CONCLUSION

In the body of the dissertation we have discussed the meaning of the term "alienation" and the exact sense in which it is frequently used. A question still hangs temptingly. Whether alienation is an actual phenomenon that describes modern man's separation from his family, from religion, from other people and from his own self or it is an intellectual tag attached to a tendency whose very existence is suspect. Whether it is a sign of sickness or of health. Some writers point out that alienation, as it is caused by a person's refusal to capitulate to a set of patterns offered to him by the conventions and mass media, is essential for the growth of his personality. Others hold that alienation which is occasioned by a faulty social order, which renders some members of the society incapable of functioning as healthy social beings, of connecting themselves to other persons, to social institutions in a meaningful way, is a sign of retardation.

It is in the spirit of our thesis to take both views for granted. Such a synthesis is supported by the fact that only those individuals who demand a great deal from themselves, who fight against the current that drifts them down, who are sensitive and aware of their possibilities and dignity as human beings, who have the personal conviction about the rightness of things—are in a position
to protest, to feel alienated when things go the other way. Such an awareness of retardation, though makes them miserable in a sense, is a step towards self-actualization. We have tried as far as possible to resist the temptation to tread into the intricate realms of philosophy. That is because Tennessee Williams is not a philosophical dramatist. Rooted to naturalism, he remains throughout a social critic with a penchant for psychology. Williams is not a complex playwright. He is sometimes confused. His confusion results from his conflicting loyalties: his flair for the deterministic naturalism and his episcopal upbringing. Though we have referred occasionally to autobiographical overtones in his plays, we have also tried to streamline such discussions. This aspect can fill up a bulky research dissertation.

A creative writer, particularly a writer with some concern for the social problems, has to draw on his own experiences as a social being. His own society, its attitudes towards values, conventions, virtues and vices, typical of its time, seep into his mental repertory and shape the mode of his writing. Tennessee Williams, writing in the contemporary American society, is obviously aware of the clash of values and attitudes, of the crisis in perspective. The sustaining force of religion, the dignity
and uniqueness of Man, the silken threads of love and fellow-feeling that hold members of a family together, the heroic life-style that can transcend, though not obliterate, the trauma of death and physical decay—all these norms so characteristic of a slowly vanishing pastoral culture are fighting a losing battle against the industrial ethics of the present-day civilization. In the frenzied, Dionysiac barbecue, everything that is subtle, quiet, pure, loving and spiritually nourishing is wilfully rejected. A sort of philistinism slowly replaces the religious faith, love is sacrificed on the altar of easy sensations, craze for anarchy breaks up the family and the rabble conceals the individual, the computer replaces the human factor. Life becomes a relentless race after material wants. The society becomes a veritable stock-market. In short, the modern technological society conjures up an apocalyptic image predicted in Capek's *R.U.R.*, Huxley's *The Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*.

People usually accept the way of life offered to them by the society. A few of them refuse. They are the saving minority. They catch Williams' fancy. They feel something vital is negated—something vital in themselves, in the orthodox religious practices, in the society. They oppose what is conceited, cruel and false. Man must
be treated with dignity that is his due. If that is denied to him, he has to struggle for it. Masks, they claim, are not a part of man. They conceal the real man; they project him what he is not. They must be ripped off whatever be the price. People must come closer to one another, understand and love one another. That is possible when the slough of superficiality is cast off. Superficiality in attitudes towards sex, friendship and religion.

Looking at Williams' protagonists from a broad spectrum, it is easy to find what exactly ails them. The embarrassing experiences of men without masks in a big masquerade. Their mission is to debunk. That too seems to be the mission of the playwright. We have discussed that such a mission, though in itself praiseworthy, can delimit the vision of the writer.

Again, though the intention of Williams is clear, a shadow falls between his intention and execution. His intentions and ideas get better of him, and his protagonists enact the roles doled out to them. He intersperses his plays with scenes of violence and aberrant sex, most often irrelevantly. He waxes lurid while portraying sex and violence. His overtly autobiographical lyricism often impairs his objectivity and the credibility of his characters.
There is another interesting anomaly in Williams’ writing. His fidelity to his literary mentor D.H. Lawrence does not seem to agree with the sense of guilt, animality and perversion, with which he depicts sex. Sex, for him, is not beautiful and ennobling. At best, it is a box of morphine tablets or a shot of heroin. The purview of our thesis does not permit us to analyse this aspect in detail. But a full-length study can be done on this topic.

Tennessee Williams’ protagonists, as we have discussed earlier, are patients in a large hospital ward. The very fact of their being there justifies their sickness whether they are aware of it or not. They are extremely annoyed with the hospital administration and the way they are treated. They complain. Like the cursed Cassandra, they are fated not to be taken seriously. Their actions and words, however offensive they may be, are only fronts of protest. They cling to each other like two shivering bed-mates in a winter night. Their attempts to establish a meaningful relationship with others are invariably foiled. They go to illusions, wine and drugs to cool down their inner tension. But these soporific agents only relieve them for the time being. Temporary escapes only make reality more intolerable.

Sometimes they spin around them little cocoons with gossamer threads of make-believe, imagination and ideals
when the reality is unaccommodating and monotonous. They form their own, solitary system of values when they realize that the values propagated by the dehumanizing, technological society are false values. But cocoons cannot hold them long. They hunger for the human contact again, emerge out of their cocoons of privation and encounter the socially adjusted people outside. Such encounters form the nuclei of most of Williams' plays. These lonely intruders are looked upon with suspicion. Few sympathetic characters try to understand them. Many try to get rid of them. Because of their peculiarity and singularity they attract attention and arouse mixed feelings of love and hate. These sensitive, subtle and fragile protagonists are pitted against the crude, confident and efficient people who defeat and often destroy them. Their defeat suggests that ultimately the coarse-grained efficiency must defeat the subtle sensitivity; that the robots would substitute men; that the devil would come up.

Such a theme runs like a thread through most of his plays. Williams has already made endless permutations and combinations with this limited stock of alphabet blocks. We believe that his reputation as a playwright mainly rests on his ability to create situations charged with electrifying theatricality and on his earnestness of execution. Certainly, these are fine qualities, indispensable for any
dramatist. But he invariably overdoes his theatrical scenes and hence runs the risk of being called sensational.

Keeping in with his lack of objectivity, his prose is imprecise and blashy. He is so much convinced about the ignorance of his audience that he never leaves anything unsaid. He is afraid of being misunderstood. In dialogues, stage directions, notes and prefaces—he makes his intentions and symbols sufficiently clear even at the cost of being obvious. We have pointed out these aspects in the course of our discussion.

In the body of the dissertation we have discussed that a society which does not believe in the dignity of an individual, in the importance of faith in something higher and nobler than the sheer physical, in the spiritual functions of religion, in the inter-personal intimacy and in the essential goodness in the human nature—is a sick one. In such a society the sensitive individual has no solid prop to fall back upon during the moments of despair. Williams loves them for what they are and advocates their cause. Williams helps his audience/readers to look at their inner gestalts with eyes moist with sympathy and hearts warm with love.