CHAPTER IV

THE PEACOCKS AND PEAHENS:
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This chapter mainly seeks to highlight some characters and situations in a few of Anita Desai's works which evoke some interesting parallels from Lawrence including a detailed treatment of the subject in respect of Lawrence's Aaron's Rod.¹ and Anita Desai's Voices in the City.²

Nirode, the protagonist of Anita Desai's second major novel, Voices in the City, shares so many singular characteristics with Jim Bricknell in some respects and with Aaron and Lilly in some others in Aaron's Rod, that one finds, an in-depth study of these fictional creations, indirectly hint at Lawrence's influence on Anita Desai in the sphere of characterization in this novel.

The most striking feature of Lawrence's Aaron's Rod is Aaron's Bohemian style of living. Aaron, a flautist, moves almost exclusively in London's Bohemian circle of artists like Lilly, a literary artist, Struthers, a painter, Julia and Josephine who are both artists living unconventional lives, though the pair named last are described only as "Half Bohemians" (AR, p.59) in the novel. On another occasion this group is referred to as indulging in "this expensive comfort of modern Bohemia . . . here they

were, in the old setting exactly, the old Bohemian routine" (AR, p. 73). Even Aaron is patronized by only a group of young men who are musically-inclined and Bohemian by profession. Josephine’s movements "had the dangerous impassivity of the Bohemian . . ." (AR, p.39).

Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City* too presents only the lives of artists who live quite unconventional lives in Calcutta, who could be best described as ‘Bohemians’. Nirode, though designated as a journalist, is a literary artist by profession. Amla, his sister, draws illustrations for magazines. Dharma, Nirode’s friend is a painter, David the Irish waif is an artist working on ceramics and Bose, known as ‘Professor’ in the group, also is a literary connoisseur who edits his own original version of *Panchatantra*. Nirode repudiates social conventions by rejecting his mother’s support and choosing to live in a ramshackle shed built on a bare terrace, made of tins in the company of David, the foot-loose waif from Galway, seized with an insatiable wanderlust. Amla, the freelance journalist tries her hand at first in Bombay and later launches herself into the Bohemian circles of Calcutta living dangerously close to married — and yet frustrated — men, like the snobbish Jit Nair and Dharma, a painter who is steeped in self-absorption. Even the light-headed, materialistic Sonny desperately tries to ape the Bohemian life once lived by his degenerate father in
the company of the popular courtesan-like figures of dubious fame like Muntaz Begum and Jahannara Begum. In short, the world that Anita Desai presents in Voices in the City is the heady world of Bohemians reeking in the smoke of cigarettes and smells of strong liquors of bars and clubs often punctuated by extra-marital and premarital love-affairs, elopements and separations, as in the case of Jit Nair and Sarla, his wife, Otima, Nirode's mother, Dharma, Sonny's father and to an extent even Nirode and Amla, where the normal values of middle-class morality are simply not in vogue.

It is against such a Bohemian backdrop that Jim Bricknell is presented in Aaron's Rod. Having broken his engagement with Josephine Hay (AR, p.37) – who is referred to as Josephine Ford by Lawrence in other contexts of the novel – and yet not being able to break off his relationship with her, Jim grows hysterical. Josephine informs Aaron of Jim's neurosis in their first meeting: "... 'He's self-conscious and selfish and hysterical." (AR, p.85) On an earlier occasion Josephine confides to Tanny, Lilly's wife: "Yes, he's impossible...Perfectly hysterical and impossible" (AR, p. 81). Jim's inconsistent - violent, yet sentimental - nature is clearly perceived by Lilly in the scene where he hits Aaron: Lilly "detected the sort of maudlin deliberateness which goes with hysterics..." (AR, p.102). There are times when he is "beside himself, in a sort of hysterics." (AR, p.45).
Nirode is nothing, if not hysterical. Like Hamlet, he finds that it is his mother’s disloyalty that disturbs him most. He has a habit of "thinking his thoughts in such vivid, short-lived streaks of lightning" (VC, p. 7) and often showing violent outbursts of temper. He also feels frustrated by the splendid success of his surgeon-brother Arun who leaves for England, and gets bogged down in uncontrollable fits of depression: "This light was crass, it stung his eyes, and what he wanted was shadows, silence, stillness . . ." (VC, p. 8). Towards the gentle Bose, his behaviour is odious. "Nirode snapped in a childish outburst of bitterness. 'The landlord’s side — the upper rung of the ladder from which you can push down the others'. . ." (VC, p. 13) His irrational explosive temperament can be seen in his response to Bose’s suggestion that finding a ‘vocation’ might keep him happy. Instantly remembering Arun, Nirode replies: "A vocation — and a little, or much, luck. He lives happily. Eats, excretes, sleeps, snores — naturally, contentedly. How? I don’t think I can, or want to." (VC, p. 18) Quick, shrewd, he is also bitterly contemptuous of Sonny’s efforts to please his father: "Up with Papa’s portrait, down with Picasso! . . . My dear boy, it will convert your cubby-hole into a stately home." (VC, p. 21). The acidity and subtle malice in Nirode’s voice becomes all the more striking,
when we recall that he makes all these remarks while enjoying Sonny's hospitality. Nirode also experiences intense moments of gloom and melancholy, bordering on the suicidal, as he once confides to Jit Nair:

"I rather fancied myself leaning over poetic bridges and contemplating suicide in limpid rivers, then being halted by a sudden inspiration too marvellous not to be immediately translated on to paper or canvas." (VC, pp. 101-02)

Thus Nirode's effervescence, impulsiveness, heartiness, cynicism and melancholy are all tinged by his latent, keen edge of hysteria. Jim Bricknell in Lawrence's Aaron's Rod uses a highly provocative language showing scant regard for manners. When Lilly and his friends tease him over his desire to be loved, he springs to his feet and brandishing his fists, says: "I'll pitch the lot of you over the bloody rail..." (AR, p. 68). On another occasion, when Robert Cunningham, the sculptor, mockingly refers to his inveterate self-pity, Jim grows suddenly ferocious and shouts: "You're a bloody young sucking pig, you are" (AR, p.79). On an earlier occasion he snaps contemptuously at Robert: "Oh, dry up the army touch." (AR, p.48), which makes Robert remind Jim of his manners. Jim also uses the rude epithet "damn" quite freely. He tells Aaron once: "Come an' have a drink. Damn the women" (AR, p. 71). To Lilly who asks why he wants so badly to be loved, he says "Because I like it, damn you." (AR, p.74)

Nirode also shows a similar rudeness in his
language. To the genial Bose who shows implicit, though rather naive, trust in Nirode's capacity as a journalist, Nirode says in a characteristic, uncouth fashion: "More fool you, . . . You even trust me! What a bloody stupid thing to do, Bose!" (VC, p.15) Even when his needs are obvious and he anticipates more and more help from the generous and sympathetic Bose, Nirode does not cease to be rude: "Beggarly Bose, the Great Philanthropist. Well, I need some again. . ."

"Now don't turn grey, I'm not going to move in with you - your wife's cooking doesn't agree with me. . ." (VC, p.15) Once in a semi-drunken state, he boasts of his experiences in the field of journalism in India to his friends:" . . . The lack of an audience is not the problem, in this bloody country it is the choice of one." (VC, pp.22-23). Even in his conversation with his close friend David he uses the same language. Once catching David building a curious structure of bamboo splinters and brown paper, Nirode asks: "What the bloody hell are you up to?" referring to his "bloody lampshades". (VC, p.73) On another occasion when Sonny tries to advise him as to how he could utilize his time writing a new book, Nirode retorts: "That's a luxury for decadent hypocrites like you. . ." (VC, p.25). He even calls him "You pimply little idiot" and "you snotty public school prig." (VC, p.25) and "bloody Bose", (VC, p. 93) Nirode does not spare Jit Nair either who inadvertently volunteers some advice to him. He
cuts him short: "Don't be an ass . . ." (VC, p.31) He also has the habit of using "damn" in conversation. Once to Sonny he says: "Damn it, we're not talking of an audience. . . ." (VC, p.24). "Damn it all, that blasted newspaper. . . ." and he talks of the "three bloody awful poems" published in his Voice (VC, p.93).

Another salient trait about Jim Bricknell, the bully in Aaron's Rod, is his extreme intolerance when it comes to repartees. When Lilly starts bullying him saying "you'd done slobbering yourself over a lot of little women, one after the other" (AR, p.101) and ridicules his love-affairs with: "Bah, Love! Messing, that's what it is. . . when you stagger and stumble down a road, out of sheer sloppy relaxation of your will" (AR, p.102). Jim cannot tolerate him any more and "sprang from his chair at Lilly, and gave him two or three hard blows with his fists, upon the body". (AR, p.102). Nirode also shows a similar intolerant impatience: "Nirode, the perpetual baiter, could take no baiting himself." (VC, p.69).

Jim Bricknell of Aaron's Rod has a tendency to call the attention of all the company on himself wherever he goes. On one occasion, Lawrence refers to him as "Jim, who had been sprawling full length in his armchair, the centre of interest of all the company . . ." (AR, p.74). "He sat in a chair . . . and stretched his long legs far in front of him". (AR, pp. 37-38). Nirode too arrests the attention of his fellowbeings by his
superior talents and wit. Bose remembers him as "the brightest of young men who argued and discoursed" at "the strident coffee-house gatherings" (VC, p.17). On another occasion Nirode's friends, "dragged their chairs up to Nirode's table - for as long as Nirode talked, it was his table, it did not matter if David paid the bill." (VC, p.30). Nirode "threw himself violently into a long, old-fashioned armchair, with its arms extending into grotesque leg-rests, and groaned at the lack of comfort." (VC, p. 87)

Jim Bricknell has a tendency to scrounge on others, even when there is no real need to exploit their hospitality. After behaving in a despicable fashion to Lilly, by hitting him on his chest, he has the temerity to ask him and Tanny permission to stay on in their house: "'Jolly nice here', said Jim. 'Mind if I stay till Saturday?'" (AR, p.97). After resigning his job in a reckless fashion Nirode throws himself at the hospitality of his friends, callously oblivious of his own rudeness towards them in the past. He tells Bose:

"Now don't turn grey, I'm not going to move in with you - your wife's cooking doesn't agree with me. All that mustard oil. I think my friend Sonny, the Zamindar's son, can put me up for a bit, till I find something cleaner. But I do need some cash" (VC, pp. 15-16).

Lawrence also makes a special mention of the promiscuous, amoral life the sentimental Jim Bricknell leads. "Jim's work in town was merely nominal. He spent his time wavering about and going to various
meetings, philandering and weeping". (AR, p.93). Once Jit Nair charges Nirode to his face: "You’re sowing your bright little wild oats, having your lop-sided little adventures, ... " (VC, p.98).

There is also a curious parallel between the references to Jim Bricknell’s and Nirode’s growing "thin" and "dying", though there is a vital distinction that qualifies these references highlighting the differences between these two characters. Jim Bricknell’s self-pity comes to the fore when he yells: "I’m losing life. I’m getting thin". (AR, p.74). To the skeptical Lilly who chides him with "You don’t look as if you were losing life," he shouts: "Don’t I? I am though. I’m dying. " (AR, p.74)

On yet another occasion, Jim goes on waxing eloquent on love, self-sacrifice and Christ: "I sacrifice myself to love": (AR p.96). But when Lilly punctures his pretence by pointing out his hollowness and waywardness in love, he assaults him. It is ironic to note that just a few moments earlier he craves for love from others: "Because I’m dead without it. I’m dead. I’m dying" (AR, p.99). But in the case of Nirode it is Monisha who is shocked to see him growing dangerously weak. She pathetically comments on him in silent despair: "Nirode, you are so thin." (VC, p.114). On yet another occasion, Monisha rescues him from his tin-shed on the verge of death: "... we have to watch keenly to see his breath stir at all. ..." (VC, p.126).
Jim Bricknell in Lawrence's Aaron's Rod continues to nurse a feeling of injured merit in himself and this curious morbid tendency results in his fits of melancholic depression. After the break of his engagement with Josephine, he still continues to gaze at her from time to time unable to break himself away and look towards the future. He also feels terribly let down when his former fiancée Josephine pays attention to someone else in a party and thinks that life is unfair to him. There is in him a nagging feeling of insecurity which results in his mistrust, diffidence, malice and neurosis. When Aaron asks him in the party: "Doesn't she love you?" Jim answers vindictively, glancing at Josephine, "She doesn't love me." (AR, p.74). In the Opera Scene, he comes in with an "ugly, queer face" as "he was in one of his moods" (AR, p.67). But he himself is not charitable in his attitude to the feelings of others. He does not spare even his sister Julia from his barbs, and alludes to her interest in Cyril Scott despite the fact she is married to Robert: "'Oh, damn it all!' said the long Jim,... 'She's dead nuts on Scott. She's all over him. She'd have eloped with him weeks ago if it hadn't been so easy'." (AR, p.64) Lilly is ironic and ruthless when he points to Jim's self-pitying, myopic love to his face: "What gives you such a belly-ache for love, Jim?...or for being loved? Why do you want so badly to be loved?" (AR, p.74).
Jim barks back, almost with a tinge of imbecility: "Because I like it, damn you" And Lilly has the last laugh in the scene: 'Why are you such a baby?' said Lilly. 'There you are, six foot in length, have been a cavalry officer and fought in two wars, and you spend your time crying for somebody to love you. You're a comic.'" (AR, p.74).

Nirode in Voices in the City, especially in the opening phase of the novel, reveals some characteristics interestingly similar to those seen in Jim Bricknell. Comparing his own condition with that of Arun, his brother Nirode cries: "Unfair, life is unfair—and how faint and senseless it sounded in all that tumult of traffic and commerce about him. . . ." (VC, p. 8) Nirode casts at the lucky Arun "a glance made sly by envy" (VC, p.5), Nirode, young, insecure and unemployed also has his moods: looking at the office—going bus," Revulsion filled him, so huge a distaste and horror filled him that he felt empowered by it..." he sank again, sank and sank till he was half-drowned even and laughed wryly, damply, 'I haven't begun yet.'" (VC, p.10). Like Jim Bricknell, who is utterly callous to the feelings of others, Nirode too can hurt even amiable people like Bose. "Nirode in an ill temper always disarmed the little whiskered man. . . ." (VC, p.13). But unlike Lilly, the genial and even-temperered Bose attributes all the venom in Nirode's words to "the righteous anger of the young and idealistic" (VC,
p.14). But it is important to note that as in the case of Jim Bricknell, Nirode's "moods" are attributed to his youth, insecurity and immaturity by Bose. "The boy was clever... He had been aggressive then, too, but not rapacious, not cruel" (VC, p.17).

Though Jim Bricknell and Nirode appear to be similar in their boorish manners at the surface level, they present a striking contrast in their attitude towards love. Jim Bricknell never ceases to profess love: "Don't you think love and sacrifice are the finest things in life?" he asks Lilly at one point and says, God is 'love': "I think it is. Love and only love" said Jim, 'I think the greatest joy is sacrificing one's self to love.'" (AR, p.96). On several occasions Jim is seen making a fetish of love.

"'LOVE IS THE SOUL'S RESPIRATION.' He printed it on the mantelpiece. Jim eyed the letters. 'It's right', he said, 'Quite right. When you love, your soul breathes in. If you don't breathe in, you suffocate.'" (AR, p.79).

Lilly who sees through him easily hits the nail on the head when he says":... You want to be loved, you want to be loved - a man of your years. It's disgusting." (AR, p.102). "Bah, love! Messing, that's what it is..." And it is this remark that puts Jim's monkey up and makes him hit Lilly. Josephine finds him "Perfectly hysterical and impossible" and Tanny thinks that he is "selfish" (AR, p.81). Nirode, in sharp contrast to Jim, refrains himself from placing anyone on the altar of love. In fact Nirode starts from the
other end. Monisha and Nirode avoid love out of fear for attachment: Talking of David Monisha says "I discover in this unattached, drifting bird-creature that vital element that is missing from Nirode and myself - the element of love." (VC, p.135) "I see now that both Nirode and I shy from love, fear its attachment, for 'from attachment arises longing' " (VC, p.135). Both Monisha and Nirode attach the highest value and significance to love and hence are not capable of bandying it about in their everyday parlance:

"I mean by love only an awake condition of the conscience. I fear this and avoid it, and so we step backwards from love and allow our hands to drop from her too warm flanks, unable to respond because we are frozen with distrust. Nirode's conscience sleeps, it has been so battered and bruised that it sleeps from sheer exhaustion." (VC p.136).

It is only after all the sufferings he undergoes, culminating at last in Monisha's suicide, that the hidden love in Nirode surges forth. This marks a profound inner experience in Nirode and means an entirely superior understanding of his concept and feeling of love. His love transforms him to the core and he ceases to think of his own feelings and nurse his own wounds. Instead he becomes totally selfless and reconciled with the life around him. Amla, the only sister left for him, surely becomes the first and immediate object of love, but his love is not simply confined to her:

"He loved her, loved all women who slept
with tears cold on their cheeks at night. He would have liked to cradle her in his arms, carry her into this divine world of which he had been permitted, at last, a vision. But she was sleeping now, he would not disturb her."

(VC, p. 249)

Thus we see that Jim Bricknell of Lawrence's Aaron's Rod and Nirode of Anita Desai's Voices in The City share the following characteristics: a Bohemian style of living, hysteria, use of provocative language, rudeness in manners, depression, insecurity, immaturity and a habit of scrounging and philandering. However, we cannot assert that Nirode is a replica of Jim Bricknell as he possesses certain salient traits which are peculiar to Aaron Sisson as well, which render him far different from being a "rare comic" (AR, p. 85) that Jim Bricknell is. An implacable hatred towards the native city, an existential view of life, escapism, a pronounced opposition to marriage as an institution a streak of puritanism, a cynical view of man-woman relationship, wealth and institutions are the other features, Aaron Sisson and Nirode have in common.

Aaron Sisson, Lilly, Josephine and Tanny - all find life in England in general and London in particular unendurable. Returning from the Embankment underground station, they become particularly conscious of the horror of the city:

"The station was half deserted, half rowdy, several fellows were drunk, shouting and crowing. Down there in the bowels of London, after midnight, everything seemed horrible and unnatural", (AR, p. 80)
"How I hate this London", (AR, p.80) says Tanny, Lilly's wife. Josephine also prefers Paris to London. On another occasion, Aaron and Josephine walk down from Soho across the Charing Cross Road to the Square Garden:

"It seemed dark and deserted, dark like a savage wilderness in the heart of London. The wind was roaring in the great bare trees of the centre, as if it were some wild, dark grove deep in a forgotten land." (AR, p.87).

In the stormy rain, the same scene grows even more forbidding and ominous:

"The houses of the Square rose like a cliff on the inner dark sea, dimly lighted at occasional windows. Boughs swayed and sang... it all seemed so sinister, this dark, bristling heart of London..." (AR, p.87).

Even after leaving England, and living in Italy for a long time Aaron feels that life in England has a "littleness" about it, in contrast to the life in Europe:

"There was something big and exposed about it all. No more the cosy English ambushed life: no longer the cosy littleness of the landscape. A bigness - and nothing to shelter the unshrinking spirit. It was all exposed. ...He looked with a new interest at the Italians in the carriage with him -for this same boldness and indifference and exposed gesture. And he found* in them too... Nay, the walls of English life will have to fall." (AR, p.238-39)

* Aaron's hostility towards London is thus unmistakable.

Nirode too shows a similar aversion for India, his native land in general and Calcutta, his native city in particular. Nirode wants so badly to leave India that he is extremely jealous of Arun who
gets a chance to go abroad: "...above all, envied oh envied, him for being on the train, speeding out of this dark pandemonium into the openness and promise... to board ship and set sail." (VC, p.7) A foreign liner he sees on his way home, reinforces the same feeling: "... a big Australian ship, neat as a pin in confident floodlight, its funnel freshly painted in stripes of flower-white and orange. Escape, escape, that funnel cried." (VC, p.10) Once Nirode tells Jit of his only youthful dream: "... I was always certain I would be a stowaway, a traveller, and live in London or Paris...." (VC, p.101) Jit, in his cups, completes the picture for Nirode: "Stand on your head, Nirode, stand on your head — that's the only way to get a correct view of this stupid, senseless world, this stupid, senseless country...." (VC, p.102) On another occasion, Nirode uses the phrase "this bloody country" (VC, pp. 22-33). On the other hand the city seems to exert an unbearable pressure on him almost malevolently infusing a sense of horror and hopelessness in his veins:

"On all sides the city pressed down, alight, aglow and stirring with its own marsh-bred, monster life that, like an ogre, kept one eye open through sleep and waking. Calcutta, Calcutta — the very pulse beat in its people's viewed wrists. The streets where slaughtered sheep hung beside bright tinsel tassels to adorn oiled black braids, and a syphilitic beggar and his entire syphilitic family came rolling down on barrows, like the survivors of an atomic blast ..." (VC, p.41).

"On all sides the city pressed down." (VC, p.9). Somehow the sights and sounds of the city are
associated with human suffering and pain in the mind of Nirode:

"On the other bank the city continued to proclaim itself with neon and naphtha lights, with the muttering and sudden shrieks of machinery and the low growling of men..." (VC, p.9)

Strolling in a part of the city where the garish and putrid night life is in its full swing amidst squalid surroundings of poverty and misery, Nirode almost reads some writing on the wall:

"Brooke - Bond - Tea ... stuttered a red neon sign, like a desperate semaphore sent out by this black city floundering about in the marshes; slowly sinking into it. 'Another fifty years, that's all I give it', Nirode said. 'Then it'll be gone - beastly, blood-thirsty Calcutta.'" (VC, pp.95-96)

Like Tanny in Lawrence's Aaron's Rod who loathes London, Monisha joins hands with Nirode in his condemnation of the callousness of the Calcutta city in Voices in the City. Interestingly enough, her words do include a mention of 'the underground' recalling Lawrence's mention of the 'underground' (AR, p.81) station "in the bowels of London" in Aaron's Rod:

"... There is no diving 'underground' in so overpopulated a burrow, even the sewers and gutters are choked, they are so full. Of what? Of grime, darkness, poverty, disease? ... Has this city a conscience at all, this Calcutta that holds its head between its knees and grins toothlessly up at me from beneath a bottom black with the dirt it sits on?" (VC, p.116).

Monisha also finds the city sinister and hopeless: "I see another face of this devil city, a face that broods over the smouldering fire - a dull, vacant, hopeless face..." (VC, p.117).
One of the main thematic motifs that runs through Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod* is its underlying existential vision. And no other character in the novel represents this existential view of life better than Aaron Sisson, its protagonist. Soon after deciding on the course of separation from his wife Lottie, Aaron collects himself, and at that moment, his thoughts are almost wholly dominated by an existential vision stressing his isolation as an individual and his freedom to carve out a destiny, for himself:

"He looked at the sky, and thanked the universe for the blessedness of being alone in the universe. To be alone, to be oneself, not to be driven or violated into something which is not oneself, surely it is better than anything..." (AR, p.155).

Lawrence traces Aaron's development into the next stage of attaining freedom from anxiety through a complete acceptance of his singleness:

"So Aaron, crossing a certain border-line and finding himself alone completely, accepted his loneliness or singleness as a fulfilment, a state of fulfilment... The Lily toils and spins hard enough, in her own way. But without strain and that anxiety with which we try to weave ourselves a life. The Lily is life-rooted, life-central. She cannot worry. She is life itself, a little, delicate fountain playing creatively, for as long or as short a time as may be, and unable to be anxious." (AR, p.201).

Lilly to whose views Aaron pays a singular attention, also advocates an existential mode of living that is free, of even love-urge:

"... You are yourself and so be yourself. Stick to it and abide by it. Passion or no passion, ecstasy or no ecstasy, urge or no urge, there's no goal outside you...: and there's no God outside you. No God, whom you can get to rest in."
"You've got an innermost, integral, unique self, and since it’s the only thing you have got or ever will have, don't go trying to lose it... Your own single oneness is your destiny. Your destiny comes from within, from self-form... You can only develop it. You can only stick to your own very self, and never betray it. And by so sticking, you develop the one and only phoenix of your own self, and you unfold your destiny..." (AR, p.343).

"... you’ve never got to deny the Holy Ghost which is inside you, your own soul’s self. Never. Or you’ll catch it. And you’ve never got to think you’ll dodge the responsibility of your own soul’s self, by loving or sacrificing or Nirvanaing - or even anarchising and throwing bombs. You never will." (AR, p.344).

The vision presented by Lawrence in Aaron's Rod is his own, whether mouthed by Aaron or Lilly.

"Aloneness is what the novel is about" as Worthen puts it. Critics have also been conscious of the identification of the characters of Lilly and Aaron in Aaron's Rod especially in the latter part of the novel:

"During the latter part of the book Aaron so often becomes Lilly that when the two meet the effect is almost that of the Teutonic Doppelgänger..."

However, it is Lilly who is more successful in articulating the existential perspective in the novel, while Aaron's very mode of being and experiencing exemplifies the vision. In the following passage Lilly addresses himself to the practical problem of relating the individual self to a companionable, even congenial, society of one's life-partner or fellowbeings in the context of


"I mean can't one live with one's wife, and be fond of her; and with one's friends, and enjoy their company; and with the world and everything, pleasantly; and yet know that one is alone? Essentially, at the very core of me, alone. Eternally alone. And choosing to be alone. Not sentimental or lonely. Alone, choosing to be alone, because by one's nature one is alone. The being with another 'person is secondary..." (AR, p.289).

"In so far as he is a single individual soul, he is alone - ipso facto. In so far as I am I, and only I am I, and I am only I, in so far, I am inevitably and eternally alone, and it is my last blessedness to know it, and to accept it, and to live with this at the core of my self-knowledge." (AR, p.289).

Aaron never surrenders himself totally to any close bond including his marital relationship:

"... his very being pivoted on the fact of his isolate self-responsibility, aloneness. His intrinsic and central aloneness was the very centre of his being. Break it, and he broke his being... It was the great temptation, to yield himself: and it was the final sacrilege ... By the innermost isolation and singleness of his own soul; he would abide though the skies fell on top of one another, and seven heavens collapsed." (AR, p.197).

"The last extreme of self-abandon in love was for him, not to take this false step, over the edge of the abyss of selflessness. Even if he wanted to, he could not... Now he realized that love, even in its intensest, was only an attribute of the human soul: one of its incomprehensible gestures. ... Give thyself, but give thyself not away. That is the lesson written at the end of the long strange lane of love" (AR, pp.199-200).

Nirode in Anita Desai's Voices in the City also is an existentialist, living a highly individualistic life, consciously carving out a destiny for himself: "He himself knew by instinct that he was a man for whom aloneness alone was the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth
treasuring..." (VC, p.24). Nirode also senses a conflict arising in him because of the demand his materialistic friends make on him because of their own sense of insecurity:

"It seemed to him his friends were forcing upon him a crusade, a career, a way of life and a set of ideals that sat upon his shoulders like an iron custodian, grasping and restraining. The freedom of impulse was taken from him by these people who forced on him an idealism to which they themselves lacked the courage or opportunity to conform. Be true, they pleaded, be alone. Starve, but do not resign. Succeed-somehow, in some way - succeed in persevering, in surviving. But do not fail, do not fail us... He longed to remind them of the two rights Baudelaire had added to the rights of man - "the right to contradict oneself, and the right to leave:"

(VC, p.71).

The two rights that Baudelaire insists on should particularly have been dear to the heart of Lawrence's Aaron. In Nirode's existential world there is no room for steady or permanent relationships. Even to David who understands him most, he says:

"Everything is temporary for people like us. If we had thought it was going to be permanent, neither you nor I would have agreed to this kind of a relationship, you know that. You and I will always be travellers, David, and we'll always travel alone" (VC, p.91)

"I want to lash out on my own now, and whether I sink or swim, I'll do it..." (VC, p.94).

Interestingly enough, Lawrence employs the imagery of the eagles in flight to denote the independence, and self-reliance of an individual caught up in an existential situation and Anita Desai uses the image of a king kite to represent a similar
"... taking one's own life-way amidst everything, and taking one's own lifeway alone. Love too. But there also, taking one's way alone, happily alone in all the wonders of communion, swept on the winds, but never swept away from one's very self. Two eagles in mid-air, may be, like Whitman's 'Dalliance of Eagles'. Two eagles in mid-air, grappling, whirling, coming to their intensification of love-oneness there in mid-air. In mid-air the love consummation. But all the time each lifted on its own wings: each bearing itself, on its own wings at every moment of the mid-air love consummation. That is the splendid love-way." (AR, pp.201-202)

Even Aaron's tryst with the Marchesa is described in terms, underlining only his intrinsically central, male isolation:

"And now came his desire back. But strong, fierce as iron. Like the strength of an eagle with the lightning in its talons. Something to glory in, something overweening, the powerful male passion, arrogant, royal, Jove's thunderbolt..." (AR, p.301).

In Anita Desai's Voices in the City, Dharma and David are likened to "marsh birds who could not fly long," but Nirode sees his role as that of a king kite that braves the empyrean propelled by its own intrinsic, marvellous power:

"To be a marsh bird was not enough, their voices were broken and plaintive, their movements harried. One must be a king kite wheeling so far away in the blazing empty sky as to be merely a dot, almost invisible to the urchins, who stood below, stones in their fists, ready to be aimed and flung." (VC, p.72).

Anita Desai's imagery of the king kite brings in overtones of a curious defensiveness whereas the Lawrentian imagery of the eagles, suggests an intrinsic
power, though both the images, in a general sense, evoke an atmosphere of exclusive isolation.

Another tendency which Nirode shares in common with Aaron and Lilly is their escapism. There is a lot of tragic truth in the comment Sir William Franks offers to Aaron:

"My dear boy, you can’t merely walk away from a situation. Believe that. If you walk away from Rome, you walk into the Maremma, or into the Alban Hills, or into the sea,—but you walk into something. Now, if I am going to walk away from Rome, I prefer to choose my direction, and therefore my destination." (AR, pp.206-07).

Earlier, Aaron, Lawrence’s controversial hero of Aaron’s Rod, suddenly has walked out of his home in England abandoning his wife and children with nothing but a flute and a little money, in search of a life of greater personal integrity. Even in his marital relationship he has been an escapist: he withheld

"the central core of himself, like the devil and hell-friend he was. He cheated and made play with her tremendous passional soul, her sacred passion, most sacred of all things for a woman. All the time, some central part of him stood apart from her, aside, looking on." (AR, p.194) and

"He took to leaving her alone as much as was possible" (AR,p.195). Nirode, in Anita Desai’s Voices in the City, too has this pronounced streak of escapism in him, from his childhood:

"Escape, escape, that funnel cried — as Arun had escaped. As a boy, Nirode had run away. Caught, run again, and captured once more — regarding it always as a temporary arrest, merely a stage in a certain journey." (VC, p.10).
But he considers himself as singularly unsuccessful in his efforts to escape from his situation: "at twenty-four he was already admitting,... that this was no actual journey, but a nightmare [sic] one, in which one is unable to start." (VC, p.10). But unlike Aaron, Nirode wants to escape to more and more unhappy situations till he reaches the very nadir of failure. Referring to the magazine he edits, he says to David:

"I want it to fail quickly. Then I want to see if I have the spirit to start moving again, towards my next failure. I want to move from failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom... I want to descend, quickly." (VC, p.40).

To Amla, his sister, who catches him in a phase of poverty and advises him to return to his mother, who is generous and very rich, he replies: "... family name, family money, family honour. I've given up using a family name, Amla, and I want no more of family life." (VC, p.156).

Josephine in London senses an extraordinary quality in Aaron of being uninterested in the vicissitudes of life:

"... there was a curious cold distance to him, which she could not get across. An inward indifference to her – perhaps to everything." (AR,p.83).

And Josephine asks him a very pertinent question: "But you don't want to get away from everything, do you?" (AR,p.83). Nirode in Voices in the City is obsessed with trying to reach a stage like mine.
"...it was as if this had become a habit with him. ‘Happiness, suffering— I want to be done with them, disregard them, see beyond them to the very end’." (VC, p.40)

"Would there be escape then in leaving it and returning to — but no, return was as pointless as proceeding on the journey and, standing stock still, he saw nothing progress, nothing advance, but everything turn slowly about him and fall in a shower of ashes and rain." (VC, p.64).

Both the protagonists have a tendency to isolate themselves from their neighbours, though for different reasons. Aaron Sisson essentially wants to preserve the hard core of his singleness unviolated even in a densely crowded situation like travelling in a train in Italy: "Yes, they might look at him. They might think him a servant or what they liked. But he was inaccessible to them. He isolated himself upon himself, and there remained." (AR, p.238). In contrast Nirode’s withdrawal from the society around does have an element of a stigma attached to it on account of his puritanic disapproval of his mother’s guilt. Even when the press refuses to publish his Voice for lack of payment, he is firm in his resolve not to ask for help from her:

"... He folded his arms closely about himself and wished he had a bell to ring. I am a leper, he wanted to ring and call, leave me, do not come near. I am a leper, diseased with the loneliest disease of all." (VC, p.61).

Both the protagonists of Aaron’s Rod and Voices in the City show streaks of acute misogyny, though their hatred stems from different reasons and
atleast in the case of Nirode, there is a dramatic development towards the close of Anita Desai’s novel. As regards Aaron’s attitude, one can name only his excessive, and almost perverse, self-absorption and the fear of the female power-urge as the main causes for it, though there is also a considerable existential angst about him as well. And as for Nirode, the unmistakable oedipal streak in him seems to colour his attitude towards women in general, though he too undergoes moments of existential anxiety. Nirode sees Monisha and Amla as merely fellow-victims and this explains the genuine, consistent love he shows towards them. Aaron’s misogyny stems out of fear:

"This is Eve. Ah,...I hate her, when she knows, and when she wills. I hate her when she will make of me that which serves her desire... She may give her life for me. But why? Only because I am hers. I am that thing which does her most intimate service. She can see no other in me. And I may be no other to her —" (AR, pp.285-86).

Talking about Sonny’s Mamma whom he has never met, Nirode says:

"I can imagine what she is like — one of those vast, soft, masses-of-rice Bengali women with a bunch of keys at her waist and nothing in her head but a reckoning of the stores in her pantry, and nothing in her heart but a stupid sense of injury and affront... they’re back to their old beauty sleep of neglect and delay and corruption" (VC, p.81).

Aaron is extremely wary of every female he meets. Even the friendly Josephine who befriends him first in London does not escape his malicious scrutiny:

"There was a certain Parisian chic and
mincingness about her, even in her walk: but underneath, a striding, savage suggestion, as if she could leg it in great strides, like some savage squaw." (AR, p. 96)

Nirode uses a similar savage language when he attacks his mother: "'I've never asked my mother to visit me,' Nirode said, '... I never will. I don't honour that old she-cannibal, and I wouldn't have her in my house if I had one'" (VC, p. 10). On another occasion Nirode sits with David "watching the flash and flare of neon and naphtha spotlighting rapacious women in the markets, swooping upon gay saris, gold ornaments..." (VC, pp. 65-66).

Aaron Sisson is incapable of 'yielding himself' in conjugal love. He resents the power and right of possession that his wife enjoys in marriage so much, that he is firmly resolved to keep himself away in the ecstatic moments of consummation, thereby thwarting her bond of love:

"He never yielded himself: never. All his mad loving was only an effort. Afterwards, he was as devilishly unyielded as ever. And it was an instinct in her, that her man must yield to her, so that she should envelop him, yielding, in her all-beneficent love. She was quite sure that her love was all-beneficent... This was her idea of marriage. She held it not as an idea, but as a profound impulse and instinct:... All that was deepest and most sacred in her feeling centred in this belief. And he outraged her!..." (AR, p. 193).

"Oh, agony and horror for a passionate, fierce-hearted woman! She who loved him. She who loved him to madness. She who would have died for him. She who did die with him, many terrible and magnificent connubial deaths, in his arms, her husband." (AR, p. 194). "The last extreme of self-abandon in
love was for him an act of false behaviour" (AR, p.19).

Nirode in Voices in the City is not married, nor interested in any woman, and has developed a positively unremitting revulsion to the physical act of love:

"God, how I hate the physicalness of the loves of that kind of men - heavy bags of gold coins, moist pink flesh and smothering perfume. My father shared it, he was brought up to it, but at least he had my mother to keep him in hand... She's changed now, and is as vulgar as the rest..." (VC, p. 81).

Aaron Sisson launches a blistering attack on the institution of marriage in Lawrence's novel, on various counts. First of all, Aaron finds that marriage denies absolute 'singleness' or 'wholeness' to the individuals involved. He agrees with Lilly when he says: "Everybody ought to stand by themselves, in the first place - men and women as well. They can come together, in the second place, if they like. But nothing is any good unless each one stands alone, intrinsically". (AR, p.112). "I hate married people who are two in one-stuck together like two jujube lozenges', said Lilly, 'Me an' all. I hate 'em myself,' said Aaron." (AR, p.111). Nirode's deep and bitter aversion towards marriage comes to the fore when he visits Jit Nair's house and meets his wife Sarla. Their sensual, decadent love almost maddens him: "Marriage, bodies, touch and torture... he shuddered and, walking

5. Lawrence writes in his poem, "Image-Making Love": "And now/the best of all/ is to be alone, to possess one's soul in silence... Always/ at the core of me/burns the small flame of anger, gnawing/ from trespassed contacts". Pinto, Vivian de Sola and F. Warren Roberts, ed. The Complete Poems, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, p.601.
swiftly, was almost afraid of the dark of Calcutta, its warmth that clung to one with a moist, perspiring embrace, rich with the odours of open gutters and tuberose garlands. All that was Jit’s and Sarla’s, he had decided, and indeed all that to do with marriage, was destructive, negative, decadent." (VC, p.35).

Aaron endorses Lilly’s opinion on marriage on another count namely, that it can, in the case of some gregarious couples, constitute a vicious condition of self-absorption: "Egoisme à deux? Two people one egoism. Marriage is a self-conscious egoistic state, it seems to me." (AR, p.112). The young, adventurous Amla finds to her chagrin how a harmonious marital bond such as the one existing between Dharma and his extremely religious, bovine wife Gita Devi does in itself constitute an egoism which ignores even the rights and feelings of their only daughter, and forces them to commit "the terrible sin of casting out a young daughter" (VC, p.229). Amla is shocked by "the newly imposed sense of Gita Devi on the other side of the wall, praying her prayers in her kitchen — temple of polished brass and incense, braziers and hibiscus, to whom Dharma was bound, by his inhuman act of rejecting their joint child, to shield and protect from further distress and possible insanity. Gita Devi appeared now to Amla as the base of all Dharma’s actions, the spread lotus that bore the weight of the god absorbed in his meditation and the spinning out of his Karma." (VC, pp. 230-31).
This passage in particular, seems to offer an equivalent Indian religious iconography, appropriate to Aaron Sisson’s reflections on man–woman relationship in Aaron’s Rod:”. . . under all her whimsicalness and fretfulness was a conviction as firm as steel: that she, as woman, was the centre of creation, the man was but an adjunct. She, as woman, particularly as mother, was the first great source of life and being, and also of culture. The man was but the instrument and the finisher. She was the source and substance. . . She did but inevitably represent what the whole world around her asserted: the life—centrality of woman. Woman, the life-bearer, the life-source”. (AR, pp. 1

Dharma, in a cowardly fashion, takes cover, under the cloak of secrecy and solidarity in his marriage, thereby evading an honest response to the crime he has committed: He tells Amila: “There is the matter of loyalty, habit, complicity — things I couldn’t talk to you about till you married and knew for yourself.” (VC, p.229).

Another ground on which Aaron Sisson condemns marriage is the clash of wills between the marital partners, that frequently results in a feeling of nausea: ”. . . the moment he actually realised himself at home, and felt the tension of barrenness which it meant, felt the curious and deadly opposition of his wife’s will against his own nature, the almost nauseating ache which it amounted to, he pulled himself
together and rejoiced again in his new surroundings." (AR, p.191) Aaron recalls how "the love had developed almost at once into a kind of combat ... by his very nature, he considered himself as first and almost as single in any relationship. First and single he felt, and as such he bore himself. It had taken him years to realise the [sic] Lottie also felt herself first and single." (AR, p.192). Nirode watches one such violent scene in Jit's palatial house with its pillared porch and deep verandahs: and he is not amused at what he sees there: "Nirode had nothing to say. He sat through their ferocious snarling and sniping in absolute silence, like a man in a dark room watching a film, a film very polished in execution but describing something intrinsically uninteresting." (VC, p.34).

There is a queer, puritanic vein in both Aaron and Nirode. Aaron fails miserably in all the love-relationships he tries to establish between himself and women other than his wife. His brief affair with the Marchesa ends in a fiasco and he decides to own up before her the true cause of its failure: "...he would tell her that he was a married man, and that though he had left his wife, and though he had no dogma of fidelity, still, the years of marriage had made a married man of him, and any other woman than his wife was a strange woman to him, a violation..." (AR, p.310). Earlier, soon after his meeting with her, he wants to be totally free of her: "He felt an intense
resentment against the Marchesa. He felt that somehow, she had given him a scorpion. And his instinct was to hate her..." (AR, p.309). "He felt she was not his woman. Through him went the feeling, 'This is not my woman'" (AR, p.305). "You know. I think it is better if we are friends - not lovers. You know - I don't feel free. I feel my wife, I suppose, somewhere inside me. And I can't help it -" (AR, p.311). Nirode's puritanism manifests itself where his mother is concerned. Her sensual, amoral disposition is a constant source of horrifying resentment in Nirode and with the oedipal strain in his character he chides her in his reverie: "'Mother', he said - and his voice was not a child's voice but issued from his man's throat - 'do you really think that worth doing, that hideous mass of squeezed out paint tubes in your lap?' Her rich, large mouth curved with sarcasm - a sarcasm she had rarely directed at him, but then pitilessly. 'My son', she said, and her voice was like the thick fur of a winter beast, 'my son, you would have made an excellent Jesuit.' " (VC, p.27). "... his mother sat on the veranda, smiling a slow, sensual smile. Hideous to see in his mother, hideous to see in the heroine who had led his crusade. He turned over, away from her, and in his sleep groaned... Sonny awoke to hear him say, 'No, mother, you can't..." (VC, p.28).

Aaron Sisson finds in Argyle a veritable mouthpiece to pronounce what he has to say on the
money-loving, sensual wives who also want to keep their husbands under their control. He asks Lilly: "'But do you think it’s true what he says? ... Has your experience been different, or the same?’... ‘Mine was the same. Mine was the same, if ever it was’, "(AR, pp.287-88) And Argyle says: "And Women. Oh, they are the very hottest, once they get the start of you. There is nothing they won’t do to you, once they’ve got you. Nothing they won’t do to you. Especially if they love you. Then you may as well give up the ghost: or smash the cart behind you, and her in it. Otherwise she will just harry you into submission, and make a dog of you, and cuckold you under your nose. And you’ll submit. Oh you’ll submit, and go on calling her my darling" (AR, pp.286-87) "For a woman has an uncanny, hellish strength — she’s a she-bear and a wolf, is a woman, when she’s got the start of you. Oh, it’s a terrible experience, if you’re not a bourgeois, and not one of the knuckling-under money-making sort." (AR, p.287) Nirode meets in Sarla, Jit’s wife a visible personification of such a kind of woman. Once a tipsy Jit admits to Nirode quite frankly: "There are too many of my wife’s admirers lurking about, you’ll soon see them — white ones, mainly, and a few that she calls honey-complexioned..." (VC,p.34). In another cocktail party Jit tells Nirode of the incentives, he has received in return for his wife’s infidelity: "All very trite, isn’t it? It’s a silly sort of humiliation to complain about,
rather a baseless one when there are so many compensations - 'perks' we call them - comfortable, even luxurious ones, which I enjoy very much." (VC, p.101). Once Nirode refers also to Jit Nair's "rich, rutting wife" (VC, p.60). In short, Sarla symbolizes the decadence of the bourgeoisie, and Jit himself stands for "one of the knuckling-under money-making sort" in Voices in the City.

Aaron almost characterizes the type of such women: "The bourgeoisie, the shopkeepers, these serve their wives so, and their wives love them. They are the marital maquereaux - the husband-maquereaux, you know. Their wives are so stout and happy, and they dote on their husbands and always betray them. So it is with the bourgeoisie. She loves her husband so much, and is always seeking to betray him. Or she is a Madam Bovary, seeking for a scandal..." (AR, p.286). Josephine cynically regards a group of women belonging to a similar social class in the opera house in London: "The vulgar bodies of the fleshy women were unendurable. They all looked such good meat. Why were their haunches so prominent?... She scanned their really expensive brilliant clothing. It was nearly right - nearly splendid. It only lacked that last subtlety which the world always lacks, the last final clinching which puts calm into a sea of fabric ..." (AR, p.60). Now Sarla in Voices in the City almost fits in with the description of the women of this class, in
her physical appearance, and her manner of dressing: "a voluptuous porpoise of ebony flesh encased in green silk". (VC, p.34)..." she seemed to belong to the same century as her house, to that class of courtesans who had clung like bracelets, or vampires, to its wealth and leisure and decadence." (VC, p.34). Though Nirode meets her only once, he can neither forget nor approve of Jit's "large, voluptuous wife" (VC, p.60). Nirode is cynical and uninterested in the marital troubles of Jit, who volunteers to him all the details of Sarla's affairs "With a lurid sense of injury and dishonour, every now and then trailing off into an in comprehensible litany of fatalism..." (VC, p.105). Nirode, though tipsy, remains unmov ed till the end: "And here we have you, Jit, sick of your job and all its perks and the intrigues and the corruption it takes to keep it. Right?" (VC, p.107). Nirode's lack of response stems from his awareness of Jit's hopeless decadence and incapacity for an inner spiritual growth and his own puritanism: "... Nirode instantly knew this would never shape into anything at all, for there was no despair on that face, no agony of doubt and will, but merely an uncontrolled vacuum..." (VC, p.107).

Nirode finds in his own mother a similar sensual charm—primarily on account of his own oedipal disposition—and bourgeois decadence. He is intensely conscious of the tactile thrill he gets out of his mother's "water-cool palm" (VC, p.27) and "I used to
like stroking and fondling them, quite lasciviously" (VC, p.52), her "rich, large mouth" (VC, p.27) and her "ravishing smile"; "a slow, sensual smile": VC, p.28). He also considers her now "as vulgar as the rest" (VC, p.81) in "the tasteless vulgarity" (VC, p.27) of wearing "the diamonds that he hated for their undimming, electric glitter", "all glittering and vicious" (VC, p.27). The young Nirode senses his mother's corruption in the way she looks at her husband: "...she looked... at his father, and in the curve of her mouth and the sullen lowering of her brows there was so much contempt and resentment..." (VC, p.27).

But the main difference in the perspective on the issue of bourgeois decadence between Aaron's Rod and Voices in the City, is that there is no exclusive condemnation of decadence in women in the latter as it is found in the former. It's own complicity and decadence has already been pointed out in this chapter. Nirode does not spare his own dead father either. Seeing "the tawdry tinsel and glimmer - glamour" of Sonny's rich father Nirode admits to Sonny: "Oh, the father, must have been real enough at one time - very real in all that raw vulgarity... My father shared it, he was brought up to it..." (VC, p.81). Even in his symbolic reverie, Nirode looks at his father only with certain critical detachment: "... between him and his mother's brilliant territory was erected a barbed wire fence... To his astonishment, he found at his side,
also on the wrong side of this cruel division, his father, lying slovenly in the prickled shadow of the barbs, asleep, his mouth half-open, the buttons ... undone" (VC, p.27). "... all through his life he had despised his father and adored his mother, only to turn, after his death, to pity for him and loathing of that same, unchanged mother" (VC, p.64). Nirode's fear of affluence, which might result in the decadence of his moral self impels him to reject Otima's offer of financial assistance: "Tell her to go shove it up that old major of hers, all her stinking cheques..." (VC, p.134).

Thus we find that though Nirode has much in common with Jim Bricknell in the superficial, social habits and manners he also shares several deeper qualities of the mind, and spirit with Aaron Sisson, the protagonist in Aaron's Rod. In addition to the parallel features between Nirode on the one hand and Aaron and Jim Bricknell on the other, a close analysis of the characters in the two novels under discussion will reveal curious similarities between certain other traits amongst some other characters figuring in them.

The first part of this statement brings in echoes from Lawrence D.H. Sons and Lovers: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 p.263 and p.264:

6 Paul's contempt for his father can be seen in the scene where "his eyes upon the side of his father's mouth, where in another instant his fist would have hit. He ached for that stroke..."

7 "The deepest of his love belonged to his mother."
Aaron Sisson's innate, helpless sense of isolation haunts him wherever he goes. There is a central hard core in him that prevents him from yielding himself to the woman. And this inborn inclination that seeks to preserve his "aloneness" or "wholeness" in Aaron is suggested by Lawrence through the convincing trait of his "sardonic smile". Such a smile, while expressing the fascination of the character for a member of the opposite sex, also brings out the inner conflict raging within the character, and his bias towards isolation: "He sat and listened, with a sardonic smile on his face and a sardonic gleam in his blue eyes" (AR, p.316) in the dinner party hosted by the Marchese, Del Torre, as he feels very much out of his depths there. During another dinner at the Marchesa's house, when the dazzling, sensual Marchesa looks at him with a "strange, dark, silent look of knowledge", and Aaron finds her irresistible, his inner conflict asserts itself once again: "His eyes remained fixed and gloomy, but with his mouth he smiled back at her". (AR, p.294). "Something deep, deep at the bottom of him hovered upon her, cleaved to her. Yet he was as if sightless, in a stupor." (AR, p.294). On another occasion when he agrees to play on his flute for the Marchesa's exclusive pleasure, the same kind of smile, lights up his eyes: "At the end of the verse, he looked up at her again, and a half mocking smile played in his eyes" (AR, p.299). At last Aaron realizes that his
attitude towards the Marchesa is almost that of a father to his child: "Strange, in his arms she seemed almost small and childish, whilst in daily life she looked a full, womanly woman. Strange, the naked way she clung to him! Almost like a sister, a younger sister! Or like a child... almost like a clinging child in his arms. And yet, like a child who in some deep and essential way mocked him..." (AR, p.305). When the Marchesa wants him to continue to regard her as his love, he tells her plainly, though feeling awkward within: "You know. I think it is better if we are friends - not lovers." (AR, p.311).

Interestingly enough, one can see a curious parallel between the short-term love-affair between Aaron and the Marchesa in Aaron's Rod and that of Dharma and Amla in Voices in the City, for a close, analysis of the works may reveal, that conflict and self-absorption on the one hand and the essential quality of Dharma's relationship with Amla on the other are presented through strikingly similar images.

There is something suggestive of a sardonic quality about Dharma's glance and smile. Though Amla is thoroughly fascinated by Dharma, "that uncanniness, that eeriness about him" (VC, p.230) brings about an impassable gulf between them. Even at an early stage of painting her portraits, Dharma watches her movements with interest but preserves his singleness or isolation intact: "... with the faintest saurian flicker of an
eyelid" (VC, p.203). There is an occasion when Amla notices how "he raised his leathern eyelids". (VC, p.202). Even Nirode finds "that a new self-centredness was eclipsing Dharma’s once brilliantly clear and detached vision." (VC, p.224). He does not fail to notice Dharma’s "heavy lids that always remained, at least partly, over his searching, troubling eyes, all denoted withdrawal, composure, reserve." (VC, p.46). "One wondered where his veiled eyes wandered to" (VC, p.46). "Those veiled eyes of his, shadowy and saurian, seemed to be fitted with magnifying contact lenses: when he painted, he focussed them..." (VC, p.47) "his big, bent shoulders conveyed a faint and inscrutable smile on his lips, a half-lifting of those heavy eye-lids..." (VC, p.52). The "saurian" image is recurrent in Lawrence, generally denoting withdrawal or self-absorption and indicating a basic lack of reciprocation. Amla puts in a nutshell her plight while talking to Monisha in the novel: "One must have someone who reciprocates, who responds. One must have that — reciprocation — I think" (VC, p.197). Amla also learns soon to look at Dharma critically:" He smiled a strangely caustic smile" (VC, p.228) Curiously enough, Amla also is shocked like the Marchesa in Aaron’s Rod to find that her lover sees only his child in her: "You are now grown very much like my daughter during the last days she spent in my house, and you arouse in me the same feelings that she did at that time," (VC,
And despite the moments when "she felt herself to be the daughter" (VC, p. 230), Amla does not cease to think of him in terms of a lover: "... she was no longer his by blood, she was the lover again..." (VC, p. 230).

The Marchesa in Aaron's Rod herself is essentially and intrinsically 'single', owing to her own self-absorption. Repeated references to her "remote-seeming" and "heavy" eyes are made in the novel. (AR, p. 262); :"Her dark-blue, heavy, haunted-looking eyes were resting on him as if she hoped for something." (AR, p. 269). "She had that peculiar heavy remote quality of pre-occupation and neurosis" (AR, p. 266). Mention is made also of the Marchesa's "strange, naked, remote-seeming voice" and her "slow, dark smile" (AR, p. 294). "The woman was silent mostly, and seemed remote". (AR, p. 295) "A strange, dark, silent look of knowledge she gave him: from so far away." (AR, p. 294). Another quality that distinguishes the Marchesa from the other women like Josephine in Aaron's Rod is her love of power. Despite his admiration for the Marchesa, Aaron hates her urge for domination: "... she had a quiet little air of proprietorship in him, which he did not like" (AR, p. 311). "... she put her arms round him, that seemed such frail and childish arms now, yet withal so deadly in power. Her soft arms round his neck, her tangle of hair over his face. And yet, even as he kissed her, he felt her deadly." (AR,
p. 306). "Power-urge" is the most prominent thematic motif in Aaron's Rod and at the time of writing it, Lawrence was fully convinced that the woman must surrender herself to the man in her life in a 'deep' and 'rich' sense, Lawrence's mouthpiece in the novel as a whole is Lilly and he says towards the close of the novel, almost summing up the case as it were: "The woman must submit, but deeply, deeply submit. Not to any foolish fixed authority, not to any foolish and arbitrary will. But to something deep, deeper. To the soul in its dark motion of power and pride . . . . The woman must now submit - but deeply, deeply, and richly! No subservience. None of that. No slavery. A deep, unfathomable free submission. ." (AR, p. 346).

Amla confesses to her own self-absorption, ratified by the nightmarish feelings she experiences and her inner conflict after meeting Dharma, described vividly in Voices in the City. She also talks about her mother's power-urge to Dharma during their early, garrulous, gullible phase of love: "... I will read you her letters one day, to show you how warm-hearted she is, in spite of her self-absorption, how full of impulses and instincts she can be. Yet at the core of it all there is this cold, frosty love of power* - like a fluorescent bulb. I can't describe it or explain to you why I sense it, but I'm certain it is there. Perhaps I understand it because, really, I am a bit

* Italics mine.
like her, and so is Nirode, and we share this secret inner coldness and outward impulsiveness with her." (VC, p. 209).

And it is almost as a rejoinder to Lilly's theory of the need for women's submission to men expressed in Aaron's Rod that Amla's aunt Lila comes out with her own theory of the need for the assertion of women's right to freedom from the hands of men, in the closing section of Voices in the City: "Women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out. All their joy and ambition is channelled that way, while they go parched themselves." (VC, p. 221) Aunt Lila represents the modern generation of truly emancipated women, who do not attach excessive importance to marriage as an institution when it goes against the happiness and dignity of women: "My Rita broke away, I made her, and I'm not sorry." (VC, p. 221). When Amla in her infatuation says that there is a thrill in serving Dharma "a very fine artist, a very great man who saw something in me that - that directly inspired his work - "(VC, p. 221), Lila cuts her short, pointing to her that as for Dharma "He uses you, something in you that he needs. But the rest - what does he care for that?" (VC, p. 221). In fact a corresponding thematic motif of power-urge in Voices in the City can be seen in instances like Monisha's words as recorded in the novel: "... I think of generations of Bengali women hidden behind the barred windows of
half dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring aloud verses from the Bhagavad-Gita and the Ramayana, in the dim light of sooty lamps. Lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men, self-centred and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying. misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, in the old houses, in the old city." (VC, p.120).

Aaron looks back upon his love affair with the Marchesa with extreme discontent. And one of the reasons he advances for the failure is his own isolation and self-absorption: "A husband is not a lover. Lilly told me that: and I know it's true now. Lilly told me that a husband cannot be a lover, and a lover cannot be a husband...Well, I am a husband, if I am anything. and I shall never be a lover again, not while I live..." (AR, p.310). Aaron is chagrined at the very memory of the affair because of the utterly impersonal context of the whole episode, and its want of tenderness: "... Previously there had been always some personal quality, some sort of personal tenderness. But here, none. She did not seem to want it. She seemed to hate it, indeed. No, all he felt was stark, naked desire, without a single pretension" (AR, p.313). And Aaron does not blame the Marchesa alone for his dissatisfaction: "His famous desire for her, what had it been but this same attempt to strike a magic
fire out of her, for his own ecstasy. They were playing the same game of fire. In him, however there was always something, all the time something hard and reckless and defiant, which stood apart. . . " (AR, p. 318). Amla in *Voices in the City* too realizes that her love affair with Dharma has not done her any good: "There was no comfort in it, no shade or rest. Each moment and each object hovered on the brink of crisis. In her more intimidated moments, it seemed to Amla that there was something theatrical about these long, probing evenings that they spent together. The very studio, crowded with finished canvases and yet contriving to seem stark, was an undressed stage where they performed." (VC, p.209).

Soon Amla becomes aware of the falsity of her situation:

"These were the two things Dharma was unable to offer her and could not promise her - tangibility, permanence....";

and "The understanding between them was an interior volcano, colouring the water of his existence and splashing on to his canvas the tints of the upheaval within him." (VC, p.212).

There is also a remarkable verbal echo from Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod* in Anita Desai, relevant to this context. During a discussion with Aaron, Argyle and Lilly, Del Torre, the Marchese refers to the power-urge dominant in modern women:

"She must be loved and adored, and above all, obeyed: particularly in her sex desire. There she must not be thwarted, or she becomes a devil. And if she is obeyed, she becomes a misunderstood woman with nerves, looking for the next man whom she can bring
under. So it is. "(AR, p.287) and he says later," The way out is that it should change: that the man should be the asker and the woman the answerer. It must change." (AR, p.288). "But Del Torre is sure that this would never happen and so tells his friends:" "Then? Why the man seeks a pis-aller. Then he seeks something which will give him answer, and which will not only draw him, draw him, with a terrible sexual will... Because now a baby of one year, if it be a female, is like a woman of forty, so is its will made up, so it will force a man." (AR, p.288)

"These words also recall Lawrence's own in his famous poem "Bei Hennef" written on the harmony of a pair of happy lovers:

"You are the call and I am the answer, / you are the wish, and I the fulfilment, you are the night, and I the day./ What else? it is perfect enough. / It is perfectly complete, you and I, what more? Strange, how we suffer in spite of this!" Lawrence uses the same imagery in other works too.10,11

In Anita Desai's Voices in the City too the power game played between the lovers are expressed through questions and answers like in Aaron's Rod:

"The actors were Amla and Dharma, playing a sober, yet dangerous game of questions-and-answers in which Dharma's answers were all questions to Amla and her own answers, further questions. He never allowed her to question him as she longed to, and he rarely spoke of himself, his art, his family, his relationship with friends..." (VC, p.210). In his questions and in her own answers she was always seeking for something that in this


11. The Plumed Serpent, D.H Lawrence Selected Novels and Stories, London: Hamlyn, 1984 "To him she was but an answer to his call" p.898

precarious situation, would emerge as tangible and permanent." (VC, p.212).

Aaron Sisson’s love relationship with the Marchesa, at least in the anticipatory stage, transforms him almost with a new lease of life when he feels driven with the splendid power of, ‘male passion’, and a superhuman strength! "He felt his turn had come. The phoenix had risen in fire again, out of the ashes." (AR, p.302). The change that comes over Dharma, the painter in Voices in the City after Amla enters his life is also depicted only in terms of a ‘reincarnation’:

anything more than "Dharma saw in his model, inspiration that had come to him so unexpectedly and opportunely, offering him rescue from the complexities of microscopically observed nature to which he had enslaved himself for so many years, as though inflicting upon himself a discipline that was to prepare him for this reincarnation. For he was truly reincarnated as an artist ...." (VC, p.213).

Lawrence in his Aaron’s Rod compares the ease and grace with which the Marchesa sings, to the lilting maiden flight of a butterfly: "She didn’t know there was anything except her own pure lovely song-drift. Her soul seemed to breathe as a butterfly breathes, as it rests on a leaf and slowly breathes its wings. For the first time! For the first time her soul drew its own deep breath!..." (AR, p.299) Dharma in Voices in the City, compares Amla to a butterfly because of the alertness of her instincts: "Your instincts are as mysteriously accurate as a butterfly’s," Dharma told her, ‘How does a butterfly, sitting on a leaf, know
imagery of "harsh, broken voices" is also associated with the visual imagery of the "seven white geese" in Anita Desai:

"... in Dharma's paintings, each of these objects acquired a silent, pressing symbolism. Who were these seven white birds walking in single file, with ritualistic lugubriousness, across the garden that was swooning in a dense mauve mist? At night, in her dreams, Amla believed that they were former models turned into white birds by Dharma, warning and scolding her in their harsh, broken voices..." (VC, p.211). In reality the geese are doomed to eternal silence: "Dharma paused at the edge of the still pond and began to smile as he saw his white geese swim silently across it, their rounded breasts parting the pond's ceiling of paludial [sic] flat weeds and leaving a wake of disturbed glassiness behind them." (VC, p.224). It is the contrast between the joyful song of the swans in flight and the "harsh, broken voices" of Dharma's geese visualized by Amla or even their regimented silence, that hints at a Lawrentian connection here.

Another interesting parallel can also be drawn between the pair of friends, Lilly and Aaron Sisson in Aaron's Rod and the inseparable pair, Nirode and David in Voice in the City. One of the primary preoccupations of Lawrence's novel is, as has been noted earlier, the urge for power and the power-urge is discussed not only in the context of man vis-a-vis woman but also man vis-a-vis his fellow-men, for Lawrence at this particular stage of his career was seriously interested in the question of leadership. While desperately trying to nurse Aaron, Lilly thinks of the problem of authority:

"... And what's the bonum publicum but the mob power? Why can't they submit to a bit of healthy individual authority? The fool would
die, without me..." (AR, p. 119). Lilly, though a strong believer in the principle of 'wholeness' and 'singleness' of the human individual, treats Aaron in such a manner that implicitly manifests its power and authority causing him alternating feelings of security and indignation: "Lilly was alone and out of his isolation came his words, indifferent as to whether they came or not. And he left his friends utterly to their own choice. Utterly to their own choice. Aaron felt that Lilly was there, existing in life, yet neither asking for connection nor preventing any connection. He was present, he was the real centre of the group. And yet he asked nothing of them, and he imposed nothing... And there was a finality about it, which was at once maddening and fascinating... Lilly would receive no gift of friendship in equality. Neither would he violently refuse it. He let it lie unmarked." (AR, p. 290). It is also pertinent in this context to remember that critics have already noted the autobiographical element in this part of the novel:

"... Lilly, who is obviously Lawrence himself... turns to Aaron, who is obviously intended to be Mr. Middleton Murry, with whom Lawrence had bitterly quarrelled in Cornwall and with whom he was to quarrel again even more bitterly... Lawrence was more attached to Mr. Murry than to any other of his men friends... what Lawrence wanted was not a friend but an utterly obedient and subservient disciple..."

Neither does Aaron find such a total self-surrender to another man so easy or totally desirable;

"... yielding to the peculiar mastery of one man's nature rather than to the quicksands of woman or the stinking bog of society: yielding, since yield he must, in some direction or other: yielding in a new direction now, to one strange and incalculable little individual" (AR, p.337).

Viewed from such a perspective Nirode in *Voices in the City* bears some remarkable resemblance to the Lilly of *Aaron's Rod*; and David to Aaron Sisson. The same unease and vagueness that mark the character of Aaron, plague Anita Desai's David. So also the forbidding garrulousness and presumption that are the distinguishing traits of Lilly are seen in Nirode:

"David smiled, blinked. There were many things he wanted to ask Nirode, about himself and his magazine, but he could not get a word in, for Nirode was off on a compulsive talking spree, never pausing to allow David to answer or comment. David was uncertain whether this was because Nirode was truly so interested in his affairs, or was only covering up the tumult of a deep unease, or whether he was mocking, praising or envying David." (VC, p. 66)

Nirode also is well aware of his own closeness with - and authority over - David though he is deliberately undemonstrative about it:

"Nirode decided that if there was one person whose presence, even at this stage, did not revolt him, it was David, who was too like a familiar, cheerful little budgerigar, or a tough little potted plant, to be objectionable as other men were to him... he even smiled ironically, thinking that now he had acquired the power of a true anarchist, the power to attract a disciple..." (VC, p.67).

As for Lilly being "the real centre of the group", Nirode too so admirably does suit the
description:

"Once he had only to stalk into the coffee house,leonine, inscrutable, aloof, to make heads turn and young men call out greetings filled with respect and mystification." (VC, p.57).

There seem to be considerable echoes of thoughts and motifs from the conversations between Lilly and Aaron Sisson in Aaron's Rod and those between Nirode and David in Voices in the City. The Lilly-Aaron mix-up in roles in Lawrence's novel and that of Nirode and David in Anita Desai's novel is so complex that it is not always easy to assign a particular thought to a particular individual in these cases, except where it concerns the assertion of personal authority.

Lilly in Aaron's Rod suggests power-urge as a superior alternative to love-urge which, he considers as outmoded. But his bipolar doctrine too suffers from its constant shifting dependance on the need for submission to a greater soul on the one hand, and the equally crying need for asserting one's own inviolable individuality on the other, as can be seen from the following two pronouncements of Lilly:

"... Yield to the deep power-soul in the individual man, and obey implicitly... And there will be profound, profound obedience in place of this love-crying, obedience to the incalculable power-urge. And men must submit to the greater soul in a man, for their guidance; and women must submit to the positive power-soul in man, for their being." (AR, p.347).
"Remember this, my boy: you've never got to deny the Holy Ghost which is inside you, your own soul's self. Never; or you'll catch it. And you've never got to think you'll dodge the responsibility of your own soul's self, by loving or sacrificing or Nirvanaing..." (AR, pp. 344). [Nirode's words to David too reflect this dualism of relationship and isolation;]

"Don't feel you'll be letting me down by going", Nirode said quickly. 'Everything is temporary for people like us. If we had thought it was going to be permanent, neither you nor I would have agreed to this kind of a relationship, you know that. You and I will always be travellers, David, and we'll always travel alone.'" (VC, p. 91).

Lilly is categorical in his assertion that 'travelling' does not mean 'seeking', for

"You are yourself and so be yourself. Stick to it and abide by it... There's no goal outside you,... and there's no God outside you. No God, whom you can get to rest in..." (AR, p. 343)

And he tells Aaron:

"There is no goal. I loathe goals more than any other impertinence. Goals, they are..." (AR, p. 339). "I'm rather sick of seekers. I hate a seeker... "What's the good of running after life, when we've got it in us if nobody prevents us and obstructs us?" (AR, p. 337).

Nirode's doctrine is quite similar:

"All this fighting to carve out a destiny, for oneself—it's nothing compared to the struggle it is to give up your destiny to live without one—of either success or sorrow." (VC, p. 185).

According to Lilly, Buddhists teach something quite akin to his belief: "One loves, one hates— but somewhere beyond it all, one understands, and possesses
one's soul in patience and in peace — "(AR, p.128). "Being yourself" says Lilly "To me is everything." (AR, pp.338-39).

Nirode's words to Amla present almost a similar doctrine in Voices in the City:

"... I realized that the only thing I wanted to protect, what any sane man needs to protect, is his conscience. Oh, individuality you might call it, or conscience, as I do,...and you must keep it secret in order to keep it - bearable. Mixing, diluting, muddying it — that's the disease" (VC, pp. 183-184).

Lilly calls such a process "love - whoooshing" (AR, p.342). According to Lilly, "the process of love is never accomplished ... at the end of each stage a true goal, where the soul possesses itself in simple and generous singleness" (AR, p.201). Nirode too sermonizes on the same theme: "... in the end, silence and solitude, and those are the two most powerful things of all." (VC, p.185).

Lilly uses the Buddhist doctrine of Nirvana as the frequent point of reference to articulate his own theory of silent, pure self-possession at the end of the soul's journey in Aaron's Rod:

"You want to go on, from passion to passion, from ecstasy to ecstasy, from Triumph* to triumph.* till you can whooosh away into glory, beyond yourself ... Either that or Nirvana, opposite side of the medal" (AR, p.342). Nirode talks about a friend who ended up, preferring the "opposite side of the medal" mentioned in the above passage:"... you know, I once told a friend - a friend who has become a Buddhist now, an acolyte — that life lived to be a Success* only follows one Success* after the other, but eventually..."
has to bend with the arc and arrive at the bottom. And since I never was any good at going along with the others, I thought I would take the other direction..." (VC, p.184).

Once, in the true tradition of master-disciple relationship, Lilly invites Aaron for a walk: "'I wondered', he said, 'if you'd like to walk into the country with me'..." (AR, p.337). In a rare moment of role mix-up in Voices in the City, David invites Nirode to join him in his travels seeing in him a kindred spirit...

"But come travel with me, Nirode, I think you are like me, there is something in travelling that fulfils people like you and me" (VC, p.40-41).

Lilly asks Aaron a question in order to drive home the point that his travels do not mean a quest beyond himself:

"... Do you think a cuckoo in Africa and a cuckoo in Essex is one and the same bird? Anyhow, I know I must oscillate between north and south, so oscillate I do. It's just my nature. All people don't have the same needs." (AR, p.337).

David tells Nirode how his mind travels differently from the pace and direction of the physical journeys he undertakes; stressing the fact that a mere physical movement need not necessarily mean a movement in consonance with his mind:

"We've different ideas of movement, and progress, Nirode. A yogi sits for years under the same tree, getting up only to wash himself in the same stream - but his mind still travels; doesn't it?" (VC, pp. 94-95)

But David, like Lilly, is bitten by the travel bug and he cannot simply rest from travel. Listening to
the tooting of a suburban train, he says excitedly to
Nirode:

"Isn't there invitation as well? I enjoy that
sound, when I hear it at night. It makes me
think of the many places I still have to
visit-Badrinath and Kedarnath in the north,
and in the south Mahabalipuram, Mamallapuram,
Mysore..." (VC, p.38).

"I find the ticket alone answers all my
questions, reassures me completely." (VC, p.39).

Curiously enough, Lilly detects in Aaron
the love-urge lurking in the inner self and hence
predicts that Aaron would find fulfilment only in a
theosophical spiritual quest irrespective of the
religion he chooses:

"You've got a love-urge that urges you to God,
have you? Then go and join the Buddhists in
Burma, or the newest fangled Christians in
Europe. Go and stick your head in a bush of
Nirvana or spiritual perfection..." (AR,
p.341).

Nirode too detects a love-urge and a
predilection for religion in David and says:... "You'll
end as a barmy theosophist in some shady, orange-toned
mission house. And what's more, you'll be happy," (VC,
p.95).

"I am a vagrant really: or a migrant. I must
migrate." Lilly confesses to Aaron in Aaron's Rod (AR,
p.337). "I feel Europe becoming like a cage to me...
Another year I shall get out. I shall leave Europe. I
begin to feel caged," (AR, p. 338) he says to Aaron. In
a curious change of rôles, it is David who bears this
trait of wanderlust in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*: "All I know is when it is good to rest, and when it is time to go. I like to travel, that is all. It is very simple." (VC, p.94). If ever anyone wants to 'escape' from India it is Nirode himself, especially in the earlier part of the novel, as has been shown earlier in this chapter.

In one of their conversations, Lilly and Aaron touch on a "hedonistic dilemma" (AR, p.131). Nirode and David do touch on this topic "Any one who feels happy deserves to die" (VC, p.94) "There is a point in happiness, I think" (VC, p.95). Like the Lawrentian pair, Anita Desai's Nirode and David are also only presented as discussing "happiness and pleasure and the disparity between the two" (VC, p.95), in general terms.

But there is certainly a qualitative difference in the doctrine of "acceptance" preached by Lilly at the close of *Aaron's Rod* and the 'acceptance' Nirode talks about in *Voices in the City*. Lilly says:

"...we've been trying to work ourselves, at least as individuals, from the love-urge exclusively, hating the power-urge, and repressing it. And now I find we've got to accept the very thing we've hated." (AR, p.345).

"We've exhausted our love-urge, for the moment... We've got to accept the power motive, accept it in deep responsibility, do you understand me? It is a great life motive... Power - the power-urge. The will-to-power - but not in Nietzsche's sense. Not intellectual power... But dark, living, fructifying power..." (AR, p.345).

Ironically, Nirode's advocacy of 'acceptance'
at the end of the novel is based essentially on the love-urge rejected by Lilly:

"He pressed them to him with hunger and joy, as if he rejoiced in this sensation of touching other [Sic] flesh, others' pains, longed to make them mingle with his own, which till now had been agonisingly neglected. There was so much he wanted to tell them ... in a fire of care and conscience, and that they too must accept, with a like intensity, the vigilance of heart and conscience, allowing no deed of indifference or incomprehension to drift by, but to seize each moment, each person, each fragment of the world, and reverence it with that acute care that had driven Monisha to her splendid death." (VC, p.248).

In short, it is an emotional eloquent repudiation of whatever Lilly has prescribed as the guiding principle of 'acceptance' in Aaron's Rod.

There is also a remarkable similarity between the techniques employed by Lawrence and Anita Desai, in capturing the significance of the eternal flux through the still, arrested images of similar rural scenes perceived in moments of heightened awareness. Lilly and Aaron take a train into the country and experience "an hour of pause":

"They came to a little inn near a bridge, where a broad stream rustled bright and shallow. It was a sunny day ... The yellow leaves were falling - the Tuscan sky was turquoise blue. In the stream below three naked boys still adventurously bathed, and lay flat on the shingle in the sun. A wagon with two pale, lowing, velvety oxen drew slowly down the hill, looking at each step as if they were going to come to rest, to move no more.* But still they stepped forward... a girl with bare feet drove her two goats and a sheep up from the waterside towards the women ... A big girl went past, with somebody's dinner tied in a red kerchief and perched on

* italics mine
her head. It was one of the most precious hours: the hour of pause, noon, and the sun, and quiet acceptance of the world. At such a time everything to fall into a true relationship, after the strain of work and of urge ... It was something quite different from happiness: an alert enjoyment of rest, an intense and satisfying sense of centrality. .. Not passivity, but alert enjoyment of being central, life-central in one’s own little circumambient world." (AR, p.339-40)

David Gunney undergoes an experience comparable to the one felt by Lilly and Aaron in Voices in the City. He is filled with an extraordinary elation as he travels by train:

"It was as though only in flux and in passage could this balding, myopic waif from Galway find the security necessary to joy... The meandering canals, the ponds covered with a powdery mauve mist of water hyacinths, the ducks waddling out of the thatch-roofed village in an orderly line.... he loved them with a Bengali’s ardour. And the man driving out his team of oxen, waving a long whip over their haunches, the kingfisher poised upon a tingling telegraph wire the instant before it plummeted down upon its prey, ... seeing these somehow familiar figures, these symbols of a wanderer’s world, David was filled with a passionate wish that the whip may remain for ever poised above the angular haunches of the oxen, never upon their hides, that the bright bird may remain always in the air, taut and rippling with static speed and

flight, that the small boy remain always in mid-air, in the ecstasy of his jump, never to land on his feet in the mud." (VC, pp. 43-44)

In this passage Anita Desai succeeds to a considerable extent in recreating the visual and poetic splendour of the experience in her own terms, though the clarity and depth that mark the philosophical sweep and assimilation of the basic experience in Lawrence seem to belong to a greater source of creativity.

Thus we find that Nirode, the protagonist in *italics* mine
Voices in the City shares to an appreciable degree a similar philosophy and attitude to life with Lilly of Lawrence's Aaron's Rod, though in the very last pages of Anita Desai's novel Nirode, undergoes a volte-face in his vision. Even some other qualities for which parallels were found between Nirode, Jim Bricknell, and Nirode and Aaron and even Nirode and David earlier, could be attributed to a pair like Nirode and Lilly. For example, Lilly also shares to an extent Nirode's bohemianism, hysteria, boorish manners, tendency to dominate the fellow-beings, desire to escape and innate wanderlust, professing a 'love' principle and hatred for the City, existentialism, assertion of 'singleness' and 'wholeness' of the human individual, frequent misogynous outbursts, tendency to make 'disciples' of friends, streak of puritanism, abhorrence of materialist decadence, and loquacity. To a considerable extent such an attribution of several qualities to Lilly is possible on account of the near identification of the characters of Lilly and Aaron in Lawrence's Aaron's Rod itself.

It is of curious interest to note that when all the above qualities attributable to Lilly are added with three more of Nirode's features namely Nirode's 'thinness' of appearance; his extremely venomous and virulent attack on 'editors' -

"Editors are born without eyes, without pupils or corneas or irises. They have two sets of shutters instead... they are born
with claws, the kind they make for men who lose their hands in the war, or get them rotted away with leprosy. Clack, clack, the claws pick other people's brains, as butchers do with sheep." (VC, p.30-31)

and above all, his oedipal tendency deliberately imitative of D.H. Lawrence's own words in his autobiographical novel _Sons and Lovers_ - "... all through his life he had despised his father and adored his mother..." (VC, p.64) - We get more or less a figure, resembling none other than the writer David Herbert Lawrence himself! Could it be that Anita Desai who obviously shows great admiration for D.H. Lawrence and affinity of spirit has recreated one of her own literary favourites in character and spirit in her second major novel? One can hazard this conjecture without much qualms, especially when Monisha's words in _Voices in the City_ referring to Nirode, are recalled in this context. Monisha reserves the greatest tenderness for "this broken bird" (VC, p.125) and this "broken brother-bird" (VC, p.128). And Nirode's own words uttered in a moving context in the novel to his favourite sister, apparently on his death-bed would have been ideally suited to D.H. Lawrence himself as he lay dying:

"...Even that grinning, smirking, disastrous old witch-art. All art is communication, that's the popular cry of the day, isn't it? Well, if so, all art is - 'he uses a rough word, casting it off his tongue like the thick coating of fever'"(VC, p.130).

"Monisha? Well, I've given up talking and telling now, as well. I've sealed up my ears and my
mouth, only my eyes are open— but just a slit. It's
blessedly peaceful." (VC, p.130) and "Tell your
secrets, don't tell 'em, do you think it makes the least
bloody difference?" (VC, p.132). Could it be that
Anita Desai with her characteristic artist's delicacy
pays a silent homage to Lawrence himself here, inspired
by the Shakespearean tradition of rendering the
allusion to the 'Dead Shepherd' as subtle and disguised
as possible? After all, Nirode's words do sound too
grandiose for the character in that particular
situation in Voices in the City, for as he himself
admits, he has been only experimenting from failure to
failure and has no great achievement to his credit, not
even a magazine.

There are some other comparable images found
both in Aaron's Rod and Voices in the City that offer
further evidence of the connection between the two
works. For example Lawrence uses his favourite image of
'phoenix', the unique bird in Aaron's Rod to denote
"singleness" and "wholeness":

14. Though Nirode's words do bring in associations
from Emily Dickenson, in their basic content they
resemble Lawrence's unease, distrust and
irritation with the British Public, as can be seen
in his poems like "We can't Be Too Careful" Pinto,
Vivian de Sola ed. D.H.Lawrence The Complete
Poems, p.670. and "Lucky Little Britisher" The
Complete Poems, p.670.
"You can only stick to your own very self, and never betray it. And by so sticking, you develop the one and only phoenix of your own self, and you unfold your own destiny..." (AR, p.343).

In *Voices in the City*, Amla warns Nirode that such a realization of one's own uniqueness is impossible for them as the anarchistic, negative genius of Calcutta will thwart the attempt of any individual trying to find such a wish fulfilment using the image of the phoenix:

"No, my dear Nirode, there can be no phoenix in the heart of such destruction. The anarchistic genius of Calcutta is intrinsically negative. "Cholbè na" ("won't do") that is the battle cry..." (VC, p.187).

There is also the employment of the rather unusual image of a 'cretin' in both the novels. Argyle rather mockingly refers to the incongruous presence of the porter in his residence called Paradise as a "cretin", while inviting Aaron for lunch: "I'm right under the roof. In Paradise, as the porter always says. Siamo nel paradiso. But he's a cretin. As near Paradise as I care for..." (AR, p.261). In Nirode's reverie described by Anita Desai in *Voices in the City* also, the image of the 'cretin' is associated with something*

* italics mine.
'celestial'. Dreaming of his charming mother working on her embroidery, Nirode says: "In reality it would have made an enchanting scene; ... and the exquisite fingers that worked on it seemed as detached as those of a god who creates a cretin..." (VC, p.27).

There is also the extraordinary image of the hieroglyphs in the two novels under discussion. And in both of them the image stands for the mysterious communication relating to glittering landmarks connected with an undulating countryside:

"Away in the dark hollow, nearer, the glare of the electric power station disturbed the night. So again, the wind swirled the rain across all these hieroglyphs of the countryside, familiar to him as his own breast..." (AR, p.53)

In Voices in the City, Nirode is about to study the sketch of the countryside sent to him by David:

"... in the scrolled, illuminated tankha David had sent him from Sikkim, which he wished to unroll about him .. like a mosaic of shining hieroglyphs that would show him the way out of it all." (VC, p.189).

*italics mine
In both the novels the eyes of the characters who get drunk are described with the epithet 'moist'.

In *Aaron's Rod*, Robert, the sculptor-turned-soldier husband of Julia begins to drink in a party: "He drank red wine in large throatfuls, and his eyes grew a little moist" (AR, p.38). In the same party Cyril Scott who "was silently absorbing gin and water" (AR, p.40), stands with Josephine, admiring the night together with her. "... His eyes were moist with pleasure." (AR, p.42). In *Voices in the City*, Sonny's father who goes on drinking finally loses his composure exposing his own crude interior self: "... a vulgar, bumptious old thing with raw, red skin, bulging moist eyes" (VC, p.79).

Lawrence presents a rather queer character in the person of the young Major in *Aaron's Rod*: "... tall, gaunt, erect, like a murdered Hamlet, resurrected in Khaki, with the terrible black shutter over his eye, the young Major came last." (AR, p.209). Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City* presents a different Major,
who has stepped into the shoes of 'a murdered Hamlet' namely Nirode's dissolute father. Nirode refers to his mother and the Major who plays the role of Claudius in her life, in a furious outburst before the helpless Monisha:

"Ask her about the love that makes her perch on her mountain top, waiting so patiently and surely for retirement and the last wormy twisting of lust to send major Chadha - Chadha! - into her open arms." (VC, p. 190).

In an earlier context also, Nirode makes a reference to the same Major and his mother with the same ferocity: "Tell her to go shove it up that old Major of hers, all her stinking cheques..." (VC, p. 134).

The manner in which cigarettes are handled by different characters is used by both Lawrence and Anita Desai to provide a glimpse into the characters themselves or their momentary moods in the two novels. For example, the rather nervous and hysterical Josephine Hay "smoked with short, sharp puffs" (AR, p. 40). The comparatively more secure but excited Julia "sucked wildly at her light;" (AR, p. 40) "sucking the end of her cigarette" (AR, p. 39). "Julia sucked her cigarette." (AR, p. 39) As for the Marchesa, "she at once began to smoke, with that peculiar heavy intensity of a nervous woman" (AR, p. 262). Her "heavy langour" is suggested by the statement: "She smoked heavily, in silence" (AR, p. 262) Nirode's nervousness in Voices in the City is suggested by his habit of chain-smoking.
"lounged over a cigarette as though he were relaxing" (VC, p. 5). He flings his cigarette in a moment of self-pity and self-doubt "and spoke to its vanished glow" (VC, p. 11) "... no one saw the fury with which he struck a match." (VC, p. 24). "He flung his cigarette at a famous gravestone" (VC, p. 43) in a moment of recklessness. Jit who faces serious problems in his marriage "began to fret the top of a cigarette packet with dark, nervous fingers"... (VC, p. 100). Monisha senses Nirode's despair as "his fingers tremble as he strikes a match, lights a cigarette" (VC, p. 111).

There are some lovely descriptions of the Alps in Aaron's Rod:

"... It was a frosty morning at the end of September, with a clear blue morning-sky, Alpine, and the watchful, snow-streaked mountain tops bunched in the distance, as if watching..." (AR, p. 180).

"Wolves in the street could not have startled him more than those magnificent fierce-gleaming mountains of snow at the street ..." (AR, p. 185). Besides "the magazine photographs of the grandeur of the Swiss Alps" (VC, p. 20), Voices in the City also presents impressive images of the mountainscapes:

"What unutterably good fortune to have such a landscape in one's background! - the solidity of land, the thunderous glory of mountains..." (VC, p. 17).

Aaron's "rod" in reality, is the flute in Aaron's Rod, and there are recurrent references to
images connected with music in Lawrence's novel:

"He tried his flute. And then, with the odd gesture of a diver taking a plunge, he swung his head and began to play. A stream of music, soft and rich and fluid, came out of the flute... very limpid and delicate..." (AR, p. 20).

"And there, in the darkness of the big room, he put his flute to his lips, and began to play. It was a clear, sharp, lilted run-and-fall of notes, not a tune in any sense of the word, and yet a melody: a bright, quick sound of pure animation: a bright, quick, animate noise, running and pausing. It was like a bird's singing." (AR, p. 271)

Voices in the City too presents some incidents of flute-playing: "... a fisherman in a crimson lungi played upon his reed flute—tenderly, questingly... the plaintive and exquisite music of the reed flute" (VC, p.9). Nirode is particularly aware of the wind “bearing on the gem-like notes of the flute”, (VC, p.10).

Lawrence is extremely skilful in capturing the movement of the train through some highly memorable onomatopoeic images in Aaron's Rod in keeping with the musical motif of the novel:

"The train began to hesitate - to falter to a halt, whistling shrilly as if in protest: whistling pip-pip-pip in expostulation as it stood forlorn among the fields: then stealing forward again and stealthily making pace, gathering speed, till it had got up a regular spurt: then suddenly the brakes came on with a jerk, more falteringly to a halt, more whistling and pip-pip-pipping, as the engine stood jingling with impatience: after which another creep and splash, and another choking off..." (AR, pp. 243-44).

Anita Desai daringly merges the very name of Calcutta to represent the mad rhythm of clattering railway bogies moving, at top-speed through a
successful image of a similar kind:

"Calcutta, Calcutta — like the rattle of the reckless train; Calcutta, Calcutta — the very pulsebeat in its people's veined wrists." (VC, p. 41).

Lawrence uses the image of a "cold eye" to suggest the contrariness of a diabolical or evil consciousness in Aaron which eggs him on to revolt against all social conventions and the moves of society: "There was a cold eye in his brain that was not taken in by what he saw." (AR, p. 32) From Aaron's point of view even Lady Franks has such a cold, unfeeling, materialistic "eye" which kept the situation under her control as she lends her cynical ears to the anthem:

"'His eye is on the sparrow/so I know he watches me...her inward eye was on the spy-hole of her vital affairs—her domestic arrangements, her control of her household, guests and husband included." (AR, p. 211).

In a critical moment of her neurosis, Monisha too becomes aware of a certain murderous diabolic consciousness watching her with its evil eye:

"She pulled out the funnel irritably, threw it against a wall. It did not roll but lay dead, silent, the big tin eye watching her, unblinking. She returned its glare..." (VC, p. 242).

The imagery of the wind is employed in both the novels, in order to highlight the peculiar disposition of the characters figuring in them. Josephine and Aaron:

"pursued their way through the high wind, and turned at last into the old, beautiful square. It seemed dark and deserted, dark
like a savage wildness in the heart of London. The wind was roaring in the great bare trees of the centre..." (AR, p.87)
The susceptible Josephine says: "How wonderful the wind is!" She shrilled. 'Shall we listen to it for a minute... ' "(AR, p.87). The irascible temper of Nirode comes to light in Voices in the City in the episode where he shouts at the wind:
"Rumbling and quaking, the little shack leant this way and that, the tin roof lifted up at the edges, then at the centre... and so loud was the thunder that Nirode roared back at it, 'Shut up, shut up, will you, won't let me hear myself swear, you shut up!'
But the storm heaved and blew and howled..." (VC, pp.53-54).

Both the novels present a few, interesting scenes of drinking, catching certain characters in some of their most unguarded moments. The Marchese who has some problems in his marriage finds the tipsy gathering at Argyle's house the most congenial company at Florence: "Well, it is very nice up here - and very nice company. Of the very best, the very best in Florence". And Argyle adds ironically: "Have a whisky and soda, Del Torre. It's the bottom of the bottle, as you see." (AR, p.281). Jit Nair in Voices in the City facing a serious crisis in his relationship with Sarla, rediscovers his lost happiness only in drinking:
"... he seemed to have rediscovered at the bottom of his glass of beer, for he caressed it and spoke to it with a tenderness that alarmed Nirode..." (VC, pp.103-104).

As a sociological symbol 'the box' stands for the well-to-do or aristocratic class of society. In Aaron's Rod by and large, the company presented is the
Bohemian group of artists. And Aaron, the flautist finds all the people in the box at the opera irrelevant. "He looked as if he were quietly amused, but dissociated. None of the people in the box were quite real to him." (AR, p.70). Sonny, heir to a stupendous ancestral property shows his awareness of Nirode's aversion for the class to which he belongs though gloating over the power his class enjoys in the society:

"No, no, just the fact that I represent the box-wallah class you profess to loathe so much. You rant against us precisely because you realize our danger - we entice you." (VC, p.97).

Lilly says in Aaron’s Rod: "I feel Europe becoming like a cage to me... I begin to feel caged." (AR, p.338) and in response to this remark Aaron says: "I guess there are others that feel caged, as well as you." (AR, p.338). In Voices in the City Monisha detects in the eyes of the companion of the street-dancer: "...infinity of possibility in those wild eyes of his, as proud and as defeated as a caged animal’s" (VC, p.236). Monisha attributes different and contrary attributes to the street dancer herself, as though she does somehow symbolize subjectivity as well:

"And as she circled the little ring, pacing with the restlessness and eloquence of a caged animal, she sang those songs that touched, in every line, on love, on wine, on roses and on death." (VC, p.237). Monisha feels herself like a caged animal as she is not able to feel with the others the "primeval truth" the dancer conveys through her dance and she is incapable of experiencing the "raw passion". In short,
she is growing more and more incapable of living in her own isolation, "inviolably whole and alone and apart"; unlike Lilly and Aaron who want to preserve their "singleness" and "wholeness". Lottie, the wife from whom Aaron runs away is often symbolized through the image of a serpent which exercises a certain haunting charm as well as a deadly terror over his mind: "The strange, liquid sound of her appeal seemed to him like the swaying of a serpent which mesmerises the fated, fluttering, helpless bird." (AR, p.154) "Her odd, whimsical petulance hid a will which he, and he alone, knew to be stronger than steel, strong as a diabolical, cold grey snake that presses and presses and cannot relax, nay cannot relax... her will never relaxed, and the cold, snake - like eye of her intention never closed." (AR, p.196). "...her terrible will, like a flat cold snake coiled around his soul and squeezing him to death." (AR, p.195).

Nirode refers to his mother almost using the same image, suggesting the power of fascination and destruction she had exercised first over his father and then over Major Chadha. He tells Amla:

"Ask her about the love that made her swallow father whole, like a cobra swallows a fat, petrified rat, then spews him out in one flabby yellow mess. Ask her about the love that makes her perch on her mountain top ... and the last wormy twisting of lust to send Major Chadha - Chadha! - into her open arms." (VC, p.190).

In one of the last scenes in the novel, "he could not take his eyes off her, he watched her, petrified..." (VC, p.251).

Both the novels in question make a mention of woman-worship. In Aaron's Rod the man rebels against the woman's archful way of exercising her power over him in the garb of love.
"He started off on the good old tack of worshipping his woman while his heart was honest, and profaning her in his fits of temper and revolt. But he made a bad show. Born in him was a spirit which could not worship woman:" (AR, p.193)

Though Aaron does not 'knuckle under' the concept of woman-worship, Lawrence does recognise the tremendous power Woman wields over Man on account of her "life - centrality".

"Woman, the life-bearer, the life-source .... Practically all men, even while demanding their selfish rights as superior males, tacitly agree to the fact of the sacred life-bearing priority of woman. Tacitly, they yield the worship to that which is female." (AR, p.192).

Thus the dialectics, of power-urge is vigorously carried out by Lawrence in Aaron's Rod - And Lawrence by his insistence on "singleness" and "wholeness" of the human individual favours only an equilibrium and a balance of power. But Anita Desai who does speak of the power-urge, in Voices in the City, tacitly, through the cult of 'Kali-worship' offers a facile triumph to Woman at the close of the novel, almost in the teeth of the Lawrentian assertion of the power-urge in Man spelt out so clearly in Aaron's Rod. And strangely enough, it is Nirode who has been hither-to abusing Otima in the filthiest terms who yields himself up to such a mother-worship and woman-worship at the close of the novel. A frenzied Nirode tells Amla

"... she is Kali. She has watched the sacrifice and she is satisfied. Don't you
see, Amla, the satisfaction on her lips? See how still and controlled her lips and hands are, because she has at last seized and mastered death. She has become Kali —"(VC, p.255).

But Amla, who has always shown a consistent, sensible attitude towards her mother says: "Mother ... Nirode, that is all'" (VC, p.256) maintaining thereby her own objectivity and critical aloofness till the very end. But Nirode seems to be mystified by the suddenness and immensity of the catastrophe of Monisha's suicide, and shows a hitherto unfelt humility and reverence before his wayward mother: "... Don't you see, Amla, how once she has given birth to us, she must also deal us our deaths? Oh, I see so clearly now, I feel my skin is stripped away and my interior has melted into the exterior... she is everything we have been fighting against, you and Monisha and I, and she is also everything we have fought for. She is our consciousness and our unconsciousness, she is all that is manifest and all that is unmanifest..." (VC, p.256)- Nirode does not heed Amla's words and goes on: "She is our knowledge and our ignorance. She is everything to which we are attached, she is everything from which we will always be detached. She is reality and illusion, she is the world and she is maya. Don't you see, in her face, in her beauty, Amla, don't you see, the amalgamation of death and life? .... Oh, I have such a vision, I don't know if I can bear it- and survive... I have heard her approach—death, Kali" (VC, p.256).
However these words at the end, cannot by themselves turn Nirode into a visionary, or a seeker who has attained at long last his, 'vision beautiful'. For there is no particular event happening immediately preceding this outburst in the novel that can precipitate such a profound spiritual change in Nirode who has always been abusing 'the plaster gods'. Moreover, Amla's repeated rejoinders at the end of his outbursts show that the novelist wants to stress the rather abnormal, or vulnerable condition of his mind, rudely shaken up by his mother's cold indifference towards him, almost suggesting his 'death'. Only Amla is standing on the 'terra firma' at the close of *Voices in the City*.

Both *Aaron's Rod* and *Voices in the City* reject God on the identical ground that there is no real love possible between human beings in the modern age:

"Ah-bah! "says Aaron,

"The grinding of the old millstones of love and God is what ails us, when there's no more grist between the stones. We've ground love very small. Time to forget it. Forget the very words religion, and God and love" (AR, p.338)."

Anita Desai's skepticism too can be seen in her references to the "plaster gods" in *Voices in the City* - And it is pertinent to note that Anita Desai condemns a blind faith in religion, not accompanied by care and concern for the fellow-human beings:
"Everywhere traders sat beneath their plaster idols of Ganesha and Lakshmi, fiddling about their nostrils with thoughtful enjoyment... Amla watched, straining her eyes, watched to see what else there was besides this want of care, this want of will. She saw no glimmer, no shade, no sound of love. Did love exist here at all? ..... She shut her eyes then, making herself believe that love could be born, could exist, but only in the form of a little sweet, short anaesthesia" (VC, p.193).

Monisha condemns religion and faith pointing out the lack of ethics and greed amongst those who profess and exploit others in the name of religion: "I watch them pay obeisance to their favourite celestial pair, Ganesha and Lakshmi, god of Fortune, goddess of Wealth. These two I meet everywhere in this bright temple of commerce ... sickly white plaster figures painted orange and pink, crude and garish amidst the paper flowers and joss sticks, but so powerful, so awesomely powerful. Here they dwell, in these houses of cut-throat, eye-for-eye rapacity, of money greed and money ruthlessness, to bless those who fatten upon it, to bless them and not to forgive ... "(VC, p.117).

There are also some mocking references to Christ in Lawrence's Aaron's Rod. Lilly is of the view that when people in the modern, materialistic world talk about Christ, they mean in reality Judas, the greedy disciple who betrayed Christ because of his greed:

"I think your Judas is a rotten, dirty worm, just a dirty little sentimental twister. And out of all Christianity he is the hero to-day. When people say Christ they mean Judas. They find him luscious on the palate... "(AR, p.97).

A tipsy Nirode in Voices in the City standing in the company of Ajit, the decadent box-wallah under a neon sign blazing: REPENT AND BE SAVED-JESUS CALLS, momentarily meditates on a murderous betrayal of his
friend: "he decided it was time to topple Jit's shapeless figure into whatever it deserved. Should I tell you what you can do to get away from it all, Jit?" he asked slyly. 'I can help you, you know.'" (VC, p.107).

There is also a close resemblance between instances of the imagery of a 'snake's' flicker of tongue, occurring in both the novels. Josephine in Aaron's Rod "suddenly licked her rather full, dry red lips with the rapid tip of her tongue. It was an odd movement, suggesting a snake's flicker." (AR, pp.38-39) "Jit's words issued as a serpent's forked tongue, flickering, quick and false for, of course, the poison was not there but in the secret fangs." (VC, p.31).

Medieval romantic imagery is used to convey the plight of two married women in these novels. The Marchesa, though married, is likened to Cleopatra without Antony in Aaron's Rod:

"She seemed like one who had been kept in a horrible enchanted castle—for years and years. Oh, a horrible enchanted castle, with wet walls of emotions and ponderous chains of feelings and a ghastly atmosphere of must—be..." (AR, pp.271-72).

In Voices in the City, Monisha, married to Jiban yet feeling lonely, shackled by the evil conventions of a middle-class family is referred to as a "lost princess": "... she went slowly and resignedly through the poisonous bright green of the monsoon grass, once more the lost princess of the fairy tale,
under a secret spell." (VC, p.197).

Anarchism and Communism are discussed in both the novels by two minor characters without any definite authorial opinions on their comments. Curiously enough, anarchism and communism are so mixed up in both the novels that they defy any clear, idealogical assessment. For example, Josephine in Aaron's Rod is all for 'freedom' from the 'system': "Freedom, liberty, an escape from this rotten system." (AR, p.76) - At one moment she talks of a 'bloody revolution', obviously referring to communism and class-war: "'Why, yes, I don't believe in revolutions that aren't bloody,' said Josephine. 'Wouldn't I love it! I'd go in front with a red flag!" (AR, p.77). At another moment she rants in favour of anarchy: "'Yes', she cried. 'Don't you hate it, the house we live in - London - England - America! Don't you hate them ?'" (AR, p.77). Even Clarissa throws herself into the fray with her tongue in her cheek: "I'm all for a clearance. I'm all for pulling the house down. Only while it stands I do want central heating and a good cook." (AR, p.77). The lack of commitment to the communist ideology, decadence and anarchistic tendency can all be seen in the statement quoted last here.

A brief discussion on communism is touched on in Voices in the City, again as a backdrop in a coffee-house, treated with a similar deft indifference as in Aaron's Rod: "... neither Nirode nor Jit took part in
this." (VC, p.32) but they certainly are very much aware of the conversation that is going on. It all begins with Jit calling Nirode a communist:

"Communist. The word ran around like a flame that is passed from cigarette to cigarette. Flickering, flaming, it made certain young men sigh in boredom, others muse and blow thoughtful spumes of cheap cigarette smoke." (VC, p.32). "One amongst those who had sighed now stirred and said, 'One must draw a distinction, of course, between Russian communism and Chinese communism, and you'll see its the latter we'll have to deal with.' Another cried, 'the fountainhead - whether you go on a pilgrimage or a crusade, you must go to the fountainhead...'. Through all the opposing strands wound the quiet and insistent refrain of 'Better Red than...'" (VC, p.31).

And that marks the end of the disputation of communism and its ideology in 'Voices in the City'!

There is also a brief, rather uncharitable description of the Bandinelli statues and Michelangelo's David in Florence in Lawrence's Aaron's Rod: "They may be ugly-but they are there in their place, and have their own lumpy reality." (AR, p.253).
And David, "standing forward stripped and exposed and eternally half-shrinking, half-wishing to expose himself, he is the genius of Florence ..." (AR, p.253).
And Aaron also looks at the bronze statues there: "Benvenuto Cellini's dark hero looked female, with his plump hips and his waist, female and rather insignificant: graceful, and rather vulgar." (AR, p.253).

A similar situation is presented in Anita Desai's Voices in the City where Nirode comments on the
If Aaron comments on the Bandinelli statues of Florence as "ugly" and "vulgar", Anita Desai's thoughts on the gravestones are not very different:

"Nothing remained but... the staring bulbous monstrosity of funereal marble in towers, domes and mausoleums. Eyeless angels, odourless lilies, bloated doves with their beaks missing." (VC, p. 17).

And as for the "water trickling down the flanks" of the Florentine statues stressing "the undaunted physical nature" of the Florentines, a contrast is presented in the stress on mutability in the following image in Voices in the City: "The founders of the British empire lay buried in the sleazy Bengal ooze where they had first founded their colonial power. Merchants, generals, vagabonds and adventurers, their brass and gold turned green amidst their clavicles and pelvises, their swords and sabres corroded by rust. Young English roses seized once by glorious ambition and then, finally, by dysentery..." (VC, p. 17).

Lawrence evokes the revulsion Aaron feels towards the city of London by focussing the attention of the readers on what Aaron sees of the rear view of the houses in London:

"Uneasily, he looked along the whole range of houses. The street sloped down-hill, and the backs were open to the fields. So he saw a curious succession of lighted windows, between which jutted the intermediary back premises... So the long scale of lights seemed to trill across the darkness, now bright, now dim, swelling and sinking. The
effect was strange. And thus the whole private life of the street was threaded in lights. There was a sense of indecent exposure, from so many backs... So many houses cheek by jowl, so many squirming lives... It was revolting" (AR, pp. 51-52).

In *Voices in the City*, the mind-boggling sight of the roofscape of Calcutta, provides almost, the objective correlative for Nirode's own state of mind as well: "For one drink... revealed the arterial network that now spread and grew on a plane slightly above that of Calcutta's tumultuous roofscape, but attached to it by countless wires, telegraph poles, chimneys, pigeon roosts... his dark and demoniac dreams that grovelled mostly in the grossness of the city, its shapeless, colourless and grim old houses and slums, then heaved up..." (VC, p. 22).

It is only in the sharp response that it elicits from its various inhabitants that the city of London comes alive in Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod*—" How I hate this London", (AR, p. 80) says Tanny, Lilly's wife, who finds "Everything is so awful—so dismal and dreary, I find it" (AR, p. 81). To Aaron and Josephine, "It seemed dark and deserted, dark like a savage wilderness in the heart of London" (AR, p. 87). The city spells at times fear too, for Aaron: "He was frightened, it all seemed so sinister, this dark, bristling heart of London." (AR, p. 87). In another context, Aaron "found London got on his nerves. He felt it rubbed him the wrong way..." (AR, p. 158). "Down
there in the bowels of London, after midnight, everything seemed horrible and unnatural." (AR, p. 80).

The city of Calcutta too comes alive in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* mainly on account of the intensity of the response it evokes from its residents. Nirode tells David once:

"There you and I are alike, Davy. We're both terrified, aren't we... Calcutta, Calcutta - like the rattle of the reckless train, Calcutta, Calcutta - the very pulse beat in its people's veined wrists" (VC, p. 41).

Nirode says, "was almost afraid of the dark of Calcutta, its warmth that clung to one with a moist, perspiring embrace, rich with the odours of open gutters and tuberose garlands." (VC, p. 35).

Nirode calls the city "beastly, blood-thirsty Calcutta" (VC, p. 96) in another context. Amla tells Nirode on yet another occasion: "this city, the city of yours, it conspires against all who wish to enjoy it, doesn't it?" (VC, p. 153).

The strength and validity in personal relationships are vindicated by an authorial statement in *Aaron's Rod* which posits the city against an ideal friendship: "Though the noise of London was around them, it was far below, and in the room was a deep silence. Each of the men seemed invested in his own silence" (AR, p. 132). This sentence refers to the Lawrentian doctrine of "singleness" and "wholeness", the prerequisite for any worthwhile
relationship between individuals. *Voices in the City* also presents such a scene in Calcutta involving Nirode and David:

"At night the rains broke again, washing out the lights and sounds of the city below, drowning all traffic and bustle and life, isolating them in their crackling, thundering shelter and imbuing their conversation with an adventurousness... As they sat smoking and talking, the pinpoint beams of their cigarettes the only illumination since the storm had blown over the electricity, they knew they were too comfortable to alter the arrangement, at least for the time being" (*VC*, pp. 67-68)

Aaron finds comfort in the river Thames, in sharp contrast to the din and tumult of the city of London: "He walked quickly down Villiers Street to the river, to see it flowing blackly towards the sea. It had an endless fascination for him: never failed to soothe him and give him a sense of liberty..." (*AR*, p. 136). Nirode finds his comfort in the Hoogly’s gentle flow:

"On all sides the city pressed down, yet the river took one, enfolded and slid one away into the dark, silently. Nirode liked this sense of having an unlit channel flow through his veins, along which he could move in secrecy. He leant over the railing in a deep delight that this river always gave him..." (*VC*, p. 9).

There are also verbal echoes in *Voices in the City* which recall certain situations or imagery from *Aaron’s Rod*. For example, Lawrence uses the imagery of the "cold grey snake" to symbolize the power—urge in the woman in *Aaron’s Rod*:

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"Her odd, whimsical petulance hid a will which he, and he alone, knew to be stronger than steel, strong as a diabolical cold grey snake that presses and presses and cannot relax; nay, cannot relax..." (AR, p. 196). "What was there in the female will so diabolical, he asked himself, that it could press like a flat sheet of iron against a man all the time?" (AR, p. 191).

And Anita Desai writes:

"On all sides the city pressed down" (VC, p. 69) To denote the horror and helplessness of Nirode in the face of the challenges of the city of Calcutta. Similarly, referring to the male passion aroused in him, after his acquaintance with the Marchesa and recognizing a certain loosening of a hard, restricting and resistant bond within himself Aaron makes a significant remark: "As he laid his flute on the table he looked at it and smiled. He remembered that Lilly had called it Aaron's Rod. 'So you blossom, do you? - and thorn as well,' said he!" (AR, p. 301). "His flute, its Aaron's rod, would blossom once again with splendid scarlet flowers, the red Florentine lilies..." (AR, p. 313). And while describing David's reserve and sensitiveness and also his susceptibility to Nirode's sense of humour, Anita Desai uses a similar imagery: "Subjected to a spell of vicious leg-pulling, his face would retreat, closeup its pale leaves. But, inevitably, the leaves would open again, slowly and with a dull glimmer as of a sensitive plant, to receive another touch." (VC, p. 69).

There is some similarity between the description of Lady Franks in Aaron's Rod and Otima, Nirode's mother in Voices in the City. "... Lady Franks appeared - short, rather plump, but erect and definite..." (AR, p. 162). Nirode "watched the stately and precise figure of his mother parade out..." (VC, p. 251). There is also a curious parallel between the
Marchesa and Otima in the role each of them plays as an acolyte or "priestess". In the case of the Marchesa it is the love-rites that she performs, quite lost in herself: "She was absolutely gone, like a priestess utterly involved in her own terrible rites. And he was part of the ritual only, God and victim in one." In *Voices in the City*, Otima is also lost but in performing the funeral rites of her daughter Monisha:

..."She was concerned only with holding this vessel of sorrow and death. She was by no means reveling in this part she played of high priestess at a ritual sacrifice, she was obsessed by her part as only a great actress can be, to the point of merging completely with the role, leaving no division whatsoever." (VC, p. 253).

Nevertheless, the mere association of the role of a priestess in both the contexts suggests a certain automatism and definite lack of total involvement on the part of the characters concerned.

On his journey by train to Florence, Aaron comes across a fat impudent Italian fellow-traveller, who, having occupied his seat during his trip to the restaurant refuses to vacate the seat for Aaron on his return,

"a jeering, immovable insolence, with a sneer round the nose and a solid-seated posterior... The fat man sat on, with a sneer-grin, very faint but very effective, round his nose, and a *solidly-planted* posterior." (AR, pp. 241-42)

There is some resemblance between the "insolent and unbearable", rude Italian with "fat

* Italic* mine
thighs" who sits with a "rocky fixity" and Major Chadha in *Voices in the City* in their physical sizes as well as attitudes: "How helpful was this Chadha, providing her with male company and admiration. How **solidly** he **planted** himself on her little square chair, gay with Tibetan tapestries" (*VC*, p.37), with "thighs too fat to wooden squeeze between those merry little arms." (*VC*, p.37).

In the eyes of Nirode, Major Chadha too illegally supplanted himself in the seat that belonged to his dead, ineffective father: "He saw the soft, pendulous flesh of his father overflowing from it, like a mass of runny dough that she had moulded into a funny shape, a helpless one" (*VC*, p.37) In Aaron's Rod there is the stage-by-stage description of Aaron, the flautist, settling down to play his music like "setting his music and taking up the piccolo," putting the piccolo to his mouth and **blowing** a few piercing, preparatory notes"; and "... he was looking unheeding at the music. Then suddenly the piccolo broke forth, wild, shrill, brilliant. He was playing Mozart" (*AR*, p.21).

Anita Desai too presents such a stage-by-stage description of a **sitar** player playing in harmony with a **tabla** player in *Voices in the City*: "With a little tap and run of his fingertips, he breaks into the **sitar** player's so carefully constructed raga ... they are purists and play, not for an audience waiting to be

* italics mine

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titillated, but to each other, to their combined muse. And now begins that discussion, that philosophical argument that causes the sitar player to trace a dangerously complicated pattern, thoughtfully and wonderingly, both arriving at the answer with a simultaneous flourish. The more intricate the pattern, the more dazzling their performance in unravelling it and arriving at the sweet, lucid solution. More and more intense, violent and brooding grows the sitar in its quest. But the tabla is not to be shaken off, it always has a reply—ironic, reasonable and pertinent. Then the sitar flies into a passage that is surely climatic [sic]... Yet the tabla follows with nobility and heroically accomplishes an answer" (VC, p.124).

In addition to the above echoes from Lawrence’s Aaron’s Rod, Voices in the City also presents certain images which can be only called ‘Lawrentian’, because of the exclusive manner in which Lawrence has employed them in his works. One such image is that of a ‘gargoyle’:

"... Though the rain lightened, the sky darkened and in the night the sodden sagging city regained some pride, some brilliance and Nirode hung over it, a dripping gargoyle—grotesque, offensive, comic..." (VC, p.54).

It is only in the attribution of facial expressions to the gargoyle that the image becomes ‘Lawrentian’. For example, in his Twilight in Italy, Lawrence uses the image of the ‘gargoyle’ only in this sense: "Suddenly 15. Lawrence, D.H. Twilight in Italy, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981, p.59.

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his face broke into a smile of profound melancholy, almost a grin, like a gargoyle." The protagonist in Lawrence's novella The Captain's Doll finds her lover enigmatic mainly on account of his "gargoyle" smile:

"it was the incomprehensible smile on his face that convinced her and frightened her. A strange, lurking, changeless - seeming grin... like a mask." 16

Again,

"Her soul groaned rebelliously in her... he lifted her face and smiled down on her with that gargoyle smile of his." 17

There is also a reference to the "strange gargoyle smile" 18 on the face of the doll in the 'novella', representing "The strange look, like destiny".

Another image frequently employed by Lawrence is 'etiolation', usually referring to the process of leaves growing pale for want of sunlight but in Lawrence metaphorically carrying often sensual connotations of growing sterility, caused by the mechanical busy routine of a city - life which denies 'the sun' to the average individual. For example the protagonist of "Sun" thinks of her husband in these terms: "... she thought of him with his blanched,

18. ibid. p.199.
etiolated little city figure walking in the sun in the desperation of a husband's rights. And the
city-branded, little etiolated body of her husband, would possess her."

Lawrence uses the word "etiolated" metaphorically to denote something insidiously powerful, and utterly lacking in human warmth. Referring to the bully Williams in her brutish class at the Brinsley Street School, Ursula Brangwen says in The Rainbow: "... he had a kind of sickness... something cunning etiolated and degenerate... He had a kind of leech-like power..." It is interesting to note that the variants of "etiolation" occur three times in Voices in the City; once in the literal sense as in "masses of dead and etiolated leaves" (VC, p.51); on another occasion, in an ordinary, metaphorical sense as found in: "It was not a sensation strong enough to incite to action, but an insidious one that caused a fading, an etiolation of what had so far been new and young and strong inside him" (VC, p.87) and in yet another instance in the Lawrentian sense, where Monisha says: "Sometimes I wonder, would mother take back this shrunken, etiolated, wasted thing into her house..." (VC, p.139)

20. ibid. p.142.
Lawrence uses the image of the porpoise to symbolize the superficial gregariousness and inner emptiness of Pierre in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina. Lawrence uses this image to denote a perverse kind of love between a man and a woman: "We have a vice of love, of softness and sweetness and smarminess and intimacy and promiscuous kindness and all that sort of thing" whereas the "deepest consciousness is in the loins and the belly" and Lawrence uses the image to symbolize the superficial gregariousness and inner emptiness of Pierre in Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina:

"Natasha and that porpoise of a Pierre... the porpoise Pierre was puffing with great purpose." However, in his poem "Whales Weep Not!", Lawrence likens Venus to a porpoise in the sea: "Where God is also love, but without words". "She is the gay, delighted porpoise sporting with love and the sea/she is the female tunny-fish, round and happy among the males". Sarla, Jit Nair’s wayward wife in Voices in the City is referred to as a porpoise by Anita Desai:


23. ibid. p.189.

24. ibid. p.194.

25. Pinto, Vivian de Sola ed. The Complete Poems, p.695

* ibid. p.695
"a voluptuous porpoise of ebony flesh encased in green silk" (VC, p. 34). It is important to note that in the novel too, her character shows all the softness, sweetness, smarminess, intimacy and promiscuous kindness mentioned in Lawrence.

Lawrence also uses the verb 'snarl' profusely in his writings, evoking associations of animals like cats, dogs and even leopards at times. To cite only a few instances in "Jimmy and the Desperate Woman" Lawrence says "snarled Jimmy, really exasperated". Hester in "In Love" "spoke the two words with almost snarling emphasis". Anita Desai too makes use of the same imagery in *Voices in the City* "Nirode snarled" (VC, p. 96). On his visit to Jit Nair's house, Nirode "sat through their ferocious snarling and sniping in absolute silence" (VC, p. 34).

Lawrence who believes in the oneness of all the universe often attributes life to the inanimate objects by using the verbs like 'pulse' standing for the measured beating of the heart and the arteries, and 'pulsate' meaning thrilling with life or emotion. To cite just a few examples of this use, Lawrence writes, in his poem "Space". "And somewhere it has a wild heart/ that sends pulses even through me; and I call it the sun." A similar imagery occurs in "Martyr A La

27. ibid. p.398.
Mode"29 and "Two Fragments on Sleep"30. His The Boy in The Bush presents this imagery with the "sky hovering and pulsing above".31 Lawrence uses the word 'pulsing' literally in certain contexts too like he does in the poem, "A Man At Play On The River"32 and significantly enough with sensual connotations as in "The Wild Common".33 Anita Desai's use of the verb "pulsed" in Voices in the City in her reference to the Shiva-and-Parvati statue, brings in unmistakable Lawrentian overtones: "Shiva and Parvati locked together in an upright embrace that pulsed with so grand a desire, so rich a satisfaction that soon the girls, too, looked away from that inscrutable smile on Shiva's face and the taut buttocks of Parvati 'who had turned her back on the world as she pressed upon her consort her purpose and her delight" (VC, p. 147).

Lawrence himself shows a great awareness of the significance of "the lingam stones in the Shiva Caves and temples"34 in his Etruscan Places and associates them with other mystic symbols: "the womb... the Ark of the Covenant, in which lies the mystery of eternal life",35 and points out "the mystery of innate, natural, sacred priority" associated with the

29. Pinto, Vivian de Sola ed. The Complete Poems, p.194
30. ibid. p.869.
33. ibid. p.874.
35. ibid. p.110.
Hindu "mystery of Lordship" in his *Kangaroo*. Even more significantly, in deliberately attributing sensual suggestions to Shiva and Parvati in the above passage, Anita Desai follows the Lawrentian tradition of associating the sensual with the religious or the mystical. Like Lawrence, Anita Desai does not profess any faith in any established religion and like him, she too takes an almost defiant stand on the issue with her references to "plaster figures" (VC, p. 117) and "the plaster idols" (VC, p. 193). Lawrence also has the linguistic habit of referring to the eyes that are apparently open but lost in the memory of the past or the eyes of those who are self-absorbed in some emotion as "glazed". For example, Lawrence's "Glad Ghosts" presents "glaze of fear", "glazed almost fishy", and his "Mother and Daughter employs "eyes were glazed under heavy lids", "glazed brown eyes", and "...dark glazed eyes", to suggest that the characters involved are lost elsewhere and are staring simply with unseeing eyes. The same Lawrentian usage is found in Anita

36. Lawrence, D.H. *Kangaroo*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p.120.
37. A good example for the association of the sensual with the religious in Lawrence is his famous short story "The Escaped Cock", attributing to Jesus a sensual motive in his love for Madeleine.
40. ibid. p.761.
41. ibid. p.760.
42. ibid. p.763
Desai's *Voices in the City*. "...so sadly so as to make Sonny's eyes glaze at the remembrance of the Persian carpets and the chandeliers they had once held" (VC, p. 85).

Anita Desai's works at times present situations that are astonishingly similar to those found in some other works of Lawrence too. For example, Lawrence's poem "When I went to the Circus" presents certain situations which call for a close comparison with those presented in Anita Desai's description of the cabaret performance in *Cry, The Peacock*.

The feat of tight-rope walking in a circus, performed by a scantily-clad, blonde, shapely, young, woman is described by Lawrence in his poem, "When I Went to the Circus". The 'scene' opens after a clamorous shouting of the children and the rumpus caused by the animal show. "Then came the hush again, like the hush of fear". In *Cry, The Peacock* too the cabaret scene follows a noisy scene: "After the rustle, there was a hush amongst the diners, the drinkers and the dancers..." (CP, p. 80). "The tight-rope lady, pink and blonde and nude-looking, with a few gold spangles/footed cautiously out on the rope, turned prettily, spun round/bowed, and lifted her foot in one

hand, smiled, swung her parasol/to another balance, tripped round, poised, and slowly sank/her handsome thighs down, till she slept her splendid body on the rope./ When she rose, tilting her parasol, and smiled at the cautious people/they cheered, but nervously".  

Anita Desai's cabaret dancers in *Cry, the Peacock* are also particularly associated with physical exercises "...they even stamped the/music out into a kind of quick/goose-step march that rang of prison parade-grounds and jailor beats. They might have been tiredly going through the callisthenics that a necessity for correcting and improving their merchandise -- their figures..." (CP, p. 81). And significantly enough, they are also connected with rope exercises and games: "This body, that once... twined itself round swing ropes and moved through lanes of sunshine and clear rain, and was now her business, her chief merchandise in a market... could spring out in certain places at a time, lie flat in others, assume postures that shrieked of unnaturalness, toss and twist, fling itself once this way, once that..." (CP, p. 83) "Vigorously they pumped their long, muscled legs into the air..." (CP, p. 81). Like the circus audience even the cabaret-watchers are treated to the scintillating "reflection of the girls' spangles that nudged their cheeks and their shirt-fronts". And one of the dancers is so clever "that she dropped a little

spangle on the floor which she had to pick up, with a little, provocative upthrust of her rump". (CP, p. 83)
"On their costumes of black net, they wore bright spangles, and each spangle was a price tag, each price tag proclaimed the price of their breasts, their rumps, their legs." (CP, p. 85).

And Maya does not fail to notice the "weird" (CP, p. 82) smile of the tall cabaret dancer and even at the end of the cabaret she is intensely aware of the mechanistic component that has gone into the cabaret dance and plainly sees them in terms of performers in the circus: "Grinning with the acrobat's relief at having an act safely behind her, she swung past our table" (CP, p. 84).

The very fact that Maya sees the cabaret artistes almost solely in terms of acrobats shows her essential cynicism and detachment from the situation. And the acrobatic images employed in this context of Anita Desai's novel seem to be particularly tinged with Lawrentian associations.

Further, Lawrence says that in a circus the audience are

"compelled to wonder/compelled to admire the bright rhythms of moving bodies/compelled to see the delicate skill of flickering human bodies/flesh flamey and a little heroic." *

Maya also sees the flesh of the fair cabaret dancer as "a mass of soft pulpy tallow" (CP, p. 83).

Even more significantly, "When I went to the circus" describes in almost psychological terms the *

The Complete Poems, p. 445

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possible response of modern human beings to a sudden flagrant exposure of human flesh, displayed to its greatest advantage in the exalted glare of the limelight:

"When modern people see the carnal body dauntless and flickering gay/playing among the elements neatly, beyond competition and displaying no personality, modern people are depressed. Modern people feel themselves at a disadvantage, and they grudge them their circus - life altogether."*

And Maya undergoes one of the worst hysterical depressions of her life soon after the cabaret:

"Values were distorted in that macabre half-light with its altering tints. at an hour when those values would have been all-important. What was true? What was lasting? What to believe in? What (sic) reject? Danger, danger... the warning came whispering over a vast distance to me..." (CP, p. 86).

Moreover, Lawrence's poem closes with, "The children vaguely know how cheated they are of their birthright/in the bright wild circus flesh".* Maya in Cry, The Peacock puts the cabaret dancers in the place of unfortunate children who are denied of their birth right of dignity and freedom"... I am so afraid they have been thrust into it by evil uncles, or stepmothers-like female children in Japan who are turned into prostitutes by their own families, to earn a living for them all" (CP, p. 90).

Another of Lawrence's poems, "Elephants in the Circus" captures almost the same melancholy that is

* The Complete Poems, pp. 445-46
** ibid., p. 446
47 ibid., p. 425
evoked by certain words of Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*. Lawrence's poem is almost imagistic: "Elephants in the Circus/have aeons of weariness round their eyes/Yet they sit up/and show vast bellies to the children". In Anita Desai's novel it is a Himalayan bear that is being described in a similar or comparable situation.

"I gaze at this magnificent beast from whose thick coat the glass has sunk into dust, from whose tenebrous [Sic] eyes all pride and power have gone, leaving only an intent determination to remain tearless." (CP, p. 87). In Maya's nightmare several bears join in to perform a dance in order to please the child Maya: "They kick up their legs, displaying cleft feet, grin hugely and roll up their clothes and rub their bellies..." (CP, p. 89).

In respect of imagery, Lawrence's poem "Give me A Sponge" also seems to have influenced a part of the description of the cabaret scene in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*. Lawrence feels that the "obscene eye" of the "sordid people" who condemned his precious paintings exhibited at the Warren Gallery, London, in June, 1929 and those nasty "police-eyes" of the London constables who removed the so-called objectionable thirteen paintings of his, have looked "dirt" on the pictures leaving "nasty films" of "slime" on them like the slimy taint, the snails leave behind, on the surface on which they have crawled. And he wants "the clean waters of the sky" to sponge away the slime:

"... my soul is burning/as it feels the slimy taint/of all those nasty police-eyes like snail-tracks smearing/ the gentle souls that figure in the paint/

Ah, my nice pictures, they are fouled,
they are dirtied/not by time, but by unclean breath and eyes/of all the sordid people that have stared at them uncleanly/looking dirt on them, and breathing on them lies/ Ah my nice pictures, let me sponge you very gently/to sponge away the slime....48

This poem with its rather unusual imagery also seems to have influenced Anita Desai's use of the "slime" imagery in Cry, the Peacock. Maya, the protagonist of the novel, has almost a puritanic revulsion at the sight of "the seething mass of pimps and lechers, of touts and prostitutes" who have assembled at the cabaret hall to watch the cabaret, as they seemed to smear the dancers with snail-slime by just watching the performance with a lurid interest:

"... for a hundred fish-eyes that slithered over it, (namely, the body of the dancer) feeling it with quivering antennae, sliding along it as slowly as snails that dribbled white slime over the white flesh"... (CP, pp. 83-84).

The term "fish-eyes" also brings in Lawrentian suggestions of fish-like self-absorption and aloofness while at the same time implying an inexhaustible, trenchant curiosity, an anathema to Lawrence. Alvina finds Albert in The Lost Girl one such fish: "Really an odd fish: quite interesting, if one could get over the feeling that one was looking at him through the glass wall of an aquarium; that most horrifying of all boundaries between two worlds. In an aquarium fish seem to come smiling broadly to the doorway, and there to stand talking to one, in a mouthing fashion awful to

behold." And Arthur, his brother too is in no way different:"... he too seemed 'to have a dumb, aqueous silence, fish-like and aloof, about him".

Clifford condemns this self-absorbed, prurient curiosity in the human beings in his letter to Connie: "... we are weird scaly-clad submarine fauna, feeding ourselves on offal like shrimps. Only occasionally the soul rises gasping through the fathomless fathoms... where there is true air. I am convinced that the air we normally breathe is a kind of water, and men and women are a species of fish". In his poem "Fish", Lawrence condemns the fish for they have "No wistful bellies/No loins of desire".

Lawrence's "The Lovely Lady" presents a curious oedipal situation, where an old mother who looks astonishingly youthful for her age, exercises a tremendous control over her son Robert: "At seventy-two, Pauline Attenborough could still sometimes be mistaken, in the half-light, for thirty. She really was a wonderfully preserved woman, of perfect chic". And Cecilia, her niece who grows very fond of Robert becomes aware of Robert's humiliating fascination for his mother: "Ah, Ciss was not blind to the eyes which he fixed on his mother, eyes fascinated yet humiliated,

50. ibid. p.83.
52. Lawrence, D.H. The Collected Short Stories, p.707
  The Complete Poems, p.335
full of shame". 53 And in the climatic scene of the story, the mother's voice calls him a Jesuit: "... you are a Jesuit like a fish in a tank." Robert 54 confesses to Cecilia "I am no lover of women". Now, Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* too presents an Oedipal situation where Nirode is fascinated by his mother who remains astonishingly youthful for her age, exercising a tremendous power over him. She also uses the image of a Jesuit in her remarks to Nirode: 'My son,' she said, and her voice was like the thick fur of a winter beast, 'My son, you would have made an excellent Jesuit.' (VC, p. 27).

There is also an interesting parallel between the situations described in Lawrence's short story, "Mother and Daughter" and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, both serving to underline the escapist tendency in the characters involved. Virginia Bodoin comes under the excessive influence of her possessive mother Rachel Bodoin and spurns all the lovers of her youth. Now, past thirty, and no longer youthful and highly successful in her career, she makes a luxurious home for herself in Bloomsbury, and begins to entertain friends on a lavish scale. But Virginia is utterly unable to break the possessive chords of maternal love.

And Mrs. Bedoin, "never realized the hypnotic spell, which of course encompassed her as well as Virginia and made men just an impossibility to both women, mother and daughter alike." 56 Virginia's own intellectual process and her mother's eternal mocking sense of hammer-like humour gradually prove to be an

54. ibid. p.719.
55. ibid. p.717.
insurmountable obstacle even for eligible young men like Adrian from Oxford.

Soon poor Virginia becomes worn out. She grows thin and shows sign of frayed nerves "under the strain of work and the strain of her mother's awful ceaseless mind." Even the terms between the mother and daughter become strained and Virginia does not heed the pains Rachel Bodoin takes to amuse her:

"... Virginia would lie on the couch and put on the loudspeaker. Or else, she would put a humorous record on the gramophone, and be amused, and hear it again, and hear it again six times, and six times be amused by a mildly funny record that Mrs. Bodoin now knew off by heart. 'Why, Virginia, I could repeat that record over to you if you wished it, without your troubling to wind up that gramophone'. And Virginia, after a pause in which she seemed not to have heard what her mother said, would reply: 'I'm sure you could, mother'. And that simple speech would convey such volumes of contempt. ... Then Virginia would put on the record for the seventh time." 58

Lawrence's description of Virginia's absorption in the gramaphone records brilliantly captures the depression and nervousness that Virginia Bodoin suffers from. Anita Desai uses a similar situation of a character suffering from depression and a condition of nerves in her Clear Light of Day.

Baba, Bim's younger brother in Clear Light of Day is mentally retarded and psychologically depressed.

most of the time, depending on others’ goodwill and support. And he has a compulsive desire to play the rollicking music of the ’40s again and again on top volume as other sounds “startled him and drove him into a panic — the koel calling — calling out in the tall trees, a child crying in the servants’ quarters, a bicycle dashing past, its bell jangling”. The depression Baba suffers from can be seen in the context when he finds out that there are no more needles available to continue to play his favourite records: "... the sight of all the other obsolete needles that lay in that concealed grove seemed to place a weight on his heart. He felt defeated and infinitely depressed." 59

"This need for an elemental, primitive rhythm automatically supplied" 61 gets on the nerves of Tara, who stands as an outsider to the experience, and not totally sympathetic even as Rachel Bodoin does not feel involved in her daughter’s depression:

"But then why did he spend his days and years listening to this appalling noise? Her daughters could not live through a day without their record-player either. . . theirs was an evergrowing, ever-changing collection!" 62

It also should be emphasized here that the narratives and even the characters compared here are different, because in the case of Lawrence’s Virginia, a welcome

60. ibid. p.14.
62. ibid. pp.12-13
trend sets in with the arrival of a new lover whereas in the case of Baba, he is permanently handicapped with an incurable state of nerves. But the situations that are used to portray the depressions of Virginia in "Mother and Daughter" and Baba in Clear Light of Day do bear some resemblance in the common device they employ to portray the isolated worlds of two individuals with minds impaired, though to varying degrees.