Chapter Four

Conclusion

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 Levinas’s propositions of ethical relationship. 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 recognizes his own alienation from society and decides to take the responsibility to help Martha eliminate her internalized ontological violence. It is an act of profound love and care that George dispels the illusion in his and Martha’s marriage life.

In Chapter Two, Levinas’s critique of ontology helps analyze the totalizing violence in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. The totality, referring to any philosophical system associated with totalizing power, is characterized by Levinas as ontology. Three major ontological thinking, I and not-I in the Hegelian dialectic, ego and an alter ego, and the Heideggerian primacy of Being, all reveal their ontological weaknesses from Levinas’s point of view. Ontology is an egology and a philosophy of power. In the modes of reduction and possession, the ontological self demonstrates its violent totalization through reduction, assimilation, and negation of the Other. Martha’s father illustrates the notion of the ontological self that favors the male self and reduces women as the “Other.” In the boxing match episode, the ontological self of Martha’s father tries to incorporate George into his idea of masculininity. Also, the subject Nick studies symbolizes the totalizing violence of assimilating otherness into
Sameness. Furthermore, having internalized her father’s ontological inclination, Martha uses abusive words and intentional adultery to negate George and Nick. Thus, her adultery is her totalizing inclination to control both George and Nick.

In Chapter Three, Albee in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* suggests that the totalizing attitude in the most extreme manner is apt to bring pain to others as well as self-destruction. Martha’s totalizing inclination has taken her to be entirely wrapped up with her own illusion. However, the playwright asserts that one should abandon illusion and enter reality. This positive way of facing life correlates with responsibility to and for the Other in Levinas’s ethical relationship. The face of the Other issues an ethical calling into question of the Same. It is through gazing and speaking, the face of the Other obliges the Same to make responses. George’s determination to change shows his willingness to take responsibility for Martha and George’s resolution embodies Levinas’s notion of ethics. Nick and Honey’s visit, like the presence of the Other, disturbs the private fantasy world of George and Martha and leads them to the realization of their son-myth enjoyment as only otherness not Other. Fortunately, Martha’s exclamation that “It’s not what I’ve wanted” awakens George and makes him realize that he is the only one who can help Martha now. Only when George realizes that Martha is over-addicted to the son myth they create does he decide to take his responsibility for their life. George fully represents Levinas’s concept of responsibility to and for the Other. Out of love, not revenge, George destroys the son-myth in order to take the responsibility to help Martha eliminate her totalizing inclination and rebuild their marriage with a more honest attitude.

Levinas’s philosophy is directly related to his experiences of war-time suffering.
During the First World War, his family became refugees. In the Second World War, Levinas lost most members of his family. His parents and brothers died in the Holocaust, and fortunately, his wife and daughter survived with the help of their friends. Levinas himself became a prisoner of war in Germany for five years. This captivity experience and his teacher Heidegger’s affiliation to National Socialism lead him to question the meaning of one’s existence.\textsuperscript{12} It is the violence of war and his German teacher’s Nazi involvement that made Levinas recognize the suppression of the alterity in the works of great philosophers and thus he started to formulate his own philosophy. With his critique of the violent essence in Western philosophy, Levinas asserts the primacy of the ethical relationship with the Other in his book \textit{Totality and Infinity} (1961). Levinas believes that the relation to other people is ethical and should not be reduced to comprehension.

Similar totalizing violence of ontology and a call for responsibility to and for the Other can be found in Albee’s \textit{Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?} (1962). The playwright portrays a couple, who live in their illusion and torture each other. At the end of the play, George wakes up from his alienation and recognizes his responsibility to help Martha eliminate her totalizing inclination so that they can rebuild their marriage relationship with a more truthful attitude. The illusion of life is another inconvenient truth,\textsuperscript{13} yet the playwright urges people to acknowledge the difference between illusion and reality. A dialogue of Albee’s dramatic text and Levinas’s

\textsuperscript{12} In 1933, Heidegger’s speech “The Self-Assertion of the German University” revealed his affirmation of Nazism.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{An Inconvenient Truth} (2006) is the title of a documentary movie, which describes the overwhelming and undeniable evidences of global warming and urges people to face this truth and to take action.
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.