Abstract

This thesis examines the totalizing violence overrunning in Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and a call for responsibility to and for the Other in Emmanuel Levinas’s propositions of ethical relationship. In this play, the illusion of life can also be counted as an inconvenient truth, yet the playwright urges people to acknowledge the difference between illusion and reality. George and Martha build their marriage on a life game, their imagined son. When Nick and Honey arrive, an interrelation between private and public and illusion and reality disturbs all four characters. Martha’s totalizing indulgence goes into extremes when she is lost in her fantasy world gradually and commits adultery deliberately. Sensing the seriousness of Martha’s situation, George finally wakes up from his own illusion and decides to kill the imagined son for Martha’s sake. It is an act of profound love and care that George dispels the illusion in his and Martha’s marriage life. Chapter Two examines different forms of ontology, which is embodied by the three major philosophical systems: I and not-I in the Hegelian dialectic, ego and alter ego, and the Heideggerian primacy of Being and then demonstrates various examples of the totalizing violence through the reduction of Martha’s father, the symbolic assimilation of Nick, and, particularly, the destructive negation of Martha. Committing adultery is an extreme manner to claim one’s power. George’s reaction to Martha’s ethical transgression is crucial. Chapter Three explores one’s responsibility to and for the Other in the ethical relationship between self and other and argues that George’s decision of killing the imagined son reflects Levinas’s ethical concern. Recognizing his own alienation from society and deciding to take the responsibility to help Martha eliminate her internalized ontological violence, George fully represents Levinas’s concept of responsibility to and for the Other. A dialogue of Albee’s dramatic text and Levinas’s propositions highlight the importance of ethical relationship between self and other on a genuine basis. Through their works about violence and compassion, both Albee and Levinas have high concern for the Other.