Chapter III

Escape and Aggression

Escape and aggression in various forms appear to be one of the dominant strategies adopted by a number of Walker's characters to confront different kinds of pressures in their life. This method of coping with the challenges of life is characterised by certain distinct features manifesting themselves in varying forms and degrees in the behavioural patterns of men and women in Walker's world of fiction. Though there is wide range of characters representing this approach, they tend to form a broad category because of some similarities in the way they see and respond to life.

This approach of facing life is adopted mainly by those of Walker's characters who seem to possess a greater degree of intelligence, awareness and sensitivity than those who try to go through life by making themselves rather numb to its pains. They appear, therefore, to develop some hopes and expectations in their life. They are capable of some dreams and desires for a better deal from their society. But their expectations and ambitions for a better future are very often frustrated by the harsh realities of their world which they fail to comprehend fully and realistically. These failures confront them with the situations of crisis making demands
on their moral, emotional and mental resources. But all of these characters are found wanting in their abilities to withstand the pressures of their failures.

This leads them to adopt an attitude of evasion and escape from the challenges and responsibilities in their life. They often turn either to sex or to alcohol to forget the disappointments and dullness in their life. Some of them also display a marked tendency of using aggression, wherever they can, to compensate for their failure in realizing their aims and ambitions.

Their "exposure to aversive events...generates negative affect (unpleasant feelings of annoyance, irritation, and anger). These reactions, in turn, automatically activate tendencies toward both aggression and flight."¹ Various external conditions resulting in their frustration and loss of face "serve to arouse a strong motive to engage in harm producing behaviour."² This aggressive behaviour is the manifestation of "the instinct which is" according to Freud, "initially aimed at self-destruction but is soon redirected outward, toward others."³ This turns most of these characters into forces of disruption and destruction in one way or the other.

Treatment of this coping strategy, represented by a number of Walker's male and female characters, possessing some
or all of its salient features, has evoked tremendous interest and debate among her readers. Most of her critics, however, have examined these characters either from a feminist or black male's chauvinistic point of view. For example, critics like Pinckney, Prescott accuse Walker of presenting the black males as negative characters. They charge her with a bias against the black men and thus abusing and degrading black male characters. Pinckney in his review of *The Color Purple* states that "the Black men are seen at a distance – that is, entirely from the point of view of the women." Pinckney further argues that Walker has presented the black men as rude and degrading suggesting that "Walker's cards are always stacked against them (Black men)."

Certainly, Walker does present a negative portrayal of the black male character to a certain extent. However, Pinckney seems to have failed in appreciating the artist's purpose in portraying characters like Harpo and Albert. Carried away by his antipathy to feminism, Pinckney is unable to recognise that Walker has presented these male characters with a deep insight into human psyche and understanding of the cause and nature of evil, providing a humanistic perspective which is free from gender bias. Moreover, the critic has failed to take cognizance of those of Walker's female characters who tend to knuckle under pressure and thus indulge
often in acts of self-destruction. Walker's criticism, implicit in her portrayal of their fall and degradation, escapes Pinckney's attention. Preoccupied as he is with only the black male characters, he ignores Walker's approach as an artist to the attitudes of escape and aggression, adopted both by men and women in various life situations.

Similarly, Walker's female critics, too, have failed to examine in depth Walker's approach to all the characters, male and female, who try to cope with challenges of life broadly through the strategy of escape and aggression. They are primarily interested in how the black male characters treat and blame the black women characters for various disasters that occur in her novels and short stories. Paula Giddings, for instance, believes that "relationships that occur between men and women were due to the black male character's behaviour." However, Walker is not so simple a writer as to show that all negative relationships are caused by men alone. She shows how women also play their part and are responsible for their sufferings and degradation. For example, it is not only Grange in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* who is responsible for the degradation of his wife, Margaret, it is also her own lack of proper judgement, grace and courage under pressure that leads her to promiscuity and even suicide.

The character of Margaret provides the reader a clear
idea of how Walker views critically the attitude of escape from aversive conditions of life. Though the novel is mainly a story of Grange Copeland and his son Brownfield, the figures of Margaret and Mem also occupy a place of great importance in the development of the novel and in unfolding the writer's vision of life. Certainly, it is through the relationships of these two women with their men that Walker brings the issue of gender discrimination and conflict into a sharp focus. But she goes further and explores through the personalities and behavioural patterns of Margaret and Mem how in different ways these women try to cope with the sexist oppression in their society. It is their approach to the forces of their degradation and dispossession that determines their place not only in the scheme of the novel but also in the reader's assessment of these characters. If the reader tends to develop a bond of sympathy and admiration for Mem, who grows gradually into a heroic figure in the drama of her tragedy, Margaret gradually looses the reader's sympathy and ends up as a pathetic and pitiable figure. But the critics, who have not cared much to examine Walker's treatment of the different coping strategies adopted by her characters, have failed to appreciate the vital difference between Margaret and Mem, so necessary for a proper and balanced assessment of the mind of the artist. For example, even a perceptive critic like Barbara Christian fails to distinguish
between Margaret and Mem when she states that "neither Margaret nor Mem are emotionally prepared to understand, far less cope with, their reality" because "they believe in the definition of woman dictated by society." Because of her preoccupation with the thesis of Walker's depiction of women struggling for a life of wholeness in a male dominated society, Barbara Christian succeeds in bringing the victimization of Margaret and Mem into a central focus. But she does not go beyond a discussion of the predicament of these women and fails to explain the vital points of difference between the ways Margaret and Mem respond to their societal pressures. It is important to note how Mem grows into a figure of courage, determination and self-reliance, whereas Margaret becomes weaker and loses control over self and ultimately over her life itself.

Margaret's life shows a steady pattern of decay and decline. She appears in the novel as the wife of Grange Copeland, sweet and virginal. One of her sisters is in the North, and Margaret, too, has been contemplating the possibilities of going North and improving the fortunes of her family. This surely suggests that she is conscious of the opportunities of the betterment of the lot of her family but she does not leave her husband behind to take this plunge alone. In fact, her fidelity to Grange and her efforts to build a happy life with him reveal her valuable qualities as a woman. She
displays remarkable ability to understand Grange's frustrations and inner tensions. As a wife, she tries to mitigate his plight through her caring attention. It is to take out some of the venom of frustration that "she didn't do or say any thing that could further deepen Grange's crisis"(TLGC:6). Brownfield reflects, "She didn't have a thing to say that did not in some way show her submission to his father"(TLGC:6). He thinks, "his mother agreed with his father whenever possible"(TLGC:6). Her submission to Grange and her efforts to agree with him clearly indicates not only her endurance and a sense of sacrifice, but also her resolve to create a happy life, as far as possible, with her husband. She even worked "all day pulling baits for ready money," coming home clean and cook, trying to maintain a home for a husband and son (TLGC:7). But Margaret has to contend with situations of oppression and debasement not only from without but from within her own family also. Her strength, thus, proves to be too limited to help her confront the heavy odds in her life with dignity and integrity intact.

By the time Brownfield is fifteen, Margaret has been regularly trying to change her world into something it can never be. She finds the poverty and injustice of the sharecropping system too much for her to cope with. Grange's frustration caused by his failures in the racist and exploitative economic system continues to subvert all her attempts
to build a happy home. The way she is emotionally deserted and humiliated by Grange who flaunts his affairs with Josie becomes unbearable to Margaret. In the face of these pressures, Margaret ultimately runs out of resources of her inner strength. Unable to withstand the pressures of her debasing circumstances, she gets broken and loses control over the course of her life.

Accustomed to receiving nothing from Grange, who deserts her both emotionally and physically, she seeks escape in the arms of strangers. She, thus, tries to negate the reality of her painful existence by attempting to realize the dream of love through her sexual encounters with "fellow bait-pullers and church members" (TLGC:27). On weekends, after having struggled to look after her family, she becomes "a huntress of soft touches, gentle voices and sex without the arguments over the constant and compelling pressures of everyday life" (TLGC:27). She turns herself a commodity for Shipley, and even his driver Jhonny Johnson use her body for his carnal pleasures. All she gets from this indulgence in sex with a number of men is a temporary feeling of relief from the boredom and pain of her daily life.

Walker's aversion to this attitude of escape from the realities of one's conditions is evident when she provides the reader an insight into a state of hollowness in Margaret's
life. Her attempts to find answers to her problems in promiscuity fail utterly to give her a sense of fulfilment and strength. On the contrary, Margaret sinks deeper into frustration and depression. A sense of guilt seems to haunt her, and even her desperate efforts of defiance fail to conceal her inner weakness and void. She feels restless and miserable, unable to face her own image as a degraded woman. It is this that leads her ultimately to an act of self destruction. Star, her son born of her illegitimate sexual relations, acts as a constant reminder to her of her guilt. He is two years old but can neither walk nor speak, as if struck by the sins of his mother. Unable to muster up sufficient courage, necessary to overcome this feeling of guilt, Margaret commits an act of aggression against self and her child. She embraces death as the only means of escape from life. She poisons her son as well as herself and dies as a pathetic and lonely figure: "She was curled up in a lonely sort of way, away from her child, as if she had spent the last moments on her knees" (TLGC:29).

This depiction of Margaret's course of life, characterised by a steady process of decay and degeneration, is indicative of the writer's total rejection of the methods of escape. She seems to attribute the tendencies of escape to a lack of inner strength and self-esteem in her characters. Walker, an artist of life, treats the escapists like Margaret with human understanding and tender insight into their plight, but does
not present them as objects of sympathy and admiration. Such characters in her fiction serve to reveal the writer's complete rejection of the escapist attitude. This underlines her celebration of the qualities of courage, endurance and struggle for the ideals of integrity and wholeness in life.

It is a noticeable feature of Walker as a novelist that her vindication of these values is not made through direct moral statements. She, in fact, presents them through the incisive portrayals of her characters, locked in struggles against a hostile environment. Though the subtle presence of the author is often felt by the readers, she does not intrude upon their aesthetic response. She seems to take the readers with her into the life and processes of thoughts and feelings of her men and women, enabling them to have a full, authentic and critical view of the real nature of the motives and actions of her characters. She does it so artistically that both the strengths and weaknesses of these men and women appear as natural components of their portrayals.

It is this ability of Walker to present the image of life that makes some of her characters so interesting. It is not rare for Walker's reader to find her characters ambiguous and complex, especially in the case of those men and women who are composites of good and evil, strengths and weaknesses. She depicts both the sides of their life so power-
fully that a casual reader sometimes fails to penetrate to the inner realities beneath what appears on the surface of their existence.

This failure of some of her readers leads them to make casual and imbalanced assessment of Walker's characters as well as her vision of human values. For example, she regards the qualities of self-reliance and freedom as essential for a life of wholeness. But if these are not rooted in a sense of self-respect, human dignity and integrity, they, for Walker, are nothing but a facade or mere illusion. It is the nature of motives, intentions and the basic impulses behind an action that in Walker's fiction seems to determine the human quality of her fictional figures. This emphasis on the inner realities brings her characters close to the reader's heart. They tend to display the remarkable complexities and richness as human beings capable of human contradictions and changes.

Josie, in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, is an example of a character who evokes ambiguous and ambivalent response from her reader. There are critics who even tend to see her as an example of a strong and rebellious woman. Elliot Butlar-Evans places her in the category of rebellious women in the novels of Morrison and Bambra and asserts that the eruption of her feminine desire makes "Josie triumph over her social situation. She is alternately lover to both Grange
and Brownfield, and is totally in control of her life. Though Evans admits that Josie has been presented in the narrative as a woman possessing both desirable and undesirable qualities, his attribution of the quality of self-control to Josie suggests the critics' inability to pierce through the mask of self-control to reach her inner weaknesses. A careful reading of the novel reveals that she is abjectly dependent on men like Grange and Brownfield for love and self-assurance. This destroys her sense of self-respect and dignity as a woman, reducing her to the level of a pathetic figure. Her whole story in the novel, in fact, shows a pattern of her decline and loss of her grip over life.

The way Josie conducts herself in the face of pressures of her conditions, shows that she is unable to put heroic resistance to the dehumanizing forces in her society. She proves utterly deficient in inner strength which is necessary to face pressures with grace. On the contrary, she chooses the easier course by adopting the life of a fallen woman. This is clearly indicative of her tendency to escape from challenges in life to easy options even if it involves a loss of her self-respect and dignity as a woman. Even if her life as a whore is seen as a protest against the patriarchal authority and hypocrisy in society, a critical examination of its impact on her inner real self reveals that it is the protest of a weakling seeking escape in the blind alley of pros-
titution. This is evident from the fact that her life in Dew Drop Inn leads her to a deeper feeling of frustration and despair. It only compounds her miseries and fills her with a sense of remorse and guilt. Her sense of integrity and self-esteem are the first casualties and she ultimately ends up as a broken and rejected woman.

Josie's flight from a life of responsibilities and challenges has been presented by Walker with a remarkable understanding of the complexities of human psyche. The reader finds that Josie's tendency of flying from the responsibility of upholding her integrity manifests itself, broadly speaking, in two important ways. Her recourse to the life of a fallen woman is a simpler and more easily perceptible method of evading challenges. It does not call upon her to struggle and make sacrifices like a heroic figure to keep herself intact. A subtler and more complex mode of escape seems to be operative when one analyses her behaviour when she asserts herself and draws a sadistic pleasure by hurting the ego of her male customers. This mask of a self-reliant woman, mocking at the virility of old men, subtly hides the agony of a defeated woman. Her appearance as a confident and triumphant woman on such occasions is, in fact, nothing but an attempt to conceal her inner void and loss of her self-control and dignity. This complex pattern reveals itself clearly to us once we analyse her response to different situations
Walker places Josie, like most of her other women, in degrading and dispossessing environment of a patriarchal society. Crisis in her life is also generated by the definition of woman by man and the prescription of her role by a male-dominated society. She is supposed to be pure and virginal as a girl and obedient and docile as a daughter in a society where black women are considered no more than mere repositories for male ego and lust. Josie is exploited sexually by the friends of her father. There are some suggestions in the novel underlining the possibility of her own father being one of the victimizers of Josie, forcing her down on the road to a sinful life. The crisis in her life begins with her pregnancy and her subsequent rejection by her authoritarian father who throws her out of family. Though as a black girl she has every fear that she may not be accepted back in the family, however hard she may try, Josie does all she can to please her father and "be again a child, be again sixteen" (*TLGC*:55). She even buys gifts for him with her hard-earned money and tries to humour him by attending all his guests at his birthday party. But the unrelenting father refuses to pardon his daughter for, what he regards as sin. None in the gathering, which probably includes the lover, moves to help her even when she is unable to support her body and falls on the ground, unconscious. With her
"knees turned out", and "arms outstretched", she looks like a "spider, deformed and grotesque beneath the panicked stares of the gathered men" (TLGC:57). Josie, thus, discarded from her family, finds herself utterly alone in her struggle for survival. She is cut off from every source of strength and support so necessary for a girl of her age. Her mother is too helpless a spectator to her misery, her father too cruel and callous and all the other members of her community too devoid of courage and compassion to extend to Josie any support – physical, emotional or moral. It is this situation of crisis which Josie fails to cope with courage and dignity. On the contrary, she knuckles under pressure and chooses to support herself and her daughter by running a juke-point and trading her body.

This escape from a life of challenges into an easy life of a whore pushes her deeper and deeper into an abyss of degradation and frustration. She allows herself to be used by men of every age just for the sake of money. She loses in the process every vestige of self-respect and integrity. She acts as a whore to Grange and becomes instrumental in deepening the wedge between Grange and Margaret. She even tempts Brownfield and, thus, feeds the lust of both father and the son. Brownfield found her "a devouring cat, voracious and sly, wanting to eat him up. swallow him down alive" (TLGC:50). The "thoughts of moving Northward melted
from him" under the influence of her seductive and "incredible softness"(TLGC:50). Her effect on Brownfield, thus, is disruptive and distractive as she prevents him from going North.

Her relationship with her daughter too becomes tainted by the prostitute in Josie. She vies with her for customers and they even exchange obscene words in the street as competitors for men. The whore in her seems to stifle her motherly impulse of providing tender care and healthy nourishment to her daughter. She makes no effort to shape her daughter into a fine, strong and righteous lady. The fact that Lorene is a female only in "odor and breasts"(TLGC:48) is symptomatic of the sickness that has passed from mother to the daughter.

Her own life in Dew Drop Inn becomes an interminable and pathetic tale of degradation and debasement. Neither sex nor money can give her any sense of fulfilment and dignity. Peace and contentment remain utterly alien to Josie. She often feels miserable, suffers fits of depression and often has "violent dreams"(TLGC:51) which she can tell no one. Her relationship with Brownfield fills her only with a feeling of "fear, self condemnation, guilt..."(TLGC:91). For Grange, she is an insatiable cat, a mere object to gratify his lust. Though her life in the brothel gives her economic self-reliance, it shatters completely her sense of self: "She felt she was somehow the biggest curse of her life and that it was her
fate to be an everlasting blunderer into misery" (TLGC: 310).

Josie's character, thus, is an illustration of the futility of flight from a life of struggles and responsibilities. Her escape into the life of a whore can solve none of her problems. The goal of happiness and fulfilment slips further away from her as she tries desperately to attain them by trading her body. Her inability to stand up for the ideals of her dignity and a life of wholeness has a disruptive and pernicious effect on her as well as all those who come into contact with her. Through her degradation and debasement, Walker exposes the dehumanizing possibilities inherent in the attitude of escape from challenges. She, in this way, underlines the necessity for the black woman to resist oppression and exploitation through a life-like portrayal of the character of Josie, dramatizing the subtle complexities of human nature. The reader finds the conflict between Josie and her environment, her search for happiness and her disappointments, her desperate attempts to get hold of life and her loss of control over it so gripping only because the writer has rendered it realistically, mirroring the intricate interplay of different human feelings, emotions, passions and motives.

Walker's ability to understand and render realistically the complexities of human behaviour is mainly due to her holistic perception of the drama of human life. She does not seem to view the external environment and the internal
life of the individual as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, she depicts them as intricately interrelated, acting and interacting upon each other. That is why her characters bring a variety of responses to bear on their situations while remaining fully representative of human nature. Some of the finest examples of this kind are provided by those of her black characters who are pitted against the deeply entrenched system of racial discrimination which thwarts the realization of almost all of their dreams and desires. Those of her men and women who are unable to express their frustration through any act of creativity reveal sometimes a marked tendency to escape into the world of fantasies. They tend to indulge in day-dreaming as a compensation for what they fail to achieve in real life. With the help of imagination, they enter into a world of their dreams and thus try to achieve a fulfilment of their thwarted impulses, wishes and desires. Fantasising is, thus, a strategy used by the unconscious mind of such individuals to cope with the stresses and frustrations in their life. Though the reader can see very often Walker's characters indulging in dreams and reveries, her portrayal of the old woman in "The Welcome Table" provides a memorable illustration of how and why one adopts the method of fantasy as a response to one's thwarting conditions.

The old woman in the story appears as an image of long sufferings of centuries. She has been compared to "poor
gray Georgia earth, beaten by king cotton and the extreme weather. Her elbows were wrinkled and thick...On her face centuries were folded into the circles around one eye, while around the other, etched and mapped as if for print, ages more threatened again to live"(p.82). The whole description suggests that she has been subjected to ruthless oppression, exploitation and dispossession by the people who control the socio-economic system in America. But this interminable tale of sufferings has not destroyed completely all of her human desires for acceptance. The epigraph to the story clearly indicates that she wants to protest against her oppression and be heard and loved by Christ. It is her suppressed anger discrimination, her instinct of defiance against her oppressor and her deep irresistible yearning for being loved and accepted that takes her to the church of the white. But the hatred of the white against the coloured is too strong to be overcome and the old woman is thrown out of the church even before the service starts.

The colour discrimination is a barrier that the old woman cannot transcend in her actual life. She fails to achieve a fulfilment of even the most basic of her human instincts for acceptance. Her repressed desires, however, seek an expression which they ultimately get through her fantasy. Her pent up and frustrated impulses conjure a kind of daydream wherein she seems to achieve a state of fulfilment.
When the old woman is thrown out of the church she feels bewildered and sad. But her urge to pray, to meet Christ and to tell him how they treat her is so strong that she feels transported imaginatively into a world where she suddenly sees "something interesting and delightful coming" (p. 84). She becomes oblivious of the pains of her actual life and begins "to grin, toothlessly, with short giggles of joy, jumping about and slapping her hands on her knees" (p. 85). Soon it becomes clear why she is so happy. She believes that "coming down the highway at a firm though leisurely pace was Jesus" (p. 85). She sees Christ so clearly that "she would have known him, recognized him anywhere" (p. 85). The imaginary becomes so real that "ecstatically she began to wave her arms for fear he would miss seeing her, for he walked looking straight ahead on the shoulder of the highway, and from time to time looking upward at the sky" (p. 85). To follow him, "she bounded down to his side with all the bob and speed of one so old" (p. 85). In this state of fantasy, she tells Christ about how she had been treated and how happy she is on finding him. On they walked without stopping and the old woman exhausts herself to death.

The story is a telling account of the hypocrisy of the white racists who cannot tolerate a black woman in their church. It underlines not only the cruelties inherent in the oppressive racist system but also the resilience of the black,
particularly the black woman. Her impulse of life shows itself in her silent protest against her oppression and discrimination. It is also evident from the fact that she is still capable of believing in the possibility of her acceptance by Christ. Inspite of her long suffering she can still feel happy and thus achieve in her state of day dream what is utterly denied to her in actual life. Fantasy, thus, helps her escape from the real world of frustrations into a dream world of fulfilment. It provides a kind of catharsis to her repressed feelings and desires, thus enabling her to withstand her pains and sufferings.

Walker's treatment of the old woman's fantasy is another example of her fiction as representational art, attempting to show life and human nature as they are. This realistic treatment of human life, which makes her fiction so complex and popular, is a distinguishing feature of her treatment of aggression, another coping strategy, adopted by some of her characters in the face of the pressures of their environment. Her fiction, in fact, is replete with examples of aggression used by both men and women, white and black. She shows violence to be an integral part of the life of the black who suffer it in different forms at almost every stage of their life. They are shown by Walker not only as an object of violence from the white, but also as the agents and instruments of violence against the men and women of their own race.
as well Walker's interest is not simply to depict the scenes of violence; she goes deeper and lays bare the subtle causes, motives and consequences of the phenomenon of violence in her society.

Walker's depiction of violence is characterised by both breadth and depth. Her characters can be seen engaging in acts of aggression against others. In such cases, aggression is directed against those who are seen as directly responsible for the arousal of the impulse to aggress. But there are also a number of characters who are seen resorting to aggression against those who are not actually or directly responsible for their anger. In such cases, the aggressor finds the real enemy to be too strong and, therefore, expresses the venom of his frustration by taking it out on those whom he perceives as weaker. There are still others in Walker's fiction who indulge in acts of violence against themselves. Self-mutilation and suicide are some of the forms of this type of aggression against self.

Walker has shown in her novels and short fiction that the instinct of aggression in some cases stems from innate urges or tendencies. Her main focus, however, in dealing with the theme of aggression, has been on depicting violence resulting from existing social and economic conditions coupled with previous learning experiences. She suggests
through the behaviour of her characters that the instinct of aggression, even if it appears to aim at harming others, is basically self-destructive in nature. Those of her characters who seem to indulge in most gruesome form of aggression appear to be those whose hostile impulses fail to express themselves against the situations or persons whom they see as the real enemy. In such cases external factors causing frustration and loss of face tend to arouse a strong motive to resort to a harm producing behaviour.

Those of Walker's characters who engage in acts of aggression are often deficient in "higher level thought and reasoning." They also appear to be wanting in the resolution of will to attempt to overcome the source of their frustration. The exposure of her characters to violence in their immediate environment weakens their inhibitions against indulging in violent behaviour. Constant exposure to violence reduces their emotional sensitivity to violence against others.

Most of Walker's characters, who use aggression as a strategy to cope with various forms of stress, seem to be lacking in skills of communication and often behave in an abrasive style of self-expression. Their aggression is often a manifestation of the tendency to view themselves and the world around them in a negative manner. They tend to become more aggressive against those from whom they expect co-
operation and loyalty. Their lack of adequately developed awareness, sensitivity and a feeling of helplessness in the face of aversive circumstances reduces their self-restraints and the feeling of tolerance. All such persons, are "low in self-control" and tend to place the blame for their failures and difficulties "on external causes."15

Walker's fiction provides deep insights into all of these aspects of the life and personality of those men and women who use aggression as a response to the oppressive realities of their environment. Though there are examples of almost every kind of violence in her fictional world, for the purpose of our analysis, it can be studied mainly in three important forms—aggression against the external source of frustration, displaced aggression and aggression against self. A number of her characters use these forms of aggression in a variety of life situations.

Though the most common area of its expression appears to be in the family life of the blacks, violence against external source of frustration is discernible often against the people of other race. Both the white and the black have been shown to be resorting to aggression against each other. Walker's treatment of this type of violence reveals that it is the instinct of fear which is often at the root of this inter racial violence. The white's attempts to repress the black by force
is the result of their secret fears they harbour against the rise of the power of the black. Aggression, thus, is a kind of defence mechanism they adopt in the face of the danger they perceive from the blacks. Not much different are reasons responsible for the aggression of the blacks against the people of white race. It is very often, this sense of fear, of cruel white power that leads them to use violence in situations beyond their control.

There are numerous examples of the use of aggression by both white and black in Walker's fiction. This is used very often against the threats they apprehend from the people of other race. This violence appears in a number of forms, most common among them being lynching, beating, looting and rape. Violence has been employed by the white as a weapon to coerce the black into submission to thwart the growth of the sense of their self and, thus, to preclude even the possibility of their acquiring power and strength of any kind in the American society. Though the shadows of racist violence by the white are never far away from the life of blacks in the novels and short stories of Alice Walker, some of the examples of violence by the white have been rendered in really a hair raising manner. The killing of Celie's father is only one of the several examples which enables the reader to understand the motives behind the use of racist aggression.
Celie, as well as the reader, learns from a letter from Nettie that Alfonso is not their father. Their real father, she tells was a "well to do farmer" (CP: 180) who owned his own property near town. He was a hard-working and skilful farmer and "everything he turned his hand to prospered" (CP: 180). He had a spirit of entrepreneurship. In addition to his work at farm, he decided to open a store as well to sell dry goods. His store was so successful that he had to seek the help of his two brothers to run it. They prospered with the passage of time. Encouraged by the success at store, he set up a blacksmith's shop also at the back of his store. The expansion of business and resultant prosperity caused fears, jealousies and anxieties in the minds of white merchants. They perceived in him a threat to the survival of their business. They complained that his store was taking away all the black business away from them and his smithy was taking some of the white too.

Unable to cope with this challenge in a spirit of healthy competition and tolerance, they resorted to the methods of aggression: "And so one night, the man's store was burned down, the smithy destroyed, and the man and his two brothers dragged out of their homes in the middle of the night and hanged" (CP: 181). This story of Celie's father provides an example of white racism in America even long after their emancipation. But Walker's purpose is not only to give an
account of racial relations in America of her time, she also aims to lay bare the causes behind the use of violence by the white as a means of coercion. She suggests that it is the lack of confidence of the white in their own abilities and capacities and their concomitant fear of the power of the black, that provokes the violence of whites against blacks. Violence is, thus, used by them as a means to perpetuate their control over the black and to nip in the bud even the possibility of black emergence.

Walker's fiction reveals the workings of the white mind with insights into their psyche. She shows that even after emancipation they found it difficult to accept the rights of the black to a life of freedom and dignity. Deep down in their psyche was rooted their notion of white superiority and supremacy. They still looked at the black as mere chattels or slaves whom they could use the way they willed. They turned their machinery of repression on the black if they showed any sign of resistance to their authority. Anything suggestive of a sense of self respect in the black was seen as a sign of their audacity and a challenge to the white inviting ruthless aggression in one form or the other. Sofia-Millie incident in The Color Purple illustrates this assertion of the supremacy of the white through aggression against members of the black race.
Sofia has been portrayed in the novel as a self-respecting and courageous woman. She has a developed sense of self and cannot brook any injury to her pride. She fights Harpo, her husband, when he tries to treat her with mindless brutality of a blackman. Her sense of human dignity is reflected even by the way she looks after her children and keeps them neat and clean trying to grow them into strong individuals. Precisely it is this quality of her personality which brings her into clash with the white world and the ugly ruthless form of white aggression comes into full play.

The incident in case takes place when Sofia and her children get into the prize fighter's car and go into town and "clam out on the street looking like somebody" (CP:90). Just then the mayor and his wife, Millie, come by. Millie, finds the children of Sofia cute as little buttons. The mayor smiles at the children. Millie fingers the children once again, eyes the prize fighter's car and the watch on Sofia's wrist. The audacity of the white woman and her tendency to regard the black as slaves makes her to ask Sofia: "Would you like to work for me, be my maid?" (CP:90). Sofia's spontaneous response to this presumptuous and arrogant question is a firm no. The mayor, whose ego refuses to stomach this expression of self-respect by a black woman, sticks out his chest and asks Sofia again but gets the same re-
sponse. This sense of dignity informing Sofia's refusal to accept maid's job is totally unacceptable to the mayor, a lineage of the white race. His vanity and pride as a man of superior race is pricked which provokes him to use the old methods of aggression. Sofia is subjected to ruthless beating so as to serve as an example for other blacks. The machinery of racist justice swings into action. The police arrives. They threaten to blow off the prize fighter, "start slinging the children off the mayor, bang they heads together. Sofia really start to fight. They drag her to the ground" (CP:90). They "crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye. She swole from head to foot. Her tongue the size of my arm, it strick out tween her teef like a piece of rubber. She can't talk. And she just about the color of a eggplant" (CP:91-92).

More indignities and brutalities are heaped upon her. As a prisoner, she is put on duty in the prison laundry where she is forced to "wash clothes" from "five to eight" (CP:93). Her flair for neatness is ironically rewarded by making her wash "dirty convict uniforms, nasty sheets and blankets piled way over her head" (CP:93). The result is that the nerve-breaking and soul-draining work leaves her deformed with "face yellow and sickly" and fingers "fatty sausage" (CP:93).
The whole episode evidences the arrogance and presumptuousness of the white, rooted in their notion of racial superiority. A deeper analysis of the white psyche behind this incident suggests that they perceive even the possibilities of black power as a grave threat to their hegemony. This perception of the blacks as a threat to the white generates fears in their minds resulting in eruption of violence and hatred against the black. It is this fear of losing their control over the system that leads them to assert their sense of superiority and supremacy through various forms of aggression. This only underlines their desperate attempt to perpetuate their monopoly over the social, economic and political life even after a century of emancipation of the black.

The racist violence has, in fact, been the main instrument employed by the white to perpetuate the system of slavery for centuries. This has been used variously to keep the black in bondage by destroying their society, culture and their sense of dignity and identity. Blacks were subjected to a relentless process of exploitation and oppression treating them as worse than beasts of burden. The most degrading and dehumanizing aspect of white aggression has manifested itself in violence against black women. They have not only been treated as mules of life, but have also been used as a mere means of sexual gratification of the white. They have thus been exposed to the most unspeak-
able kinds of assaults on their body and souls, forcing them to react and resist, often, in different ways even aggressive ones, to preserve the dignity of their self as women.

Walker presents in her fiction a number of incidents depicting the use of the methods of aggression by black woman against her white oppressor. An analysis of such incidents clearly indicates the subtle difference between the motives behind the use of violence by both white and the black. She shows that the white resort to the means of aggression primarily to preserve and perpetuate, what they regard as their rights to use blacks as their chattels. Blacks, on the other hand, turn to aggression mainly as a means of self-defence. Even when aggression in their case seems to be an act of revenge or an outburst of anger, the basic impulse behind it very often is that of the preservation of the self. Violence on such occasions appears to be an act of self-assurance, a means to feel convinced of their strength and ability to act for the preservation of their dignity and integrity. This understanding of the working of human mind informs her treatment of aggression of the black depicted in her novels and short stories. In this context the example of violence in her short story "How Did I Get Away with Killing One of the Biggest Lawyers in the State? It Was Easy" immediately comes to the mind of her reader.

The story is an account of violence done to the black
woman's body and mind in the racist America. The two women characters, the mother and her daughter, are made to suffer the most horrible kind of violence when they are exploited sexually and are forced to suffer it silently. The rapist of the daughter, Bubba, the white lawyer removes her mother out of his way by getting her thrown into a lunatic asylum. She is treated most brutally and is reduced to a total physical and mental wreck. The daughter experiences mindless male aggression when her body is violated by Bubba. Though after some initial resistance she allows him to use her body for the sake of money and appreciation of her beauty, her inner self revolts against her degradation and exploitation. She wants Bubba to get her mother out of the lunatic asylum, "But he wouldn't do it, he just kept trying to make me go with him" (p.25-26). Her mother succumbs to the tortures and the daughter kills the lawyer, instrument of their troubles.

The story seems to revolve round the idea of how black woman has to take to violence when she finds all avenues of redressal closed to her. The aggression of the daughter culminating in the murder of her rapist is an expression of a revolt against her degradation and exploitation as a woman in the white dominated society. She finds herself helpless against a system controlled and manipulated by men of the white race. When she finds that there is no justice which
a black woman can expect in the white patriarchal society, she is left with no option but to aggress against it. Her killing of Bubba, thus, is not just a simple act of revenge but a calculated response to the overwhelming conditions of oppression and exploitation in her life. Aggression in her case, in fact, is a strategy to reconstruct her sense of self which has been shattered by her dehumanizing experiences.

It is not only black woman who takes recourse to aggression in order to preserve her identity, the black man, too, turns to this method as a means to face threats to his dignity and integrity as a man. He is often exposed to violence in various forms by the white against his body, mind and soul. Exploitation and oppression of black woman cuts painfully deep into his psyche. His dispossession of his self-respect as a man is so tortuous to him that he turns on his oppressor with a sense of revenge and anger whenever an opportunity comes his way. His aggression is also symptomatic of his emotional need to revive and reassert his sense of pride as a man by confronting his oppression. Aggression, thus, is an important method for the black man to encounter disruptive effects of violence against him by the white.

The easiest target of his aggression is quite often the white woman. It is by hurting her that he tries to hurt the white man, and thus reassure himself of his virility and
dignity as a black male. The subjection of Lynne in *Meridian* to violence by the black male amply illustrates this aspect of aggression used by the black male against white woman. The reader learns that Tommy Odds was a companion of Truman and a Civil Rights activist. He had only one arm, the other arm had been shot by whites. He had seen and suffered ruthless repression of the black man and woman. But he found his enemy, whiteman, too powerful to be hit directly. His anger and frustration get internalized and erupt when he gets the opportunity of sexually assaulting Lynne, the white woman. She has been described as a white worker in the Civil Rights Movement who wrote poems about the need for gentleness in the heart of the Revolution. A good and honest worker, she marries Truman, a black Civil Rights activist. But for Tommy Odds, she is only a white woman, a representative of the race which has crippled him. The availability of opportunity, his aroused sexuality and the secret desire to hurt the white man by molesting white woman impell him to rape Lynne. He even instigates the gang of three black boys to come and avenge themselves on Lynne, the woman of the race of their oppressor. "Pointing to her body as if it were conquered territory," Tommy Odds attempts to interest the boys, Altuma, Hedge and Raymond "in exploring it" *(M:160)*. He encourages them to get rid of their fears and to avenge themselves on the white man for what they
had been doing all along to their mothers and sisters: "She's nothing particular. You guys are afraid of her, that's all. Shit. Crackers been raping your mamas and sisters for generations and here's your chance to get off on a piece of their goods" (M: 160).

Though the boys do not rape Lynne, grins on their faces speak clearly of the contempt they have for whites. The whole incident, in fact, allows the reader an insight into the genesis of the aggression of the black against the white. Incidents like this reveal the complexity of Walker's fiction. On the one hand, Tommy Odds-Lynne episode indicates the author's sympathies with Lynne, who has been depicted as a helpless victim of racist and sexist violence. Ironically, she suffers at the hands of the black whom she has joined at great personal loss in their struggle for civil rights in America. But on the other hand, Walker's treatment of Tommy Odds evidences her enormous understanding of the psyche of a blackman who has suffered at the hands of white racism. The hopelessness in his life as a crippled individual, his injured pride as a blackman, his suppressed urge to avenge himself on his white oppressor and his inner psychological compulsions to reassure himself of his black manhood have all been brought out with such an authenticity and knowledge of human nature that Tommy Odds, inspite of his villainy, emerges as a realistically drawn and complex individual. This is achieved
by Walker by placing his act of sexual aggression in the context of racism in American society an important determinant of his attitude and behaviour.

The same theme runs through the story "Advancing Luna and Ida B. Wells" in Walker's collection You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down. Walker admitted in her interview with O'Brien that the story was "a fictionalized account, suggested by a number of real events." This rootedness of her story in the realities of American society makes it an illuminating and interesting presentation of the inner drama in the life of men and women in her world. The story allows the reader to explore and analyse sexual violence directed against white women in the racist system. The story gives an account of rape, providing insights into its causes. Luna, a white girl, is a Civil Right worker and is involved in the mission of registering the black voters, motivating them to vote and ask for their rights. She tells the narrator of the story, a close friend of hers, how she had been raped by Freddie Pye in the summer of 1965.

Though the story sheds light on various aspects of race relationships, its focus remains centred on the causes of black man's aggression against the white, expressed through his sexual assaults on the white women. Freddie Pye in this story has been depicted as a poor and frustrated black man who has been a victim of violence by the white in a
number of ways. He appears as a representative of all those blacks who feel dispossessed, degraded and dehumanized by the brutal, oppressive machinery of the white. Their suppressed anger and the desire to hurt their oppressor erupt in the form of acts of violence against white women. Raping white women was one of such acts and they accepted it "as a part of rebellion" (p. 94). This is the way they thought of "paying whitey back. They have gloried in it" (p. 94). Rape, in this way, not only releases their anger and frustration but also gives them a sense of pride and confidence as men. They try to retrieve their sense of worth by asserting their virility against the woman of their oppressor. Rape, for them, is a kind of act that seems to reconstruct their battered manhood.

The dramatization of racist aggression in Walker's fiction, thus, serves not only to throw light on the nature, forms, causes and consequences of racist conflicts but also provide to the reader a profound knowledge and understanding of human psyche. Apart from the depiction of scenes and acts of violence, her primary interest seems to be to understand and highlight why men and women adopt methods of aggression to cope with the pressures of oppressive conditions. This makes her plots and characters so realistic that even when they have been presented in brief strokes of description they carry conviction with the reader. Even when such scenes and acts of aggression appear to be repugnant and
meet with moral disapproval from the reader, they become imprinted on his mind only because they seem to be so true to the realities of human nature and life.

Besides these acts of aggression committed directly against the oppressor or the representative of the race of the oppressor, there are a number of Walker's characters who try to hurt the person or persons who are not directly responsible for such acts. In such cases, the oppressed becomes the oppressor and takes out the venom of his frustration against those who are weak but not responsible for his sufferings. This kind of violent behaviour is indulged in particularly by the black male in relation to the black woman in Walker's fiction. Her treatment of this form of aggression is characterised by remarkable understanding of the psychology of the men of her race. She shows how black men, victimized by the white, turn their repressed anger to their women and victimize them, sometimes, with unspeakable cruelty. Their feeling of failure as men to protect and support their wives and children in the racist system breeds in them a feeling of frustration and despair which ultimately is vented in the form of abusive language and even emotional and physical violence against them. Walker suggests that this kind of aggression is a strategy of the black man to escape his own responsibility for his failure as a man. Moreover, her treatment of such male figures reveals that violence against
their wives and children is also a subtle psychological attempt of the black husband and father to assert his authority and thus to reassure himself of his power as a man in his family. Aggression, for them, is an act of manufacturing their manhood which they find battered in racist America. Though several of her black male characters tend to aggress against their wives, the behaviour of Brownfield in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and Alfonso in *The Color Purple* offer a classic study in this kind of aggression.

A look at the character of Brownfield reveals a pattern of steady decline as a black man. Walker has depicted through him even the most brutal and vulgar aspect of black man's aggression in the context of his socio-economic conditions he has to live in. He is the son of Grange and has inherited from him the legacy of abusing his wife. The racist environment contributes to the growth of his impulses to brutalize his woman for his own failures and frustration. He becomes so cruel and callous that ultimately he shoots her dead. Brownfield's treatment of his wife is perhaps one of the most illuminating accounts of wife abuse in the black family. As soon as he realizes that he cannot escape poverty in the sharecropping economy and will not amount to anything in the racist system, he begins to take out his frustration and anger on his wife, Mem. His marriage with her begins with moments of passion and dreams of a bright future. During
his meetings with Mem, in Dew Drop Inn before marriage, he felt charmed by her warmth and tenderness. "He thought of her as of another mother, the kind his own had not been. Someone to be loved and spoken to softly, someone never to frighten with his rough, coarse ways" (TLGC:66). He feels proud of his marriage with Mem and recalls her love and beauty with fondness: "THREE YEARS LATER...he could still look back on their wedding day as the pinnacle of his achievement in extricating himself from evil and the devil and aligning himself with love" (TLGC:72). It was a choice well made and Mem had a soothing and nourishing effect on Brownfield when he felt weary and dejected: "She was so good to him, so much what he needed, that her body became his shrine" (TLGC:72). Under the magic of her tender warmth, he "grew big and grew firm with love, and grew strong" (TLGC:73).

Like many of the marriages, Brownfield's marriage also began with a dream of happy, decent and independent house for his wife and children with a chauffeur driven car. He had planned to do sharecropping only for two years and then to move northward for a brighter life of freedom and prosperity. They worked hard at the farm but the sharecropping system proved to be too oppressive and exploitative to let them make enough money and leave for the land of their dreams. Even after three years of gruelling labour at the
farm he found himself stuck up in poverty and debt. He had to make his wife and even his little daughter Daphnie work in the field: "He had to teach, his frail five-year-old daughter the tricky, dangerous and disgusting business of handmopping the cotton bushes with arsenic to keep off boll weevils" (TLGC:77). He ultimately realised that his "life was becoming a repetition of his father's" (TLGC:78).

The frustration of his dreams and desires deepens his feeling of helplessness and despair in the face of the racist economic system. This destroys his sense of self-confidence and worth. His failure to provide his wife and children with a decent life gives a crushing blow to his spirits and his sense of self-respect as a man. His injured pride and ego prey upon his mind and soul, destroying all that was positive and creative in him. It pushes him deep into a feeling of guilt and self-reproach. His warped heart and mind see in his wife and children a constant and painful reminder of his failures as husband and father. This, ultimately, generates in him anger and rage which he unleashes freely on Mem and their helpless children. Unable to turn his frustration and anger into any positive or creative activity, he pours it out in the form of aggression which he uses as a response to his conditions.

He begins to abuse Mem, whom he had once loved so
passionately because she was plump and quiet. He had fallen in love with her because she was graceful and a good teacher, because she "put some attention to what she was saying in it, and some warmth from her own self, and so much concern for the person she was talking to that it made Brownfield want to cry" (TLGC:67-68). But his frustration and rage slowly blind him to all these qualities in Mem which had once fascinated him so much. He begins by hurting her feelings and her sense of honour by charging of being "unfaithful to him, of being used by the white men, his oppressores; a charge she tearfully and truth fully denied" (TLGC:78). Their once mutual passionate love deteriorates fast and Brownfield starts abusing her body by taking "her in his drunkenness and in the midst of his foul accusations she wilted and accepted him in total passivity and blankness, like a church...He determined at such times to treat her like a nigger and a whore, which he knew she was not, and if she made no complaint, to find her guilty" (TLGC:78-79). Brownfield's violence seems to know no bounds and after countless accusations of her infidelity, "his crushed pride, his battered ego, made him drag Mem away from schoolteaching" (TLGC:79). Her learning which he once so admired becomes too much for his sick soul to bear as "her knowledge reflected badly on a husband who could scarcely read and write. It was his great ignorance that sent her into white homes as a domes-
tic, his need to bring her down to his level!" (TLGC:79). He inflicts injuries on her sense of honour, integrity and pride by lashing her with his foul tongue and sexual abuses. He turns brutal and begins to use cruelty on her body in a beastial manner. The narrator lays bare the nature and cause of the inhuman violence that Bronwfield perpetrates on Mem: "It was his rage at himself, and his life and his world that made him beat her for an imaginary attraction she aroused in other men, crackers, although she was no party to any of it. His rage and his anger and his frustration ruled. His rage could and did blame everything, everything on her" (TLGC:79).

Brownfield gloats in the misery of Mem when she is weak, sick and down with the burden of repeated pregnancies forced on her by him. His destructive frustration and rage does not spare even the innocent and helpless children who are exposed constantly to the dehumanizing conditions of violence and poverty. When Mem tries to save the future of her daughters, it only hurts Brownfield's ego as a man and inflames his rage against her. Knowing that the future of her daughters depends on her, Mem takes on the responsibility of her family in her own hands. She tries to defy Brownfield and takes up the job of a school teacher. She works, earns and saves for her family and they move to a lease-bound house in a town. This gives them a better
social status and the realization of their dream for a decent life seems to be not too distant a possibility. But this is the work of Mem; this success of hers reminds Brownfield only of his failures. This further adds salt to the injury of his failures and he sees in her success a challenge and an insult to his pride and authority as a man. Unable to put up with the success of a woman, he grows more vicious and is out to destroy her. His rage destroys his sanity completely and he grows wild. One night, Brownfield waits on the porch for her as she returns from her work as a maid, aims the gun "with drunken accuracy right into her face and fired" \textit{(TLGC:172)}. Brownfield, thus, destroys the whole family.

Walker's treatment of aggression in the personality and behaviour of Brownfield provides, indeed, a classic study in aggression, resulting from one's experiences of oppression and frustrations. She has brought out the blackest aspect of the black male in a very forceful manner through the character of Brownfield. What makes her treatment so effective and realistic is her dramatization of the socio-economic causes largely responsible for what Brownfield is and does in his life. She has very subtly exposed the motives behind Brownfield's impulse of aggression against his wife and children. She reveals through his violence how and why black male turns into an oppressor of his woman as a result of his own oppression in the racist economic and social system. She
suggests that he uses violence not only to release his pent up feelings of frustration and anger, but also as an expression of his denial of responsibility for his failures. Walker's understanding of the psyche of the black male appears to be deep and incisive when she lays bare how Brownfield uses aggression as a strategy to rebuild his battered ego as a man. Violence for him is a method to reassert his authority as a father and husband so that he "could feel a little bit like a man" (TLGC:136) The depiction of the growth of Brownfield's tendency to use aggression also confirms the findings of the social psychologists who suggest that "impulse to aggress against others increases in the absence of the probability of deterrent resistance with sufficient severity."20 She seems to emphasize clearly that Mem's passive acceptance of insults and beatings only feeds the fire of his rage and embolden him to use more appalling forms of violence against her. It is this insight of Walker's into the complex working of the human mind that makes her characterization of Brownfield's aggression so effective, without mitigating the horror of his brutalities against Mem.

Walker's short story "The Child Who Favored Daughter"21 is another example of Walker's ability to handle the strategy of displaced aggression used by black man against women. The story deals with this theme at various levels and offers an illuminating study particularly from socio-
logical and psychological perspectives. She again depicts the aggression of the black men placing it in the context of socio-economic conditions which largely determine its nature and course. This story, too, reveals the tendency of the black man to use various forms of violence not against his white oppressor, the cause of his frustration, but against black women whom he victimizes for his own failures and humiliations. By introducing the element of incest, Walker makes her treatment of this theme more complex and multidimensional. The story is certainly an expression of Walker's protest against patriarchal brutalities in black families. But by depicting a cause and effect relationship between the socio-economic conditions and the black man's violence, she makes even the most cruel of her black characters look like real human beings.

The father in this story is the chief agent of aggression and he emerges as one of the most destructive male characters in Walker's fiction. But she has drawn his character placing it in the context of external conditions of racist oppression, exploitation and poverty which contribute largely to his debasement and brutality. His early experiences at home exposed him to violence in the family, sowing seeds of violence in his own psyche and behaviour. He remembers how his sister named Daughter had paid with her life for falling in love with a white man. She had given her love "to the very
man in whose cruel, hot, and lonely fields he, her brother, worked. Not treated as a man, scarcely as well as a poor man treats his beast" (p.38). Her falling in love with a man of the white race is taken as an act of treachery, rendering her liable to even the most gruesome forms of punishment. Unable to do anything against the white man, men in the family direct their anger on her and treat her as worse than a beast: "They threw her betrayal at her like sharp stones, until they satisfied themselves that she could no longer feel their ostracism or her own pain" (p.39). She is subjected to humiliation and tortures but it becomes apparent that she is not going to die: "They took to flinging her food to her as if she were an animal and at night when she howled at the shadows thrown over her bed by the moon his father rose up and lashed her into silence with his belt" (p.39). This inhuman treatment meted out to Daughter by her own father speaks clearly of cruelties against black women perpetrated by the black patriarch because of his own failures to stand up like a man against his white oppressor. The feeling of helplessness which the black male suffers in the face of racist system poisons his heart and mind leading to eruptions of violence often against women in his own family.

Though he loved his sister named Daughter and tried to help her, "his love for her had turned into a dull ache of constant loathing, and he dreamed vague fearful dreams
of a cruel revenge on the white lover who had shamed them all" (p.39). The fact that he dreams of taking revenge on the white man is only an expression of his failure to do anything in the form of action against the white man. This indulgence in a kind of dream fulfilment of his desires is only a method of releasing his anger and frustration at his humiliation.

This helplessness to take revenge on the white man goes deep into his psyche and determines the pattern of his attitudes and behaviour in the rest of his life. The incident of Daughter gave him a hurt that he bore "throughout his life that slowly poisoned him" (p.40). He becomes suspicious and nervous, feeling "as though all the world were out to trick him" (p.40). He turns into a kind of cynic, believing that he had only evil and deception in store for himself. Like a man suffering from a deep sense of fear and insecurity, he thinks that his only guard in this world of evil and deception is "readiness to provide them with a match" (p.40).

This makes him insensitive to the pains of violence which he later inflicts even on his own wife and daughter. In fact, women in his life face a sullen barrier of distrust and hateful mockery, indicative of his inner state of uncertainty and fear. He never appears to be kind to women— even to those—who love and care for him. He beats his own wife into
a cripple "to prevent her from returning the imaginary overtures of the white landlord "(p.40). Because of his brutalities, she kills herself even when she is young and strong enough to escape him. His obsession with the imaginary overtures of the white man and his fears of his wife responding to them suggest clearly of his deep-seated sense of insecurity and loss of authority as a man. Thus, the violence he does to his wife is only an expression of his attempt to assert his manhood.

The most horrible aspect of his aggression, however, comes into play when he learns from a letter that his own daughter is in love with a whiteman. Walker has dealt with this aggression of a father against his daughter with brilliant flashes of insights into his psyche. At a superficial glance, he seems to be motivated by his hatred for the man of white race, his oppressor. He subjects his daughter, too, like his wife to cruel physical tortures in order to assure himself of his power and control over her. But at a deeper level, the story seems to dramatize a subtle mixing of motives. The antagonism of colour and race gets mingled with the motive of incest. The father, the story shows, feels allured by the youthful body of his daughter. His secret instinct of incest that makes him feel possessive about his daughter fills him with a feeling of jealousy for the white man whom she gives her love. This jealousy makes him "nervous about
something that has never, and probably won't ever, belong" to him (p.42). His conscious self rationalizes his rage and violence caused by the hidden desires of incest in to a justifiable act of violence in defence of his honour from the men of white race. He asks her to deny her love for the white man, but when she remains firm in her love for the white man, he beats her with his belt and then strikes her with his fist sending her sprawling once more into the dirt:

"She gazes up at him over her bruises and he sees her blouse, wet and slippery from the rain, has slipped completely off her shoulders and her high young breasts are bare. He gathers their fullness in his fingers and begins a slow twisting. The barking of the dogs creates a frenzy in his ears and he is suddenly burning with unnamable desire. In his agony he draws the girl away from him as one pulling off his own arm and with quick slashes of his knife leaves two bleeding craters the size of grapefruits on her bare bronze chest and flings what he finds in his hands to the yelping dogs"(p.45).

It is his "unnamable desire," repressed by his consciousness that the girl is his daughter, that makes him frenzied and he commits the most brutal act of violence against her. This violence of a father against his daughter is thus a strategy to cope with the agony caused by his illicit passion for her body. The motives of race and incest are, thus, subtly shown to be at the root of violence, so common in black families.
Almost all of Walker's characters, who take to violence as a response to their external conditions, appear to be deficient in higher levels of thinking and self-control. They seem to lack reasoning and rationality in their behavior. They are the men and women who are found wanting in the qualities of patience, tolerance and resilience. Unable to take a balanced decision, they tend to act in an indiscreet manner and thus become the cause of disruption and destruction. At times, their impulse to inflict harm or injury turns self-destructive, particularly when it can not express itself against the external object. In such cases the instinct of aggression manifests itself in the form of suicide or self-inflicted injuries.

Those of Walker's characters who use aggression against self do it primarily for two purposes. They either aggress against self by committing suicide in order to escape from the pressures and pains of their life, or they resort to this extreme step of self-destruction as a means of protest against those conditions and persons who are responsible for their oppression and frustration. Margaret's suicide, as has already been discussed in this chapter, is an example of aggression against self resorted to for the purposes of escape from the agonies of life. The suicide of Mrs.Jerome in the story "Her Sweet Jerome" provides a fine illustration of how and why some of her characters tend to indulge in self-destructive violence as a method of protest.
Mrs. Jerome has been depicted as a complex character, offering insights into the mind and heart of a coloured woman. She has been described as "a big awkward, woman with big bones and hard rubbery flesh. Her short arms ended in ham hands, and her neck was a squat roll of fat that protruded behind her head as a big bump. Her skin was rough and puffy, with plump molelike freckles down her cheeks" (p.25). This lack of physical beauty apparently creates a cause of mental tension for her as a woman. She, like others of her sex, has an intense need for attention and love of a man. Though she owns a small beauty-shop and has acquired a measure of economic self-reliance, she does not "like standing on her feet so much" (p.25). This suggests her feminine need of possessing and depending on the love of a man. When her father, who has not been giving her any money, starts relenting when he hears about her plans to add a school teacher to the family, she cuts him off quick and declares that she does not "want anybody to take care of her men but her" (p.26).

Her trouble becomes noticeable when she marries Mr. Jerome Franklin Washington III, a school teacher, who is ten years younger than her. The couple appears to be mismated as the two have little in common. Mr. Jerome is a cute young man whereas she is rather ugly and unattractive. He has got education, works as a school teacher, reads books and
moves in intellectual circles discussing the questions of black and revolution. She, on the other hand, is uneducated and cannot understand the larger questions of racial conflict and the need to overthrow the system. Besides these physical and intellectual incompatibilities, the two are poles apart in their emotional capacities and sensitivities. If Mr. Jerome appears to be utterly devoid of a sympathetic understanding of and a sensitive response to the feminine needs of Mrs. Jerome, she appears to have a larger heart and a greater sensitivity to his needs.

These incompatibilities mar their relationship right from the very beginning. Even before they were married, he was "beating her black and blue" (p. 26). She could not open her mouth "without him wincing and pretending he couldn't stand it" (p. 26). She does all she can "to be sexy and stylish" to win his heart (p. 27). She takes all his indifference and violence with a tremendous capacity of tolerance and patience. Walker has dealt with this aspect of her personality in a very subtle and moving manner. She suggests that behind her capacity to bear Jerome's cruelty lies her delicate feminine needs of achieving an emotional, physical and social fulfillment by possessing the love of man and showing it to others in her world. That becomes evident when one hears her enunciating grandly in the presence of other women that "he don't beat me!" (p: 27).
The crisis becomes deeper when all her efforts to win over his heart fail and she hears others talk that Mr. Jerome is going with other women. This drives her crazy and she searches high and searches low. She goes to taverns, churches and to the place where he works to find who he is fooling around with. She ultimately goes secretly to a meeting of the comrades in order to discover his affairs. But the talks of revolution in the meeting are all beyond her comprehension and she comes back home feeling ashamed, broken and desperate. In her bedroom, Jerome's books and notebooks further vex her mind and the words like revolution, black anger, black revenge fill her with rage. She takes out her frustration and anger on these books which were the preoccupation of her husband and sets them ablaze. Unable to put up with her circumstances and incapable of bringing a courageous, graceful or intelligent response to her situation, she annihilates herself in the fire that ultimately overwhelms her house.

Mrs. Jerome's act of putting her husband's books on fire and committing suicide is a method of protest against her husband's indifference which denies her the possibilities of fulfilment as a woman. The way she screams "I kill you! I kill you!" is a loud and poignant expression of her revolt against all those factors and forces which deprive her of the realization of her feminity and humanity (p:34).
Walker's treatment of her characters who adopt aggression as a coping strategy reveals her deep understanding of human behaviour in the face of stresses and strains. The way she exposes the disruptive and destructive effects of different forms of aggression on one's life—personal, familial and social—indicates that she does not regard it as a very viable response to life. But all of these characters come alive in her novels and provide an evidence of her ability to draw powerful characters who emerge as individuals even when they appear to represent some social forces and their effects. The insights into human mind and nature with which she has presented the strategies of escape and aggression make her fiction an image of life. Even the blackest of her characters tend to emerge as realistically drawn human beings when the reader sees them in relation to their environment and human nature. The fact that she reveals a pattern of cause and effect in her delineation of all those who either seek to escape or adopt the stance of aggression suggests her faith in the possibilities of change and improvement, thus introducing a note of hope and optimism in her fiction.
NOTES


2Ibid.

3Ibid., p.298.


6Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Washington Square, 1982). Citations to the text of the novel are also from the same edition, and the page numbers in all such cases have been given in parentheses immediately following the quotation. The novel has been abbreviated as CP for such textual quotations.

7Pinckney, p.17.

8Ibid.

9Paula Giddings, "Alice Walker's Appeal." *Essence*, July

10 Alice Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (New York: Washington Square, 1970). Citations to the text of the novel are also from the same edition, and the page numbers in all such cases have been given in parentheses immediately following the quotation. The novel has been abbreviated as *TLGC* for such textual quotations.


14 Robert A Baron and Donn Byrne, p.300.

15 *ibid*, p. 474.

16 Alice Walker, "How Did I Get Away With Killing One of the Biggest Lawyers in the States? It Was Easy," *You*

17 Alice Walker, Meridian (New York: Washington Square, 1976). Citations to the text of the novel are also from the same edition, and the page numbers in all such cases have been given in parentheses immediately following the quotation. The novel has been abbreviated as M for such textual quotations.

18 Alice Walker, "Advancing Luna and Ida B. Wells," You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down, pp. 85-104


20 Robert A Baron and Donn Byrne, p. 327.


22 Alice Walker, "Her Sweet Jerome," In Love and Trouble, pp. 24-34.