

Chapter One

Introduction

When you, when you forget your name
When old faces all look the same
Meet me in the morning when you wake up
Meet me in the morning then you'll wake up

If only I don't bend and break
I'll meet you on the other side
I'll meet you in the light
If only I don't suffocate
I'll meet you in the morning when you wake

Lovesick bitter and hardened heart
Aching waiting for night waiting for life to start
Meet me in the morning when you wake up
Meet me in the morning then you'll wake up

(Keane, *Bend and Break*)

The epigraph is from Keane's *Bend and Break*.¹ According to Tim Rice-Oxley, the composer of this song, *Bend and Break* is a phrase "about getting through a really dark state of mind and emerging into brighter, happier times."² It appears that both the narrator and the addressee of this song are undergoing a tremendous suffering. However, the narrator wishes that he will overcome all the difficulties and waits for the addressee to join him for a brighter future. The meaning of this song falls neatly into the situation in Edward Albee's award-winning play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. In this play, all the characters have gone through a long and painful night.

¹ Keane is an English rock band. *Bend and Break* was released as the sixth from their debut album *Hopes and Fears* in 2004.

² Tim Rice-Oxley. "Death," online posting, 12 July 2004, Keane Forum, 18 May 2008
<http://bb01.sov.uk.vvhp.net/keane/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=5170>

After two decades of marital life full of disappointment, George and Martha's relationship seems destructive. However, there exists an inexplicable bond between the couple in their ceaseless verbal dueling. Unable to live with their barrenness, George and Martha together create their own myth—an imagined son. This illusory son serves as a comfort until Martha breaks the rule of the game by mentioning it before other people. George decides to kill the invented son. At the end of this play, the exorcism of their son-myth helps them rebuild their marriage on a new and truthful basis. George, who might “bend and break” or “suffocate,” invites Martha, who “forgets her name,” to “meet in the morning.” Trapped in a truculent marital relationship, George hopes that Martha can wake up from her illusion not only to meet him in the morning but also to reconstruct a more faithful identity. With high seriousness, Albee's play aims at revealing the modern human condition—the roles and games people take and play to fight or retreat from their fears and desires (Savran 2).

Edward Albee, the most controversial playwright in America (Amacher 9; Baxandall 80; Leff 453), is frequently listed alongside Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller as one of the great dramatists of the twentieth century in the United States of America (Bottoms 1; Roudané *Understanding* 65). The recurring themes in Albee's plays are alienation, images of death, and confrontation (Roudané *Understanding* 6; Savran 2). *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), Albee's first full-length play, is perhaps his most widely known work as well as the most challenging play of the contemporary American theatre (Shelton 39). It won several awards, including the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Foreign Press

Association Award, two Antoinette Perry (“Tony”) Awards, the Outer Circle Award, the *Saturday Review* Drama Critics Award, the *Variety* Drama Critics’ Poll Award, and the *Evening Standard* Award.

Brief Introduction to Edward Albee

Born on March 12, 1928 somewhere in Virginia, Edward Albee was abandoned by his biological parents and adopted by Reed and Frances Albee when he was two weeks old. His foster parents were wealthy. Reed Albee was the son of famous Edward Franklin Albee, the owner of Keith-Albee chain of vaudeville theatres (Bottoms xvii). Frances, his adoptive mother, was Reed’s third wife and she was twenty-three years younger than her husband. The Albees lived in a large Tudor house in Larchmont, New York. Edward Albee’s childhood was extremely comfortable. He began attending the theater at the age of six and wrote *Aliqueen*, a three-act sex farce, when he was twelve. “Surrounded with material goods but perhaps deprived of love,” he became an “educational rebel” (Biggsby 250). After being dismissed from several private and military schools, Albee entered the Choate School in 1944. Although he kept performing poorly in academic, he was happy there. Being encouraged by his teachers at the Choate School, Albee continued his writing and experimented with many genres: writing poems, stories, his first play, *The Schism*, and even a lengthy novel entitled *The Flesh of Unbelievers*. In 1945, his poem “Eighteen” was published in a Texas literary magazine. In 1946, Albee enrolled at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. After a year and a half, Albee was expelled for failure to attend required courses and chapel, and this was the end of his formal education.

At the age of twenty Albee had a fight with his adoptive mother and had “decisively walked out on his wealthy, adoptive parents” (Bottoms 2). He then moved to New York’s Greenwich Village, where he held a variety of jobs over the next decade, working as writer for WNYC-radio, office boy, record salesman, and Western Union messenger. Persisting in writing poetry and fiction but frustrated, Albee met playwright Thornton Wilder, who advised him to turn to drama. On his thirtieth birthday, in 1958, Albee quit his job as a Western Union messenger and finished his first successful play *The Zoo Story* in three weeks as a birthday present to himself. This play was initially rejected by several New York producers and eventually received its first performance at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt in Berlin on September 28, 1959. Four months later *The Zoo Story* played on a double bill with Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Provincetown Playhouse in Greenwich Village and it won Albee an international reputation. With this success, Albee produced two more one-act plays, *The Sandbox* (1960) and *The American Dream* (1961).

In 1962, Albee stormed Broadway with his first three-act drama and his most famous play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf ?*. The reviews were mixed, yet the critical and commercial accomplishment of this play consolidated Albee’s reputation. When this play was controversially denied the Pulitzer Prize because one trustee objected to its sexual subject matter, drama advisors John Gassner and John Mason Brown publicly resigned in protest (Amacher 9). This play is considered by many to be his finest work, and it continues to be widely taught in high school and college English and theater courses.

Albee has received three Pulitzer Prizes since *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf ?*,

one in 1967 for *A Delicate Balance* (many critics concluded it as a consolation prize for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*), another in 1975, for *Seascape*, and, the other in 1994, for his autobiographical drama *Three Tall Women*. Albee's paradoxical position in American culture might be sketched by the passage addressed by the former President of the United States Bill Clinton at the Kennedy Center's honors ceremony: "Tonight our nation—born in rebellion—pays tribute to you, Edward Albee. In your rebellion, the American theatre was reborn" (Bottoms 1).

Plot Synopsis of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

The play is set on one late night in the living room of a house on the campus of a small New England college. Martha is the daughter of the college president and her husband, George, is a professor of history. As the act opens, this middle-aged couple return home from a faculty party. When Martha announces that they are expecting guests, George warns her not to start in on the bit about kid. Their guests, the young couple Nick and Honey, arrive and soon find them trapped in the brutal marital battle between George and Martha. In the first act, "Fun and Games," George and Martha keep teasing and fighting each other. Martha tells Honey about their son and complains about George's professional failure. Act One ends with Martha's grumbling and George's singing "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf," and then Honey suddenly rushes out feeling nauseous.

In Act Two, "Walpurgisnacht," George and Nick are alone. Nick reveals a secret that he and Honey get married because of a false pregnancy and he admits that her father's money is one of his reasons for marrying her. George tells Nick a story about

a boy accidentally killing both of his parents in separate incidents. Martha and Honey rejoin them. Later on, Martha and Nick start dancing. Martha tells Nick another story about George's autobiographical novel that is prevented from publishing by Martha's father. After Martha's "Humiliate the Host" game, George proposes a new game "Get the Guests." He narrates his second novel by retelling Nick and Honey's story as well as Honey's hysterical pregnancy. Honey is upset and runs to the bathroom. George pretending reading, Martha and Nick come together in a long kiss and then go upstairs. George throws a book which hits the door bells. Honey returns and asks who rings the doorbells, which inspires George the way to really get at Martha.

In Act Three, "The Exorcism," George gathers them all and forces them to play one last game "Bringing Up Baby." Asking Martha to recount the tale of their son, George recites in Latin the text of the dead and then announces the telegram carrying the news of their son's death. Martha becomes hysterical and bursts into tears. Eventually Nick understands everything. George and Martha cannot have children so that they create an imagined son. The party is over. Nick and Honey make their exit, leaving George and Martha to rebuild their shattered marriage. At the end of the play, George sings "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf" to Martha and she replies, "I... am... George.... I... am...."

Literature Review

Edward Albee dominated the American theater world in the 1960s (Bigsby 327; Roudané *Understanding* 65). His works have continued to be the subject of much scholarly discussion ever since. The early evaluations of *Who's Afraid of Virginia*

Wolf? were quite extreme. In his review “Albee and the Medusa-Head” in *Critical Essays on Edward Albee*, Robert Brustein claims: “Edward Albee’s new work embodies both the failings and the virtues of his previous plays. But its positive achievements are substantial, and I am finally beginning to regard this playwright’s future with real expectation” (46). While Brustein has great esteem for Albee’s techniques, Tom F. Driver approaches it in a different way. In “What’s the Matter with Edward Albee,” Driver regards Albee as “the author of six bad plays” and declares that *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is “built upon an unbelievable situation—namely, that a sane, average-type person would be a passive spectator in the presence of behavior obviously headed toward destructive violence. [...] Why doesn’t Nick, in *Who’s Afraid?*, take his young wife and go home when he sees that George and Martha want only to fight the whole night through?” (99). Driver is furthermore against the claim that Nick’s passivity is allegorical (100). Driver indicates the falseness of Albee’s characters and thus draws a conclusion that the protagonists in the play are not two couples but four homosexuals (101).

The analysis of games is widely applied in psychology. Louis Paul emphasizes one of the life games George and Martha play, “Our Son the Pretend Child,” in his “A Game Analysis of Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*: The Core of Grief”(47). Paul finds their game about the child serve to repair “a major defect in identity, the lack of procreation and generativity” and to repress “a core of grief” (47). Discussions on psychological aspects of this play extend to the 1980s. An excellent exploration of the games in this play is provided in Richard E. Amacher’s carefully presented chapter “Battle of the Sexes—New Style” in his book *Edward Albee*. Amacher

proposes a question: “What, specifically, are the *games* Martha and George, as well as their guests, play?” (76). With a list of the games in Act One, Amacher elaborates: “All of these games, in terms of Albee’s purpose, relate directly or indirectly to George and Martha’s attempts to hurt each other; moreover, they reveal the marital situation of the couple” (76-77). In this close textual analysis of the use of the game, Amacher meticulously handles Albee’s play as an incidental example to probe the theme of war between the sexes (68).

Numerous commentaries center on the thematic approach. In the article “The Theater of Edward Albee” in 1967, Lee Baxandall contends: “[A]re there valid grounds for the invented child in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* [...] or is Albee artistically callow and unable to structure a play properly?” (80). Through an extensive character analysis, Baxandall reaches a conclusion that Albee’s device of the imagined child does work (93). Furthermore, Baxandall identifies Albee’s technique as “an archetypal family unit,” which consists of three generations: “*Then*, the epoch of a still-dynamic national ethic and vision; *Now*, a phase which breaks down into several tangents of decay; and *No-where*, a darkly prophesied future generation” (81). According to Baxandall’s categorization, in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Martha is the representative of the *Now* generation, and Honey belongs to the *No-where* generation (82-85).

The specific inquiry whether the invented son is valid or not has aroused abundant discussions. In the 1970s, Foster Hirsch in his book *Who’s Afraid of Edward Albee?* raises the same question: “Those who are unconvinced by [the imaginary child] argue that the patent symbolism of the fantasy child conflicts with the play’s

naturalistic texture, and suggest that George and Martha ought really to be committed” (29-30). Hirsch argues that the invented son is “much more acceptable” in “a symbolic representation of a warped, sadomasochistic relationship” (30). The child highlights the characters’ loss.

Besides this central parent-child motif in this play, Hirsch conceives of the ending as showing a sense of redemption (33). Hirsch contemplates that “George and Martha really do care for each other, and that their mutual baiting is a perverse expression of love” (32). Hirsch confirms that since George and Martha have faced their illusion, they have the possibility to change (33).

In the 1980s, a fierce debate on Albee’s device of the imagined son continues. Gerry McCarthy in his book *Edward Albee* notes: “Albee’s use of the fantasy child was most seriously criticized and proved a stumbling-block to the full appreciation of his achievement” (68). “Accordingly the child was explained in terms of significance,” McCarthy continues, “but was felt by many to be an improbable delusion in such a couple as George and Martha” (68). McCarthy then voices his opinion that the child is essential: “[T]he absent child is no mere symbol (a much-misused word) but for all four performers the essential condition for a profound emotional encounter” (69). The child is not only a necessity for George and Martha but also the key to the structure of fictions (72). Displaying the interwoven boundaries between illusion and reality, McCarthy remarks that “events are presented as straight narrative but reappear transformed” (72). For instance, George’s story of the boy, who accidentally killed his parents, is transformed into his unpublished autobiographical novel in Martha’s narrative, and then once again it is turned into the message of the

telegram.

Due to the significance of the title and the naming of characters in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, much critical squeamishness is dedicated to the allegorical study. According to the playwright's explanation, C. W. E. Bigsby specifies that the play's title is derived from a sign in a Greenwich Village bar: "Who's afraid of life without false illusions?" (264). "George and Martha, named after the first President and his wife," Bigsby further points out, "embody the fate of American dream which has moved progressively further away from the supposed liberal idealism of those revolutionary principles" (266). In addition to the allegorical analysis, Bigsby talks about the suspicion of homosexual content in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in early reception: "While suggestions that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was originally written for four men (a canard easily disproved by reference to the manuscripts held at Lincoln Center) are manifestly absurd" (254). Denying firmly the accusation that this play is written for four men instead of two couples, Bigsby suggests that the issue of homosexuality is tackled directly only in Albee's early unpublished plays and a work called *Finding the Sun* (254).

There are various inspections in the theme of alienation as well as illusion and reality. Bigsby comments on George and Martha's language game as "a substitute for real contact" (267). The slow, gradual and merciless "stripping of illusion" forces George and Martha to give up their myth and to embrace reality (266). Similarly, Matthew Charles Roudané also sees a moment of "coming to consciousness" in his book *Understanding Edward Albee*: "Stripped of illusion, Albee's protagonists stand naked" (22-23). Although dwelling in an absurd world, characters in Albee's plays

have the possibilities to improve and to change (22). Roudané distinguishes Albee's illusion from O'Neill's "pipe dreams": "[*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*] challenges the sorts of illusions" (67). Albee suggests we can have pipe dreams as long as we know that these are illusions (67). Albee's concern lies in the importance of knowing the falseness in illusions.

"The play's three-act structure," proclaims Roudané, "chronicles George and Martha's realization that their 'pipe dream'—their imaginary son—is kidding as well as killing them" (67). When "private mythology turns to public issue," George recognizes that Martha has moved into her own fantasy world (67). Holding a similar view to McCarthy's in discussing George's story, Roudané affirms that "ambiguous and mysterious, the story within a play complements the broader truth/illusion motif of the drama" (74). Roudané proposes that George's story, besides its function on obscuring the distinction between truth and illusion, serves as the fantasy, which George indulges himself with (76). "Both" George and Martha are addicted to their make-believe world (76). The play ends with the couple left alone with their broken dreams. Roudané has a view similar to Hirsch's in pointing out "the very real possibility for a truthful, loving renaissance" for this couple (82).

Harold Bloom specifies the relation of Tennessee Williams's dramas to Albee's plays in his "Introduction" to the book *Edward Albee*. Bloom considers that George and Martha are a less memorable couple than Jerry and Peter in *The Zoo Story*, which is regarded as the best of Albee's plays to him (6). Hirsch and Roudané hold the same opinion on believing in the possibility for George and Martha to change; however, Bloom disagrees. Bloom argues that both George and Martha are like Horatios in

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The couple "survive only to endure the endless repetition of drawing their breaths, in this harsh world, in order to go on telling our story" (6). In Bloom's point of view: "Nothing has happened, because nothing has changed, and so this couple will be rubbed down to rubbish in the end" (8).

Peter L. Hays provides his keen observation upon the symbolic action of child murder in American drama. In his article "Child Murder and Incest in American Drama," Hays states: "Albee again combines child murder and incest but doubles the child murder and possibly tosses in parenticide as well" (440). George kills the fictive child and "Honey's pregnancies were not hysterical false pregnancies as Nick claims, but actual ones, aborted" (440).³ The Freudian symbolism of the son killing the previous generation is hinted in George's novel. As Hays suggests, the implication of incest lies in "George's accusations of [Martha's] sexual advances on their fictional son" (440-41).

Stephen Bottoms compiles an excellent collection of critical essays on Albee. Roudané also contributes an article "*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: Toward the Marrow*" to this compilation. In this paper Roudané responds to Bloom's mistrust of the possibility for George and Martha to change: "Albee's real interest lies in presenting love as a unifying presence" (44). Roudané confirms the deep love between George and Martha: "Their wittily devastating repartee is born out of a deep love for the other, a point they lose sight of but regain in Act 3" (45). Roudané points out the short conversation at the end of the play indicates that the couple "now communicate simply, directly, with no wasted emotion" (45). Although such a

³ The playwright confirms Hays's account. For evidences of Honey's abortion, see Bhasin 35.

frightening indifference fills this play, it is love which overrides indifference at the end. The tenderness which reveals in this succinct conversation is the very proof of a restart for a new relationship (45).

In Taiwan, recent researches on Albee are few. Master theses center on the early plays of Albee, including Yin-yu Yen's *Satire and Absurdity in Albee's Plays* (1973), Yu-hui Huang's *Edward Albee's The American Dream: Functions and Symbolic Meanings of Grandma* (1987), Tsui-wei Tung's *The Early Edward Albee: A Pessimistic Absurdist?* (1994), and Jung-chen Chang's *Disturbing Our Sense of Well-being: A Study of Edward Albee's The Zoo Story, A Delicate Balance, and Seascape* (1996). In the studies relevant to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Shu-fu Wu discusses the theme of sterility in her thesis, *Modern Waste Land: Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance* (1990). In *Ritual Performance in Harold Pinter's The Homecoming and Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (2004), Chia-chun Lee describes George as the executor to exorcise the conflicts. Le-tien Hsu analyzes the language style and language strategy in the thesis *The Insight and Blind Spot: Language Performances in Albee's Plays* (2005).

From the above critical survey, a fact can be gathered—a study of ethical relationship in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* still leaves much to be desired. According to the aforecited review, the importance of confronting one's self and the other is always acknowledged; moreover, in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the boundaries between illusion and reality become a blur so that a new identity needs to be established. Hence, the confrontation between self and other and the dichotomy

between illusion and reality have always been the focuses of the critical assessment of this play. The exploration of the role conflict and the issue of illusion in this play have been undertaken from many different approaches in the past forty years, yet an analysis from the perspective of ethical relationship will make the meaning of this play more complete and relevant to the world we are now living in.

Purposes of This Thesis

In this study, I attempt to use Emmanuel Levinas's propositions of ethics to reinterpret George's determination of abandoning illusion and entering reality in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. The totalizing violence overruns in this play in the forms of the reduction of Martha's father, the symbolic assimilation of Nick, and, particularly, the destructive negation of Martha; it is out of love, not revenge, that George destroys the son-myth in order to take the responsibility to help Martha eliminate her internalized totalizing ontological inclination and reconstruct a more truthful identity.

In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Albee exquisitely exhibits various kinds of illusions. The importance of illusion and reality in the play is noticed by many critics. Roudané declares that George plays a central role as an exorcist or a "surgeon" in the process of expelling delusion (80). Under the help of two assistants, Nick and Honey, George successfully performs an "ontological" operation on Martha (81). As Roudané points out, the role of George is like a doctor to prevent and cure diseases; Bigsby further indicates: "*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a protest against what Albee saw as a growing conformity, a retreat from individuality and moral responsibility" (271).

The action George takes to help Martha as Roudané indicates is extremely significant in this play. It is insightful for Bigsby to clarify the issue of moral responsibility. The investigation on this play will be more complete if we regard George's action in terms of ethical relationship. While characters in this play indulge in their own fantasies, they more or less force others to accept what they believe to be true. Illusion sometimes is accompanied with deception and violence. Little has thus far been written on the issue of violence. In this play, we perceive a mechanism of power that manipulates and controls all characters. This power is an ontological totalization. Therefore, in this thesis, I intend to explore the concept of responsibility to and for the Other in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* from the perspective of Emmanuel Levinas's ethical relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95) must now be judged to be "the most original and important ethical thinker in postmodernism" (Atterton 231). Levinas is one of the first scholars, who introduces Edmund Husserl to France. He is a Jew and one of the key Continental philosophers of twentieth-century Europe (Kearney and Dooley 1). His works are based on the proposition of ethics as first philosophy.

Emmanuel Levinas was born in Kovno (Kaunas), Lithuania, on January 12, 1906. He was the eldest of three brothers in a Jewish family. As a youth, he began to learn Hebrew and to read the bible at home with a private tutor. Russian was his formal language of education and mostly spoken at home. Helping Levinas discover Russian literature, his mother would read Pushkin to him (Malka 7). In 1923, he went

to study philosophy at Strasbourg University in France, where he met his life-long close friend Maurice Blanchot. Between the years of 1928 and 1929, he traveled to Freiburg University to pursue studies in phenomenology under Edmund Husserl and attended Martin Heidegger's seminars. He was naturalized as a French citizen in 1930 and married his childhood friend Raïssa Levy in 1932.

Levinas is considered as "the earliest and most important exponents of German phenomenology in France" (Davis 1) for publishing the first book on Husserl in French *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (*Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*) in 1930 and co-translating Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* with his fellow Strasbourg student Gabrielle Peiffer in 1931. Levinas became a naturalized French citizen in 1930. During the Second World War, Levinas served as an officer in the French army and was captured by the Nazis. He began writing his first original book *Existence and Existents* (*De l'existence à l'existant* 1947) in the five-year captivity and published *Discovering Existence with Husserl and Heidegger* (*En Découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* 1949).

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Levinas developed his own philosophy with the aim of going beyond prior Western thinking in general. His first magnum opus, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961), is a critique of the totality of ontology, which examines the I-other relationship "from the sole perspective of detached, reconstruct theory" (Bergo 9). Ontology can be found in the history of Western thought. "It is this outwardly directed but self-centered totalistic thinking," John Wild declares in the "Introduction" to *Totality and Infinity*, "that organizes men and things into power systems, and gives us control over nature and other people"

(17). Ontology is a philosophy of power. “The whole of *Totality and Infinity*,” writes Adriaan Peperzak in his book *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, “can be read as one long refutation of the attempt to understand the difference between the Same and the Other as an opposition within the unique horizon of a totality” (138). Levinas believes that the Other and the Same are separate and thus each of them preserve their own alterity.⁴ Before the Other appears to the Same, the Same lives in its separation and gains enjoyment from transmuting the otherness it finds in its world into strength. The Other is simply there, present to the Same in a relation that Levinas defines as the face to face (*le face à face*). The face of the Other speaks the first sentence “You shall not commit murder” that obligates one’s responsibility to and for the Other.

Levinas aims at clarifying the violence of totality and introducing the transcendence of infinity. Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity* was published in 1961, the year before Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962). A dialogue of the dramatic text and Levinas’s propositions achieves a new discovery of the profound meaning of the play, especially in our times when the secular value system is collapsing.

Chapter Layout

In the following chapters, the concept of the totalizing violence of the Same and one’s responsibility to and for the Other in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* will be

⁴ The distinction between “other” and “Other” plays a central role in Levinas’s thinking. The former may be incorporated into the Same, yet the latter challenges the supremacy of the Same and cannot be assimilated into the Same.

elaborated from the perspectives of the violence of totality and the transcendence of infinity based on Levinas's book *Totality and Infinity*. Through a discussion of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in terms of various examples of the totalizing violence and the face of the Other, the ethical relationship between the Same and the Other will be illuminated. This thesis attempts to contextualize the compassion for the Other in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* according to Levinas's contemplation.

In Chapter Two, I argue that in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the totalizing violence is made manifest through the characters' reduction, assimilation, and negation. Levinas criticizes the self-sufficiency of the Same that reduces, controls, and manipulates the Other in the hope of incorporating the alterity of the Other into the selfsame empire of the Same. Though Martha's father is absent in this play, his significant influence and sovereign power are evident everywhere. Martha's father maintains an almost god-like presence in this play and he embodies the notion of the ontological self. In the boxing match episode, he intends to incorporate George into his idea of masculinity. Also, the subject Nick symbolically suggests a sense of assimilating force. Moreover, Martha having internalized her father's ontological inclination, her intentional adultery with Nick shows her total negation to George and Nick. She deliberately commits adultery in the hope of humiliating George and subordinating Nick to herself.

Chapter Three argues that George's decision of killing the imagined son reflects Levinas's ethical concern for one's responsibility to and for the Other. It is out of love, not revenge, that George destroys the son-myth in order to take the responsibility to help Martha eliminate her totalizing inclination. Levinas proposes ethics as first

philosophy. The face of the Other issues an ethical calling into question of the Same. Therefore, this chapter also examines the interrelation between illusion/reality and private/public, which disturbs all four characters, from Levinas's perspective of the encounter between the Other and the Same—the face to face (*le face à face*). Finally, this chapter analyzes Martha's adultery with Nick, which forces George to take the responsibly to help Martha abandon illusion and rebuild a more truthful marriage relationship.