Sir Henry in an interview with Celia encourages her to order her own life by means of a "sanatorium." Celia's choice, though she does not perceive it, constitutes a life of potential sainthood. Sir Henry's task seems to have been that rather of a father confessor than of an ordinary psychologist. At the end of Act II he, Julia, and Alex go through a little ritual of drinking one toast "for the building of the hearth" and another "for those who go upon a journey." This incident provides the only overt dramatic hocus-pocus, at any rate on the stage.

In Act III, two years later, another cocktail party is about to begin at the Chamberlaynes', who are living amicably together. The same people drop in unexpectedly: first Julia and Alex, then Peter back from film-making in California, and lastly Sir Henry, all uninvited. But not Celia. Alex brings word that Celia, having enrolled in an austere nursing order and having gone out to a remote country called Kinkanja, was stationed with two other sisters at a Christianized village there in time of pestilence. During an insurrection by the heathen, who resented the Christian natives' impiety of eating saffron monkeys, it was Celia's fate to be "crucified / Very near an ant-hill." After the shock of this news has somewhat abated, Sir Henry reveals that he foresaw she would die a violent death. The remainder of Act III disperses the visitors and leaves Edward and Lavinia once more alone, waiting for their cocktail party to begin.