Tennessee Williams, as a humanist, feels greatly concerned at the human suffering and the moral and spiritual decadence which, he considers, are the result of the material progress made in the modern times. His plays are profound and compassionate studies of the lost and defeated people caught in an ambiguous world of the twentieth century. With other southern writers, like William Faulkner, he looks at the lives of these mutilated warped souls and with clinical precision probes their conduct as well as their mind, and then records the results of his sensitive observations. He has given us veritable and poignant accounts of human misery.

In an interview, Williams once said, "A writer's view of the world is always affected by his own state of being. I am an anxious troubled person. I cannot write about anything I don't feel.... I am a deeply disturbed man and I write about disturbed people."1

From the vast repertory of biographical details that Williams has left us, there is ample evidence to suggest that he was himself trapped in an entanglement of despair and frustration. His own physical and mental ailments, allied to the financial problems of the family and the despair of her sister Rose, who was fast losing her mind in the prime of her youth,
were more than enough to cast a pall of gloom over his sensitive and impressionable mind. Later, when he visited New Orleans, he came across a section of forlorn and desperate people who made him realize that despair and frustration were not his lot alone. Jean Gould points out:

The scene he discovered for himself opened his eyes and his heart to humanity. Here the must-be playwright met up with the 'shadow people', creatures without roots, who lived in utter loneliness. Like Eugene O'Neill, he felt a certain kinship with them, for he realized that the grim emotions he had been suffering were shared by a whole segment of human life. These lost souls would go to any lengths to dispel their despair; and at first their explosive, wild, frenzied existence overwhelmed him with its excesses. A kaleidoscope of drinking, sex and revelry danced before his eyes in crazy prisms of colour. Sauntering wide-eyed through the streets of the Latin quarter, he rubbed shoulders with panhandlers, prostitutes, procurers, homosexuals and dope addicts, 'living a fringe-area life, fraught with desperation and wild despair'.

It was, thus, for these reasons, both biographical and psychological, that Williams came to write of the disturbed and troubled people. He believed that writing about the troubled people enabled him to release his tensions and might, as a result, help the audience and the readers to release their tensions, too.

Williams sees man as a creature badly in need of some mode of salvation which is possible only through love and compassion. The world, according to him, can be saved from disintegration only by love and pity. Unfortunately, however, he finds the world devoid of sympathy, warmth, and
tenderness like the derelict writer in the short play "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" who says: "Is there no mercy left in the world any more? What has become of compassion and understanding? Where have they gone to? Where's God? Where's Christ?" Early in his career as a playwright, after the success of The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire, he formulated his credo: "Every artist has a basic premise pervading his whole life and that premise can provide the impulse in everything he creates. For me, the dominating premise has been the need for understanding and tenderness, and fortune among individuals trapped by circumstances." Williams' most obviously trapped and frustrated individuals are his gentle and failed Southern aristocratic women such as Amanda, Laura, Blanche, Alma and others, whose permanent and irreconcilable regret is the loss of the Old South. Born and brought up in the South, Williams had an intimate knowledge of the decayed Southern aristocratic society. The Civil War, which had wrought havoc, had also brought in its wake anarchy and a complete annihilation of the old Southern values—both material and spiritual—on which the Southern society was based. Robert Emmet Jones finds the impact of the American Civil War on the Southern aristocracy as destructive as that of the French Revolution on the French nobility. The refined and cultured way of life disappeared and was replaced by crass commercial and industrial interests. Consequently, the Old South that was exists only in the memory of Williams' hapless southern women;
to them, the present symbolizes crass materialism and brute strength. Jones says, "Death, desertion, and decline surround these women, and they have been ever present in the lives of Williams' heroines. The age of chivalry, which has been romanticized to them in their youth has disappeared. Their homes have been sold, their families have died, sickness and mental breakdown have been everywhere."5 Like Anton Chekhov's battered and bruised characters, Williams' decayed aristocracy women cherish in their minds the dream and the glory that was and find it hard to adjust to the stark realities of the present. In this respect, they are like their creator, who, several years ago, said in an interview, "I'm a compulsive writer because what I'm doing is creating imaginary worlds into which I can retreat from the real world... because I have never made any kind of adjustment to the real world."7 Their social position gone, their financial security lost, they have been forced to compromise with their present lot. The reality of their situation is sadly out of harmony with the world of their soft, sentimental dreams, a world in which the ideals of gentility, decency, and decorum were cherished and respected.

Amanda, used though she is to living in style as a Southern belle on a rich plantation in Blue Mountain, has been reduced to an existence (with her two children) in a dingy apartment in one of those huge buildings which "are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation."8 The girl, for whose hand sons of rich planters vied with one another, married a none-too-brilliant telephone man
and even he, having fallen in love with long distance, has
deserted her. Now he travels and she does not know where.
Reduced to dire financial straits, she is compelled to conduct
a vigorous campaign on telephone, trying to rope in subscribers
to a ladies' magazine. Her son Tom is forced to work for
sixty-five dollars a month in the warehouse where he feels
cooped up and suffocated. The family's needs, literally of
bread and butter, have to be provided for through the means
she employs to acquire them are pathetic enough to hurt her
Southern pride. Her deepest regret, however, is the absence
of the type of gentleman callers who courted belles in the
Old South so that Laura, her daughter, faces the dismal
prospect of growing into an old maid. At the end, Randi
stands completely lost and vanquished. According to Joseph
Nool Krutch, "she is not disappointed in her efforts to find
a husband for her shy, crippled daughter but is, in every
other way, defeated by a crude and pushing modernity which
neither understands nor respects her dream of gentility." 9

The aristocrats of Streetcar Named Desire have had
a far more terrible fate to endure. Stella has declassed
herself by marrying a brutish Polish labourer though it is
a different matter that she has adapted herself to the changed
circumstances. Blanche, on the other hand, has stood her
ground and refused to make such an adjustment. Cultured,
refined, and sophisticated, she is an anachronism in the present
age and can't adjust herself to the realities of the world.
A descendant of one of the oldest and most illustrious families
of the Old South, she has been bounded by death and deprivation.
She tells Stella, "I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body! All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret that dreadful way! ... Funerals are quiet, but deaths—not always." 10 Though her family owned plantation and held a position of respect in the Southern society, she has been reduced to the lowest financial state. The rich family plantation, Belle Rive, has been sold acre by acre by dissolute and improvident grandfathers, fathers, brothers, and uncles in order to pay for their "epic fornica-
tions." She has even worked as a teacher for "a pitiful salary," but when we make her acquaintance on the stage, she has been relieved of her job and rendered a homeless wanderer. She is, therefore, obliged to seek asylum in her sister's home but with her airs of being a rare individual, she can't adjust to the two-room existence in the French Quarter of New Orleans. Except for the cathedral bells, chiming in the distance, she finds everything in the neighborhood scutild and sordid.

She surrounds in which she has to live adds to her distress, but "she tries to be above the environment into which she has descended. Her scorn for it is unmistakable. Her eyes seem fixed on a decadent past, while the present—her current surroundings—is so palpably alive and vital." 11 She is maladjusted at Elysian Fields: she cannot compromise with the animals-like sensuality of her sister and brother-in-law and the "no more submit to the grossly sensual unimaginative worldings like Stanley and Stella than Hamlet can tolerate Claudius and Gertrude. Blanche's indictment of Stella is
very similar to Hamlet's indictment of his mother's carnal passion for his uncle.\(^\text{12}\}

Another descendant of an ancient family of Mississippi Delta, Cassandra Whitetside of \textit{Bottle of Angels}, who later becomes Carol Cutrere in \textit{Ombus Descending}, has also failed to adjust herself to life in the New South. She is a decendent Southern belle who can neither regain the power and assurance of her family's past nor give up the effort. According to Peggy W. Frenshaw, Cassandra, like Faulkner's Temple Drake, represents "woman-hood defiled" and "like Temple of Requiem for a Nun she prophesies that the tensions between the old ideal of Southern womanhood and the combined actualization of the moment end of the flesh at last exhaust the will."\(^\text{13}\}

She herself admits to Val Xavier that they are "things whose license has been revoked in the civilized world."\(^\text{14}\} She is a representative of the descendants of the decayed aristocracy whose efforts to find a meaningful pursuit have met with failure. Frenshaw further observes, "In Sandra Williams exposes the desiccation of the old tradition.... When the later generation is undistracted by plantation building and the ego trip of dynasty making, it finds it is caretaking a corrupt way of life.... It finds it really has no ethical tradition to guide it, and so is faced with deriving one."\(^\text{15}\}

Cassandra, in her need to fight injustice, takes up the cause of the coloured majority and protests against their "gradual massacre." Her efforts, however bold, are more exhibitionistic than sincere and these earn her the charge of "lew
vagrancy". Ultimately her reputation makes her an alien in her own home-town; she is a lost soul.

The hypersensitive Laura, modelled upon the girl of an early short story, "A portrait of a Girl in Glass," is like a soft moth that flew too near the flame and suffered severe crippling. Beautiful and fragile, Laura is also an anachronism in the world of reality. She is cursed with physical deformity which accounts for her inferiority complex and concomitant introversion. Amanda's exaggerated, and perhaps fabricated, stories of herself as a Southern belle, much sought after by rich young men, make Laura all the more self-conscious of her complex and her lack of popularity with men. She feels the joy of life for a moment when Jim, her only and perhaps last gentleman caller, infuses her with hope and gives her some useful hints on the art of living. The moment proves to be too transient because it is revealed that Jim has already plighted his troth to another girl. The despair, heart-ache, and frustration that are in store for her are clear enough for everyone to see. "Jim was, we are made to feel, Laura's last and only means of coming to terms with reality. Laura's loss of Jim is analogous to Emily's loss of Homer Barron, Alma's loss of John, and Blanche's loss of Mitch."16 During Jim's visit, Laura becomes a normal and cheerful girl, but once he has departed she shuts herself again in her cocoon of gloom and despair.

Man's inability to adjust himself to the vital reality of the present renders him lonesome. In Williams' world, loneliness is one of the chief causes of frustration. Obsessed
with the idea of his own loneliness and his inability to communicate meaningfully with others, Williams believes that man is doomed to isolation. His life is a kind of solitary confinement from which there is no escape except through death. In *Mille of Angels*, which Williams wrote as early as in 1940, Val says to Pyro, "Nobody ever gets to know anybody.... We're all of us locked up tight inside our own bodies. Sentenced — you might say — to solitary confinement inside our own skins."

This idea of men's existential isolation preoccupied Williams to such an extent that several years later he reflected it in the preface to *Cut up a Hot Tin Roof*:

> It is a lonely life, a lonely condition, so terrifying to think of that we usually don't, and so we talk to each other.... call each other short and lose distance across land and sea, clash hands with each other at meeting and at parting, fight each other and even destroy each other because of this always thwarted efforts to break through walls to each other.... Personal lyricism is the outcry of prisoner to prisoner from the cell in solitary where each is confined for the duration of his life."18

Like Lillian Hellman in *The Little Foxes* and Paul Green in *The House of Connelly*, Williams has portrayed the loneliness of the Southern plantation owners. Like them, he has also laid emphasis on the changing socio-economic structure as the basis of the psychological isolation of the Southern aristocrats who can't adjust themselves to the changing conditions. Like Mrs. Blanche, Cassandra and other aristocratic ladies are victims of terrifying loneliness because they still tenaciously hold on to a society which does not exist anymore. They suffer intensely because of their failure to
understand others and live in a world which is quite apart from the world of those living around them.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, Laura and Amanda suffer deeply because of their emotional apartness. Though they live under the same roof, there is hardly any sense of sincere communication between them. In the Production Notes of the play, Williams writes about Laura, who has one leg slightly shorter than the other, "stemming from this [physical deformity], Laura's separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the self."¹⁰ This physical deformity, together with her psychological isolation, makes her deeply introverted. Neither Tom nor Amanda tries to understand her, much less help her to overcome her problem. On the contrary, Amanda (no doubt, unwittingly) makes her conscious of her ineptitude and inability to face any situation in life. Her profound attachment to such inanimate objects as glass figurines is indicative of her separation from human beings. Williams illustrates her loneliness symbolically by comparing her to a unicorn. As the unicorn looks strange and out of place among the horses in her glass collection, so does she among the world of normal people. The loss of the unicorn's horn in Laura's scene with Jim is symbolic of her return to normality, but that is only for a brief moment. Finally, towards the close of the play, we see Laura blowing out her candles and submerging herself in the darkness of complete isolation, which is her inescapable fate. Dusenbury observes:
Laura lives in a mountainous retreat of her own making and has thus lived for so long that she is now incapable of life among the vail of people. Unlike Amanda, she has no past to which she can belong and, as Tom recognizes, she obviously has no future to which she can look forward, so she exists from day to day, evading reality by withdrawing into herself.20

Amanda is "a little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place",21 says Williams in the Production Notes of The Glass Menagerie in order to emphasize the fact of her loneliness. She has been lonely since the day she married a telephone man who hardly cared for her emotional needs and has now deserted her. Standing amid the debris of her broken dreams, she takes out her feeling of dissatisfaction upon her son, Tom, whom she drives away with her endless nagging. She is left with Laura whose withdrawal from life makes any communication with her impossible. As a result, Amanda lives vitally in her own world. Removed from the world around her, she preoccupies herself with her reminiscences of a happy life on the plantation. Amanda, thus, is less lonely than Laura because she can project the past in the present and make it a little more tolerable.

A Streetcar Named Desire, like The Glass Menagerie, dramatizes the psychic isolation of an individual. The loneliness of its heroine, Blanche, emanates from a number of factors mainly social and hereditary. Her early traumatic experiences have rendered her almost unfit for reality. She has lost the family plantation of Belle Reve; she has been dismissed from
her job as a school teacher; she has been made to flee her home-town because of her tainted reputation, and finally her marriage at a young age ended disastrously because her husband committed suicide when she learnt that he was a homosexual. Destitute and forlorn, she pleads with Stella for warmth and human compassion: "I'm not going to put up at a hotel. I want to be near you, get to be with somebody, I can't be alone! Because—as you must have noticed—I'm not very well." Later, she explains her loneliness to Mitch, in whom she finds a sympathetic companion. She tells him how, when she married at the age of sixteen, she made the discovery of love: "All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been held in shadow, that's how it struck the world for me," but with the death of her husband "the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this — kitchen-candle." Her heart lights up with hope when she finds that Mitch needs her, but this hope fades out fast because Mitch does not find her "clean enough to bring in the house with my mother." Instead, he insults her and, tearing the coloured lamp-shade off the electric bulb, he cruelly holds it into her haggard face to make her conscious of her fading looks.

Blinche's fate bears a striking resemblance to that of Laura in that she is also filled with hope and assurance when a young man comes into her life and her dark world is
lighted and, like Laura, she is led into believing that she has been saved. But, as in the case of Laura, this momentary and evanescent hope only makes her isolation more devastating and heart-rending.

Williams has highlighted Blanche's loneliness by creating in Stella her foil, who, having rejected and forgotten the tradition of her past, has adjusted herself to her life with Stanley. Both Stella and Stanley are enjoying their life contentedly and their harmony only aggravates Blanche's sense of psychological isolation.

The feeling of loneliness and failure to communicate with a hero is one which tortures many other 'illumined' women. For instance, she feels lonely in her house with a demented mother, who has regressed to a state of petulant childhood, and a puritanical father, who is overly critical of her literary and artistic interests in which she finds consolation from her otherwise dreary existence. Her psychological seclusion is complete when she finds John Buchanan, whom she has loved crazily, marry another girl. Cassandra Whiteside (Carol Cutrera in Orpheus Descending) is lonely because she has been socially ostracized for her "lewd vagrancy". Alexandra del Lago, Mrs. Karen Stein, and Flora Ulford after the loss of creative activity and acclaim they won as stage/colic stars are so appallingly lonely that they are desperately in need of compassion and companionship. Only a few women, the like of Stella and Serafini, who are gifted with resiliences, can easily adjust to reality and escape devastating loneliness.
Sexual repression or rejection of life is another significant cause of frustration of Williams' women. "That ins no Mr. Lawrence" whose books Amanda could not tolerate is the writer whom Tennessee Williams most admires; through him, he has apparently absorbed the Freudian concept of sex as the "primal life urge" and the repression of it as a distortion for the individual or society," says David H. Rieves. The impact of the Lawrentian point of view is evident in the Preface to the play about the life of J.R. Lawrence, *Lose in Place*, *Cried the Phoenix*, where he says that Lawrence felt the mystery and power of sex as the primal life urge and was a life-long adversary of those who wanted to keep the subject locked away in the cellars of prudery.

Through portraying the frustration of his women on account of sexual repression, Williams seems to be castigating the values and standards of the Old South which was predominantly Victorian in outlook. In the Victorian South, according to Robert Emmett Jones, "Woman was the pure, pedestalized goddess worshipped from afar by the impure and animalistic man whose saviour she was supposed to be.... Good women were supposedly sexless; they were not supposed to think about, much less enjoy, the act of procreation." The Southern women, thus, became victims of this code and tried to live in accordance with the expectations of the society. They were obliged to suppress their carnal desires though, in fact, they were strongly passionate. An early example of such a girl appears in Miss Collins, the heroine of the one-act play, "Portrait of a Madonna"
whose life has been circumscribed by her mother's rigid standards and by those of the Church. After her mother's death, she becomes a recluse and confines herself to her room. The same could have been the fate of Matilda of You Touched Me! and Serafina Delle Rose of The Rose Tattoo but for the timely intervention of he-men who awaken in them the primal urge and restore them to health and life. Matilda, sexually repressed and dominated by an over-solicitous aunt who is determined to keep her a semi-recluse, is saved by Hadrian from her negative chastity; the vigorous Serafina, who rejects life after the death of her husband and leads a sterile existence, is saved by Alvaro Mangiacavallo, who restores her to life through sexuality.

Williams has effectively dramatised the conflict between physical desire and the repressive ideals of the puritanical tradition in the character of Alma Winemiller of Summer and Smoke. The parish environment and the prim code to which she conforms, rather tenaciously, make her sexually repressed. With her mother in a state of infantilism, she has to assume the responsibilities of a lady at her father's rectory. Her minister father is so excessively puritanical that he objects even to her singing. To her, as to every other lady of the Old South, any talk about the gratification of physical desires is both degrading and disgusting. She extols the spiritual side of life and so when John needs physical union as a relief from his loneliness, she nearly rebukes him, "There are some women who turn a possibly beautiful thing into something no better than coupling of beasts, but love is what you make it...."
Some people bring just their bodies. But there are some women, John, who can bring their hearts to it also—who can bring their souls to it."29 But she is emotionally immature and, as Williams says in an early stage direction, "her true nature is still hidden from her."30 Unmanned her self-denying puritanical exterior lurks the spirit of a strongly passionate, love-starved girl. Then she realizes her true self, she rushes to John and virtually throws herself at him. "The other girl who said 'no' does not exist any more, she died last summer—suffocated in smoke from something on fire inside her."30 But, by then, it is too late. John, given to a life of gay indulgence and knowing no inhibitions, abandons her and marries a far more pliant girl who would provide him, less mentally-exhausting sexual outlet. Alma's regressive puritanism leaves her utterly frustrated; she is condemned to be tormented by the physical urges she had turned away from.

The loss of family plantation apart, Blanche's destruction is also precipitated by the unfulfillment of her physical desires. She had married a delicate youth but soon discovered that he was a homosexual and sexually deficient to gratify her physical needs. When the truth about his being an invert was revealed, he committed suicide, leaving Blanche to fend for herself in life. Later, while putting up with Stella and Stanley, she is overwhelmed by her sexual urges. Acting as a lady of refinement, she cannot but see her unmistakable abhorrence for the sensual attachment of her sister and brother—
in-law, though unconsciously she feels attracted to Stanley, a typical Laurentian virile man, about whom Williams says: "Since earliest manhood the centre of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dejectedly, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens." Blanche even flirts with him; she says him to do the buttons of her blouse and then playfully sprays him with her atomizer. Her pride as a belle of the Old South, however, would not let her compromise for a sexual relationship with a man whom she considers an age, a "survivor of the Stone Age". The conflict between her emotions and reproductive ideals keeps her in sexual anxiety, which she tries in vain to keep under control by hot baths.

Depression is also the cause of frustration at Lady Torrace or Orpheus ascending on Mrs. Karen Stone of the novel The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. Both had married men who were mere nonentities and who could not fulfill their function as husbands. Mrs. Stone had deliberately married an impotent Mr. St. J in order to avoid both copulation and motherhood. Instead of a strong man who could satisfy her sexual needs, Mrs. Stone wanted an adult child. Williams writes:

If one night, nearly twenty-five years ago, he had not broken down and wept on her breast like a baby, and in this way transferred his position from that of unsuccessful master to that of pathetic dependent, the marriage would have cracked up... Through his inadequacy Mr. Stone had allowed them both to discover what both really wanted, an adult child and he a loving and adorable mother.
But after the death of her husband, the physical urges which she had consciously shunned, torment her and she suffers the humiliation of buying sex from gigolos. Lady Torrance, married to Jane, who is sick with cancer, is an emotionally starved woman. Unlike Mrs. Stone, she did not marry Jane of her own choice: the marriage was imposed upon her after she had lost her in her. Her husband is a personification of death. She describes her plight to Val, "Ask me how it felt to be coupled with death up there, and I can tell you. My skin crawled when he touched me. But I endured it."33

In Williams' world, repression of sexual urges, equated to rejection of life, is a serious crime which invites severe punishment. His females who reject sexuality, like her on account of forced remoteness or due to puritanical ideals or for any other reason, always suffer frustration. The desire, which they think they have mastered successfully, surfaces with a greater force and causes havoc. Glenn Embrey has made a perceptive observation:

Driven underground for whatever reason, sexual urges grow more powerful and more threatening. The vicious circle in which repression causes a strengthening of the desire repressed, which in turn causes renewed effort to repress, can end only disastrously when desire breaks through its restraints. By this time it has grown so powerful that it is virtually uncontrollable and bastis away the character's former life.34

This precisely is the pattern that appears in the lives of Alma, Blanche, and Mrs. Stone. Their repressed sexuality ultimately makes them suffer the ignominy of offering their bodies indiscriminately to strangers.
"Whether or not we admit it to ourselves, we are all haunted by a truly awful sense of impotence,"\(^{35}\) writes Williams in his preface to *The Rose Tattoo.* The sense of impotence is one that has chased Williams' men and women from the beginning. Time is the real villain, an unstoppable opponent. Tennessee says in *Sweet Bird of Youth,* "It goes tick-tick, it's quieter than your heartbeat, but it's slow dynamite, a slow explosion, blasting the world we live in to turned-out shoes... Time—who could beat it, who could defeat it ever?"\(^{36}\) Williams' characters are ranged not only against the evil forces of a malignant universe but against this enemy time, too. Time has wrought havoc in the lives of many of his heroines. It has destroyed the old South. It has annihilated the higher moral values which lent meaning to life. Its inevitable curse has brought loss of strength, loss of youth, and loss of beauty in its train. "The wellworn dial of the clock is less, less, less,"\(^{37}\) Lonne is a typical example of the evening years. She realizes that her youth is past and her looks are waning. She pretties herself up with furs and diamonds to retain some of her old charm. She permits herself to be seen only by shaded artificial light in a desperate effort to conceal the ravages that time has wrought. Similarly, time has turned Alexandra del Lago, a degrading beauty, from a film star to a character artist. She is filled with fear when she watches her close-ups at the premiere of her film and comes to the sad conclusion that her legend depended upon the appearance of her youth. She flees the theatre and the world. Mrs. Stone is
also haunted by the loss of her youth and relative vitality. Her youth and beauty gone, she retires from stage in frustration.

Apart from the loss of youth, beauty and creativity which time brings, there is also the fear of mortality which troubles Williams' women. This can best be seen in Anna Winters of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, and, like her Teddy of In a Lonely Place and John Trevis of Various Operations, pretends that she is not dying. Haunted by the fear of loss and impotence, Williams' women cannot live properly for the little time that they have.

It is interesting to study only the way the lost and defeated women face their desperate situations. Back dramatists as they are, they can't come to terms with the reality of their hopeless condition and instead try to run away from it. They miserably lack the courage and the will to ameliorate their lot. This attitude radically sets them apart from the characters of the classical tradition. According to Aronson, "Unlike the classical protagonists of flawed but admirable stature, the Williams' protagonists like most heroes of modern drama derive from a more moral context. His challenge is not the summoning of courage to live in the face of absolute uncertainty and loneliness." Instead of gathering courage and standing up to face the reality of their situations, Williams' women try to escape from these through a variety of escape mechanisms which they devise. One of the most common and recurring means of escape which they adopt, and to which Williams himself took recourse quite frequently, is to run away from the world to which they have failed to make any adjustment.
Williams believed that a writer, particularly an American writer, has got to keep moving in quest of a place where he can give expression to what he feels intensely. Most of his tortured women are also constantly on the move in order to give some comfort to their over-wrought minds and nerves. Like Tim of The Human Comedy, they try to find in motion what was lost in space. They are fugitives who are oppressed in continual flight. Like Lady Bertram in Mansfield Park, they would wish to be like the little bird who escapes the earth by never touching it except to die.

A quick glance at Williams' plays will reveal that the tendency to escape in motion has been present in his female protagonists from the first full-length play that he wrote in 1940. In Battle of Angels, Odessa, the earlier version of Carolot in Orpheus Descending, tells Val, "You an' me, we belong to the fugitive kind... We live on motion. Think of it. Y' know, setting out motion, motion, mile after mile, keeping up with the wind, or over the wind."

Carol is dead crazy and is always racing about in her car across the country. Towards the end of the play, when the sheriff comes in to stop her, she says, "The fugitive kind can always follow their kind." Blanche is another case in point who is running in search of peace. "I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again." Forced to flee her home-town, she arrives at Miss Julie's in search of shelter, but ironically what she gave there is not compassion but blows as nasty as, if not as stier than, the ones she had received before. Understanding her position as an intruder
and an unwanted guest, she says, "I won't stay long! I won't, I promise." She is presented with a one-way ticket to Laurel as a birthday gift and warned to prepare herself for the journey. But her violation by Stanley puts an end to her running and precipitates her destruction.

Alexandine Delage, the faded film star, is on the run, trying to forget that she has lost her youth in physical decay. She begins her journey at Fint Cloud to escape horror and human cruelty. She tells Chance, "After failure comes flight; nothing can come after failure but flight." Chey-lyn

Hamill does not move physically from one place to another, yet symbolically she is trying to reach for something beyond the earth. She goes the inside cathedral is the symbol of questing man: "everything reaches up... everything wants to be aspiring for something out of the reach of stone... To me—well, that is the secret, the principle look of existence—the everlasting struggle and aspiration for more than our human limits have placed in our reach." Mrs. Stone, after leaving stage, travels to Rome to finish the vacuum and emptiness of her heart. Hannah Selke, though not frustrated in the sense Blanche, Alexina, Mrs. Stone, and others are, does feel trapped and hemmed in by her circumstances, and like those women, she takes to extensive travelling, wheeling her grandfather from place to place. While she is at Hamill's hotel, she says, "nobody would take us in town and if we don't get in here, I would have to wheel him back down through the rain forest, and then what, then where?" However, Williams
does not see redemption or salvation for those agonised female protagonists in militancy. Their search for peace must continue until death or destruction puts an end to it.

Another common mode of escape from the darkness of despair is to retreat to a world of dreams and fantasy. Some of Williams' frustrated women try to relive in dreams a sweet state that does not exist any more. In Williams' world, the past is a great force that stubbornly affects the lives of his characters; it casts a shadow on their present and future. In an effort to recover a lost past, they are continually preoccupied with reminiscences. Their constant references to the past, which are so inescapable for the indignities of the present, are largely fictional. Quite often their nostaligic memories of the past are related to the antebellum aristocratic South when the great values of decorum and gentility were cherished. Alexandra del Lago remembers the days of her happy and rarefree girlhood when, as a charming belle, she enjoyed the attentions of the gentlemen callers. She tells her children, "my callers were gentlemen-all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta —planters and sons of planters." In the same way, Blanche remembers the beautiful dream of the family plantation which has been lost forever. Alexandra del Lago looks back nostalgically at the freedom and acclaim she enjoyed as a movie star. She says that as a talented actress "out of the passion and torment of my existence I have created a thing that I can unveil, a sculpture, almost heroic, that I can unveil."
Lacy Torrance tries to re-establish in the confectionery of the departmental store her father's wine garden where she spent the glorious days of her youth with a lover.

Some of Williams' disturbed women create a world of fantasy in order to forget the heart-ache and loneliness of their existence. Laura, for instance, spends most of her time with old phonograph records and fragile glass figurines until she herself is like a piece of her own glass collection. Blanche has her dependence on cheap perfumes and bath salts which are a means of escape for her from her desperate situation. Williams' romantic heroines, having failed to find the ideal world in which they would like to live, are forced to live in a world of their own making. It is a world of delusions which are their pathetic defences against the harsh realities of the present. Their delusions make their intolerable lives a little more tolerable. Williams seems to sympathize with these women manufacturing illusions because it pains him to see that the world is so devoid of tenderness and understanding.

In an early one-act play "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion", Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore, a prostitute by profession, is mocked at by the landlady for her pretensions to owning a Brazilian rubber plantation. A writer, nearly as impoverished as Mrs. Moore, comes to her rescue and supports her right to compensate for the deficiencies of reality "by the exercise of a little God-given imagination." He says, "There are no lies but the lies that are stuffed in the mouth by the hard-knuckled hand of need."
Self-deluded women have appeared in Williams' plays since the beginning of his career as a playwright. In the early one-acter, "Portrait of a Madonna" Miss Collins is lost in a world of delusions. Sexually obsessed because of excessive puritanism, she imagines herself being violated by a former admirer and goes to the extent of believing that she is expecting a child. However, two classical examples of self-deluded women are Amanda and Blanche. Amanda, though strong and heroic at moments, is essentially a dreamer, a pathetic character, living in the world of illusions. She must, of necessity, weave a cocoon of delusions because if she accepted the reality of the alley apartment with its dreariness and absence of hope, she would perish. She deludes herself with her conquests as a young Southern belle to such an extent that very often she loses touch with reality completely. Her recurring references to her gentleman callers are an exaggeration typical of her illusions. As she deludes herself with her charms as a belle, she deludes herself into believing that her children are exceptional and full of natural endowments though the fact is that one of them is a cynical sort of little consequence, writing poems on the lids of shoeboxes at the warehouse where he works, and the other is a morbidly shy girl, unfit for any situation in life. Just as she ignores reality, she refuses to accept Laura's physical defect:

LAURA: I'm crippled!

AMANDA: Nonsense! Laura, I've told you never, never to use that word. Why, you're not crippled, you just have a little defect—hardly noticeable, even!
A little later in the play, when Tom refers to Laura's deformity, she comes down heavily upon him:

**TOM:** Laura seems all those things to you and me because she's ours and we love her. We don't even notice she's crippled any more.

**AMANDA:** Don't say crippled! You know that I never allow that word to be used.50

...colusions are essentially a sort of Amanda's life. These keep the glimmer of hope aglow in her otherwise miserable and desolate existence.

In the same way, Blanche has grown so sick of reality that she has completely withdrawn into a world of illusions. She tells Mitch, "I don't want realism....I'll tell you what I want. Magic! Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth. I tell what ought be truth."51 David Sives says, "People who can't face reality try to pretty it up with coloured shades of illusion."52 And this is what exactly Blanche does. She covers the electric bulb with a coloured paper lantern in order to avoid its blinding naked light. She prefers to see the world with a candle light which would obscure at least some of its ugliness. The sanctuary she hopes to find at Stella and Stanley's house proves illusory. As a Southerly girl, she believes that the security and protection she is looking for must ultimately come from a gallant gentleman. She fondly hopes that Mitch, a friend of Stanley, wants to marry her, but before long she is disillusioned. Blanche, then, masquerades behind the facade of another illusion, viz., that a wealthy gentleman from Florida would divorce his wife to marry her.
She is so much obsessed with the thought of this mythical person that she starts packing in the hope of going on a cruise with him. Finally, when all her hopes are destroyed, she escapes to a psychotic world of insanity, utterly unable to distinguish between illusion and reality.

Another path of escape left open to Williams' frustrated women is indulgence in sex. No doubt, a few heroines like Lady Torrance, Serafina, and Miss Collins express their joy at the expectation of new life through their fruitfulness, but a majority of them regard sex as a sort of distraction or at best an attempt at human contact and a means to seek protection. Marguerite Gautier in *Camino Real* underscores the motive of human love-affairs to Jacques, "We stretch our hands to each other in the dark that we can't escape from— we huddle together for some dim communal comfort."53

Blanche turns promiscuous after the death of her husband and offers her body to strangers for that same "communal comfort." She tells Mitch, "Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Allin— intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with.... I think it was panic that ... drove me from one to another, hunting for protection— here and there, in the most— unlikely places— even, at last, in a seventeen-year-old boy."54 Women, such as Blanche, also think that it is through physical desire and its consummation that they can hope to establish their identity and belong to someone. To them the opposite of death is desire and so,
if they want to achieve life and escape death, they must embrace desire. Blanche says:

"I never was hard or self-sufficient. Soft people have got to court the favour of hard ones, Stella. Have got to be seductive — put on soft colours and glow — make a little temporary magic just in order to pay for one night's shelter! ... I've run for protection, Stella, from under one leaky roof to another leaky roof — because it was storm — all storm, and I was — caught in the centre. People don't see you — MAN don't — don't even admit your existence unless, they are making love to you. And you've got to have your existence admitted by someone, if you've going to have someone's protection. And so the soft people have got to — shimmer and glow."

Similarly the supremely sensual Carol Cutrere seeks sex feverishly to escape her loneliness though she finds the act of love-making unbearably painful:

VAL: Little girl, you're transparent, I can see the veins in you. A man's weight on you would break you like a bundle of sticks....

CAROL: .... Isn't it funny! You've hit on the truth about me. The act of love-making is almost unbearably painful, and yet, of course, I do bear it, because to be not alone, even for a few moments, is worth the pain and the danger. It's dangerous for me because I'm not built for child-bearing."

Blanche, Carol and the like take recourse to sex to seek a temporary shelter, or momentary companionship, because, as Erich Fromm points out, "after the (sexual) orgiastic experience, men can go on for a time without suffering too much from his separateness." It is, however, the fear of mortality and the loss of youth and creative activity (as mentioned before) that pushes some troubled women to sexual life. To Alexandra
del Lago, as well as Flora Gorforth, indulgence in sex is a distraction, a way to forget unpleasant things which they don’t want to remember. Mrs. Stone’s head-long plunge into sexuality with Roman gigolos is a desperate attempt to arrest the drift of time. A quick survey of Williams’ early plays, written before The Night of the Iguana, reveals that all his heroines, with the exception of Amanda and Laura, seek escape through animalistic sexuality. It is perhaps because Amanda was domesticated at the right age and sired two children in a fruitful marriage and did not have to undergo the traumatic experiences of the other women. Laura, on the other hand, is too sensitive and withdrawn to take on a full emotional relationship or to pursue a course similar to that of Blanche and Alma.

Ironically, however, through consummation of their physical desires, these women do not achieve life as they presume they would. Through sex they are degraded rather than exalted. Blanche’s promiscuity lands her in a state asylum and Lady Torrance has to pay the price with her life for her sexual transgression; Alma becomes a neurasthenic and then a town character, having tawdry affairs with strangers. Numerous others are the examples of such women as are destroyed through their sexuality. Their fate is not different from Williams’ men like Chance, Or, Shannon, etc., whose indulgence in sex precipitates their doom. Sex is a satisfactory answer only to Williams’ non-fugitives — men and women of the earth — like
Stanley, Stella and Serafina—who can give themselves over to it whole-heartedly. To them sex is everything—the be-all and end-all of life. Chicken, in *Kingdom of Earth* speaks for them, "There's nothing in the world, in this whole kingdom of earth, that can compare with one thing, and that one thing is what's able to happen between a man and a woman, just that thing, nothing more, is perfect. The rest is crap, all of the rest is almost nothing but crap.... That's how I look at it, that's how I see it now, in this kingdom of earth."\(^{58}\) But Williams' exceptional women are not of the earth; they are ethereal beings, seeking to transcend the corruptions of the earth which, of course, is not possible through self-indulgence.

To sum up, Tennessee Williams has been most effective in the portrayal of frustrated women in his works of psychic intensity. Whether it is on account of the replacement of higher moral and spiritual values by commercial interests or because of their inability to face reality and come to terms with their environment, these women are doomed to frustration. Their efforts at seeking human compassion and sympathy are thwarted by the impregnable wall which separates them from society, from their fellowmen. Frustration is their lot the moment they gain consciousness of their anomalous position on the earth. Lacking the spirit of optimism, Williams' women try to escape their situations. They take recourse to motion, fantasy, sex, etc. to forget the anguish of their troubled existence. But try as they will, their efforts to find a happy escape are destined to meet with failure. If they find anything, it is death, despair, and insanity.
Notes


6. Ibid., p. 216.


11. Donahue, p. 34.


27. Jones, p. 213.


41. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 171.
42. Ibid., p. 170.
43. *Sweet Bird of Youth*, p. 93.
44. *Summer and Smoke*, p. 189.
49. *The Glass Menagerie*, pp. 246-47
50. Ibid., p. 271.
55. Ibid., p. 169.