

A VISION OF HELL
IN ANCRENE WISSE AND SAWLES WARDE

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"Mors tua, mors Christi, nota culpe, gaudi celi,
Judicii terror, figantur mente fideli"

(*Ancrene Wisse*: p. 123)

Ancrene Wisse and *Sawles Warde* are two religious prose works of outstanding importance in thirteenth century English literature. MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402 containing the former and MS Bodley 34 containing the latter and some other works seem to have been written originally in the same literary dialect and to share the same spelling. They were products of an active centre of the early thirteenth century and scholars like Dobson (1976: 115) locate them "either in northern Herefordshire or southern Shropshire."

The two works were written for a feminine audience: in the case of *Ancrene Wisse*, three young sisters known to the author who had chosen the solitary life of the anchoresses. *Sawles Warde*, an allegory on the custody of the soul, is, as the other works conforming the *Katherine group*, not addressed to individuals, but rather to a more general audience whose first language was English.

Imagery and metaphor combine throughout both works to communicate sensations, ideas and emotions to the reader, with the ultimate end of moving to action or / and improving her conduct.

Ancrene Wisse presents the pervasive image of life as a pilgrimage and mortal existence as a perpetual battlefield. The wayfarer must behave as if dead to this world, since "this world nis bute a wei to heouene oder to helle" (a reminder which is repeated throughout the work).

There is a long and rough road before the pilgrim, in the course of which God tries his endurance "as a goldsmith tries gold in the fire" (Salu 80). He sends illness to man, but an illness which turns out to be the health of the soul, an aid to make man see and understand what he is, how insignificant he is compared to the power of the Lord and how precarious and vain worldly happiness is. The suffering in this world is presented as ridiculous compared to the suffering in hell

God hit wat leoue sustren al the wa of this world is ievenet to helle alre leaste pine. al nis bute bal plohe. al nis nawt swa muchel as is alutel deawes drope. togeines the brade sea ant all worldes weattres (AW 95)

(All the pain in this world, compared with hell, is a very slight suffering. It is all nothing but playing at ball; it is all just the size of a small drop of dew compared with the wide sea and all the waters of the world) (Salu 80)

The author encourages the reader to overcome the difficulties she may encounter along the toilsome road leading to the bliss of heaven and advises:

Gath nu thenne gleadluket thenne dusie worldes men gath bi grene wei toward te wearitreo ant te death of helle (AW 98)

(go more cheerfully than foolish, worldly men go by the green way which leads to the gallows and death in hell) (Salu 83),

finally reminding them:

Betere is ga sec to heauene then hal to helle. to murthe with meoseise. then to wa with eise (AW 98)

(It is better to go sick to heaven than whole to hell, to happiness in discomfort than to misery in ease) (Salu 83)

In this painstaking mission the part played by the senses is vital. They appear as the guardians of the heart,² an image present in *Sawles Warde*, too, where the five senses act as the outer servants, subject to Reason—the head of the household (= man)—and whose duty is to keep the house treasure (= man's soul) safe day and night.

Man will be tried once and again in the course of his pilgrimage, and those readers who think that they are not being tempted should fear greatly, since that may be a sign of their belonging to the devil's court already. At the very beginning of Book IV on temptations,³ the author of *Ancrene Wisse* warns the anchoresses against this impending fact:

Ne wene nan of heh lif that ha ne beo itemptet. mare beoth the gode the beoth iclumben hehe. itemptet then the wake Se the hul is herre of hali lif ant of heh. se the feondes puffed the windes of fondunges beoth strengre thron ant mare (AW 92)

(Let no one of holy life think that she will not be tempted: The good, who have climbed high, are more greatly tempted than the weak The higher the hill of holy, exalted life, the more and the stronger will be the devil's blasts and the winds of temptation.) (Salu 78)

Although the religious women to whom the work is addressed are taken to be in the highest state possible on this earth, they must watch and be constantly awake, the same as the servants (=senses) in *Sawles Warde*, because the wilderness of solitary life is often threatened by temptations taking the shape of predatory animals that lie in wait to kill the wayfarers who dare travel about that way.

Without God's help it is easy to become a prey to the seven evil beasts and their young cubs. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* proceeds to an orderly classification of the seven deadly sins in their animal shape, without parallel in any former literary work. Thus, the reader is warned against the presence of the lion of pride, the serpent of venomous envy, the unicorn of wrath, the bear of deadly sloth, the fox of covetousness, the sow of gluttony and the scorpion with its tail of stinging lechery:

theos witheriwines folhiith us on hulles (AW 100)

(These persecutors pursue us in the hills...) (Salu 86)

The readers are encouraged to be strong and follow the example of those who strove to get to the promised land, to the victors' camp:

Bi this wilderness wende ure lauerdes folc as exode teleth toward te eadi lond of ierusalem that he ham hefde bihaten. Ant ye mine leoue sustren wendeth bi the ilke wei toward te hehe ierusalem .the kinedom that he haueth bihaten his icorene (AW 101)

(Through the wilderness Our Lord's people went to the blessed Land of Jerusalem, which He had promised to them. And you, my dear sisters, go by the same path to the heavenly Jerusalem, the kingdom which He has promised to His elect.) (Salu 86)

Even such prominent figures as St. Benedict or St. Antony had to withstand the devil's thrusts, but they resisted all those temptations and therefore were awarded the victors' crown. The image of purification by fire is again present as a help to the reader's understanding of the need of keeping their soul unspotted:

Als wa as the goltsmith cleanseth that gold i the fur. als wa deth godd te sawle i fur of fondunge (AW 121)

(just as the goldsmith purifies gold in the fire, so God does the soul, in the fire of temptation.) (Salu: 104)

Those who wish to be crowned must beforehand strive with all their strength and will against these three enemies: the world, themselves and the devil. The fight may be

harsh and the reader may feel weakened at times and even on the point of giving up. Then the author of *Ancrene Wisse* advises:

betere is forte tholien thurst, then to beon iattret. let lust ouergan. ant hit te wule eft likin. Hwil the yicchunge least hit thuncheth god to gnuddin. ah threfter me feleth hit bitterliche smeorten (AW 123)

(It is better to endure thirst than to be poisoned. Let the desire pass, and later you will be glad. Scratching may seem a good thing if one is itching, but later one feels the bitter smart.) (Salu 106)

One must not throw away one's weapons until victory is a given fact. Only after having made sure that the devil's army has been defeated can one leave those weapons for a while and in his rest thank God for His help. The pain and humiliation are conceived as providing a training in self-control and the fuller use of the higher powers. The crown of everlasting life is to be worn by those who go into strict training. Many a holy man in medieval times is called *athleta* or *agonista Dei*. The eremitical life is presented to the reader not as a state of acquired grace, but as a progress towards sanctification. After so much hardship and long labour one finds great ease and can enjoy the sweetness of that rest. If, on the contrary, one is not watchful, he is asking to be wounded with the wounds of hell. When one gives in to temptations, the sinner is dead in the eyes of God. But for the devil he lives and serves in his court.

In *Sawles Warde* Fear of Death, Death's messenger, comes to warn the four cardinal virtues of Death's arrival. He has come "to frighten those who are too bold and encourage the careless to stay more alert." His physical appearance seems to be an admonition of what is to arrive after him, and even a first image of the nature of the place he has come from, hell:

for lonc he is ant leane, ant his leor deathlich. ant blac ant elheowet. ant euch her thuncheth thet stont in his heaved up (SW 169, l.3-5)

(he is tall and thin, and his face is deathlike and pale and livid, and every hair in his head seems to be standing on end) (Millet 89)

His depiction of hell to the four daughters of God presents a vast and "illimitably deep" space, where enough room is provided for the exercise of the most hideous tortures that humans can ever think of. The reader is led to imagine it as an everlasting burning place of such dimensions that it cannot possibly be compared with any earthly fire.

The sensations described and the limited range of colours seem to transcend the text and involve the reader, so effective are the brush strokes of this picture. Thus, hell is

ful of stench untholelich. for ne mahte in eorthe na cwic thing hit tholien (SW 170, l. 22)

(full of intolerable stench, for no living thing on earth could tolerate it.) (Millet 91)

The darkness there is so thick that it can be grasped, a choking smoke blinds the eyes of those who are there, and there seems to be a clear preponderance of black items which helps to emphasize the idea of darkness, blindness and total lack of light—which corresponds rather with descriptions of heavenly bliss and the joy of sharing God's riches—. Therefore, according to Fear, "black things can be seen in that black darkness," things which are identified later as devils whose leader is also "the black devil."

The actions carried out by them are endowed with a remarkable charge of violence: "devils beat" those souls, "the fire consumes them," "they are boiled in the pitch," they suffer the "heavy blows of the devils' steel-bound clubs," and are "tossed by them," "with red-hot flesh-hooks." This dreadful picture of the house of death is moreover aided by the presence of most loathsome and horrifying animals, whose actions and movements speak for themselves: "dragons with tails swallow" the souls and "vomit them out again" or "tear them to pieces" and "chew up every fragment." The climax, as it were, of this apocalyptic vision is achieved when the series of worms and reptiles appear on stage:

the lathe helle-wurmes, tadden ant froggen, the freotieth ham ut te ehnen ant te nease- gristies. ant sniketh in ant ut nedden ant eaurokes . . . et muith ant et earen, ed ehnen ant ed neauele ant ed te breoste holke, as meathen i forrotet flesch . . . (SW 172, l.5-11)

(creeping things of hell, toads and frogs, gnaw out their eyes and the gristle of their noses . . . adders and water-frogs crawl in and out through mouth and ears, through eyes and navel and the hollow of the chest, like maggots in rotten flesh) (Millet 93)

The souls of those who, living on earth did not protect their house from the vices and wiles of the devil, now, in the depths of hell, have to suffer this pitiable and terrible sight: unholy "spirits of hideous shapes," of "savage and terrible faces," they have to stand "their roaring" and are thrown now to the fire, then to the icy waters:

thet fur ham forbearneth al to colen calde, thet pich ham forwalleth ather ha beon formealte . . . and eft acwikeith anan to drehen al thet ilke, ant muche deale wurse, a withuten ende (SW 172, l. 17-20)

(suddenly they shift from the heat to the cold, and they never know which of the two seems worse to them . . . each state gives more pain because of what went before.) (Millet 93)

Alliteration, a device so commonly used not only in *Sawles Warde*, but also in the other works belonging to the *Katherine group*, helps to make the picture even more vivid, supporting the different sensations felt throughout the passage. Thus, we find:

Se thicke is thrinne the thosternesse (SW 171, l.18)

where the repetition of the dental fricative reinforces the idea of thickness and helps to evoke the difficulty implied to see in such a dense darkness;

a smorðride smoke smeche forcuðest (SW 171, l.21)

where the alveolar fricative *s* adds up to the sensation that something is in the air, that something volatile is in the atmosphere.

To a swuch bale bute bote (SW 171, l. 3)

The repetition of the bilabial *b* reinforces the idea that the souls in hell will have to face the same suffering once and again.

To grisle ant to grure (SW 171, l.4-5)

The cluster *gr* may lead the reader to think of the verb *groan*, with its connotations of pain, suffering, and the like.

fforrotet flesch (SW 172, l.11)

Just as the air escapes in the production of the labio-dental fricative *f*, its presence may indicate that something is in the process of vanishing, of disappearing.

Ferliche ha fluted from the heate (SW 172, l.13)

Again the idea that something is fading; here it is the victims that are consuming.

Ich hefde a thusent tungen of stele ant talde (SW 173 l.6)

With the repetition of the plosive *t* the author may have tried to sound very impressive, very straightforward in order to dissuade

Ant heren hare rarunge. ant hu ha wið hokeres (SW 173, l.18)

In this line, with the constant presence of the glottal fricative *h* the reader may experience himself an echo of their voices in the form of a threatening whisper at the back of his mind.

Later on a succession of pairs of words showing alliteration confirms the fondness of the author for this "special effect," at hand to the medieval writer:

wununge of wanunge (SW 173, l.24),
of grure ant of granunge (SW 173, l.25)
heatel ham (SW 173, l.1)
buri of boles ant bold of eauer-euch bitternesse (SW 173, l.1-2)
ladest lont (SW 173, l.2)
grisle ant of grure (SW 174, l.4)

Quite a few adjectives throughout the passage show themselves as unusually expressive, carrying their qualities to their most:

wið wiðute met (SW 90, l.26)
deop wiðute grunde (SW 90, l.26)
brune uneuenlich (SW 90, l.26)
stench untholelich (SW 90, l.28)
sorhe untalelich (SW 90, l.29)
smeche forcuðest (SW 90, l.32)
meast pine (SW 92, l.14)
ladest lont (SW 94, l.3)

Occasionally the use of hyperboles is present also:

Se thicke is thrinne the thosternesse that me hire mei grapin (SW 90, l.30)

(The darkness there is so thick that it can be grasped) (Millet 91)

Or contradictions of the sort

thet fur ne geueð na liht, ah blent ham the ehnen the ther beoð (SW 90, l. 31)

(that fire gives no light, but blinds the eyes of those who are there.) (Millet 91, l. 32)

All these devices contribute to present the vision more vividly. The work was written to be read aloud, in such a way that as sounds are repeated they emphasize this or that sensation, evoke this or that idea, and the reader builds up a picture in his mind which is at the time supported by the aid of such suggestive sounds. The reader therefore becomes more immersed in the text and is more liable to act and behave according to the warning here presented (the primary aim of the author of *Sawles Warde*). In this way this device used to persuade is successful.

This is the threatening future that awaits the reader of *Sawles Warde* that does not withstand the fiend. However hard the latter might try to shoot at one with riches and worldly pleasure one must be strong enough and not lessen his faith in God. The painful destiny which awaits those who are not ready on Death's arrival is already foreseen —although in a very concise form— in the Gospels (St. Matthew 22.13-14).

The bitterness and sorrow predicted are such, that the author of *Sawles Warde* concludes:

the swuch wununge ofearneth for ei hwilinde blisse her o thisse worlde, wel were him yef thet he neauer ibore nere (SW 174, l. 9-11)

(the man who earns such a home for any passing pleasure here in this world, it would be better for him if he had never been born.) (Millet 95)

And then the moral of the story follows, in the words of Prudence:

yef we wel werieth ant witeth ure hus, ant Godes deore tresor thet he haueth bitaht us, cume Deaith hwen ha wule (SW 174, l. 19-21)

(If we defend and protect our house well, and God's precious treasure which he has entrusted to us, let Death come when she will.) (Millet 95)

Ancrene Wisse develops the theme of temptation and its outcome in Book IV. Here the author presents the reader with an original parade of the seven deadly sins, each of them bearing the shape of a dangerous beast which threatens the wellbeing of the human soul, aided moreover by their numerous whelps.

When man gives in to any of the vices mentioned, that is, once the seven beasts in the wilderness of solitary life and their offspring have attacked and killed the sinner, he is given an office at the devil's court and his function there will be one according to his most particular sin. In this way man is brought down from his former place of dignity in the hierarchy of God's created world to the figure of a slave in the lower world of hell. The "evil physician of hell" (the devil) will be the king of this court and will keep on laughing and laughing at the stupidity of his trapped victims.

The order in which the sinner-courtiers are presented coincides exactly with that kept before for the listing of the seven deadly sins. Thus, the first of these being the Lion of Pride, we first find at the devil's court *the proud*, who play the role of trumpeters: they draw in wind with worldly praise and then blow it out in a vain boasting.

The envious (those who have been stung by the Serpent of Envy, which came second) are the jesters, who make faces or twist their mouths out of shape to make their lord laugh.

The slothful sleep in the devil's bosom and welcome his teachings.

The covetous are cinder-jacks who heap together many heaps of ashes, blow them up and blind themselves with them, causing the devil to laugh until he bursts.

The greedy gluttons are the devil's manacles but they are always in the cellar or the kitchen, thinking of food and drink.

The lechers are called by their proper name. They have lost their shame completely, and defile themselves as well as their companions. With their stinking smell they give more pleasure to the "deceiver of hell" than any sweet incense could do.

All these sinners constitute the devil's court where, as we have seen, they are servants, buffoons and victims to their lord. When Doomsday comes they will suffer the wounds of the same vices which made them stand out while on earth. The warning appears clearly at the beginning of Book IV in *Ancrene Wisse*:

Godd schal o domesdei don as thah he seide. Dohter hurte thes the. dude he the spumen i wreadde oder in heorte sar. i scheome oder in eani teone. loke dohter loke he seið hu he hit scahl abuggen. Ant ther ye schule seon bunkin him wið thes deoffles betles thet wa bið him thes liues. (AW 97)

(On the day of judgement God will act as though He were saying: "Daughter, did this man injure you? Did he make you stumble into anger or grief of heart,

into shame or any vexation? Look, daughter, see how he shall pay for it." And there you shall see him beaten with the devil's mallets until he wishes he had not been born.) (Salu 82)

All the dead will rise that day and will be judged, and their misbehaviour will be severely punished. Thus, the author foretells:

na prud bemere ne schal beon iborhen (AW 109)
(no proud trumpeter shall be saved.) (Salu 94)

About the envious (jesters at the devil's court):

theos bodieð biuoren hu the eateliche deofflen schulen yet ageasten ham wið hare grennung. ant hu ha schulen ham seolf grennin ant niuelin ant makien sur semblant for the muchele angoise i the pine of helle (AW 110)

(They foreshadow beforehand how they themselves will later be terrified by the grimaces of loathsome devils and how they themselves will twist and distort their features, grimacing from their great suffering in the torment of hell.) (Salu 94)

The "reward" of the wrathful (knife-throwers) is described as follows:

the deofflen schulen pleien wið him mid hare scharpe eawles. skirmi wið him abuten ant dusten ase pilche clut euch toward oder. ant wið helle sweordes asneasen him thurh ut. thet beoð kene ant eateliche ant keoruinde pinen (AW 110)

(the devils will play with him with their sharp hooks, they will juggle about with him and fling him from one to another like a piece of old fur, and thrust him through with the swords of hell, that is, with sharp, fierce, piercing tortures.) (Salu 95)

The slothful will be fiercely awakened by the terrible sound of the angels' trumpets and will keep an everlasting vigil in hell. The covetous (cinder-jacks) will have a loathsome destiny, too:

Ant al thet he rukeleð ant gedereð to gederes. ant ethalt of ei thing thet nis bute esken mare then hit needed. schal in helle wurðen him tadden ant nedden (AW 111)

(All that he heaps up and gathers together and keeps for himself, more than is necessary, of anything that is thus mere ashes, shall turn into so many toads and adders for him in hell.) (Salu 95)

God's threat to the greedy glutton is:

gef the kealche cuppe wallinde bres to drinken. geot in his wide throte thet he swelte inwið. agein an gef him twa (AW 111)

(Give the tosspot boiling brass to drink! Pour it into his open throat that he may die from within. For every one, give him two.) (Salu 96)

And finally the lechers will have to suffer their own unbearable stench in the lower world:

Ant he schal bidon ham. pinin ham wið eche stench i the put of helle (AW 112)

(he [the devil] shall defile them and torture them with everlasting stench in the pit of hell) (Salu 96)

God is shown at this moment as a stern Father who does not allow the sinners to go away without their corresponding punishment. Those men who have been seized by the seven deadly sins, who have "married the seven hags," are to be greatly hated and shunned. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* makes use of some persuasive devices to convince his readers that the path leading to God is other but this one.

This depiction of hell abounds in references to movements of a violent sort: jesters *twist* their mouths, *squint* their eyes, make ugly faces, *grimace* and *distort* their features; the devils *juggle*, *fling* and *thrust* the sinners here and there and the lord devil *bursts* with laughter.

The instruments of torture are all sharp objects, to inflict the more pain: there appears a succession of swords and knives, sharp and cutting swords, sharp point, sharp hooks, all of them conforming "sharp, piercing tortures."

To this monstrous spectacle contributes the presence of such loathsome creeping creatures as those found in *Sawles Warde*: toads, adders and worms, but the reference to them is short this time, the unpleasant sensations being moreover concentrated in the repetition mainly of smell and sounds: lechers stink, theirs is a "stinking smell," a stench; reference is made to a rotting corpse, a terrible sound and the loathsome quality of the devils.

Bearing all these items together it is not difficult to understand that the sinners are terrified when aware of their painful fate, although the vision of hell as depicted in *Ancrene Wisse* seems at first sight not so dreadful and threatening as the one presented in *Sawles Warde*. The former comes as one coherent scene with many actors, the interest being focused on the evil actions of the devil's courtiers and the just payment they get at the Last Judgement. The vision in *Sawles Warde* appeals more to the reader's senses: sounds, colours, awful creatures, disgusting actions and movements. The author's major aim is to move the reader in an only possible way: listening to Fear of Death and keeping watchful over her soul, the most precious treasure she has been endowed with. His is a sort of alarm through which he intends to see an immediate action on the part of the reader, since this seems to be the real aim of his work.

The picture of hell in *Ancrene Wisse* is not so apocalyptic. The author trusts his audience:

ye beoð ful feor from ham (AW 112)

(You yourselves are very far from them [= the seven deadly sins]) (Salu 97)

But he does have to warn them against these vices and their cubs, lest any forgets the painful consequences of giving up in the continuous strife against "the bright, shining devil."

In spite of these serious warnings on no account do these two works offer the reader a hopeless future: *Sawles Warde* introduces after the vision of hell a joyful messenger, "handsome and noble and finely dressed"; he is Love of Life, the messenger of Joy, who comes from heaven to cheer the four daughters of God and the servants (= the senses) of the house. He comforts them by saying that they need have no fear, since they will be aided by God. He tells them, moreover, what heaven looks like and the bliss one can enjoy there. Then Fortitude puts Fear of Death to flight and asks Love of Life to stay with them, deciding (advice that should be taken by the readers):

Ich am siker ine Godd that ne schal lif ne deð, ne wa ne wunne nowder, todealen us ant his luue that al this us haweð igarket. yef we as treowe tresurers witeð wel his tresor that is bitaht us to halden, as we schulen ful wel under his wengen (SW 185, l. 23-27)

(I am sure in God that neither life nor death, sorrow nor joy, will separate us from the love of him who has prepared all this for us, if we as faithful treasurers guard well the treasure he has entrusted to our keeping.) (Millet 107)

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* lists a number of comforts and remedies for those who give in to temptation. The main remedy of all, outstanding among the others is Confession. The absolution following it heals the soul and helps it get to its former state of purity and health. To this is Book V entirely devoted, as a perfect continuity in the development of human actions, wrongdoings and problem solvings. Therefore there is also a hope at the reader's hand: the humble recognition of her mistakes and her sincere intention not to sin again. The presence of a chapter fully devoted to confession is within the trend of thirteenth century England: the decrees of the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215 encouraged greatly the production of manuals of confession and *Ancrene Wisse* has this kind of manual among its eight books or chapters.

But the prime concern of Book IV was to inform the reader on the many temptations that threat her soul and the pervasive warning of ever keeping watchful, this being also the main concern of its contemporary work *Sawles Warde*. Both repeat along their pages that pain or comfort on earth, the path of our pilgrimage, is only but a shadow of what is to come after death:

of theos fikeline world. ne of hire false blisse: ne neome we neuwer yeme. for al thei is on eorðe. nis bute as a schadewe (SW 174, l.23-25)

(Let us not be concerned about this false world or its specious happiness, since everything on earth is only like a shadow.) (Millet 95)

Wa ant wunne i this world al nis bute peintunge. al nis bute schadewe (AW 124)

(Pain and joy in this world are the merest painting, shadows simply.) (Salu 107)

NOTES

1. Hereafter (in parenthetical references) *AW* = *Ancrene Wisse*; *SW* = *Sawles Warde*.

2. This is an extension of the *De Anima*, a work attributed to Hugh of St. Victor which is considered as one of the sources of *Ancrene Wisse*.

3. Two kinds of temptations are presented: inner and outer. All must be overcome and turned into a source of new strength. An account of the Seven Deadly Sins helps illustrate the quality and variety of the inner temptations. A remedy for each of them is accordingly suggested, but the general and best remedy against sin is Confession, the main theme of Book V, immediately following the present one.

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REFUNCTIONALISING THE PAST: SALMAN RUSHDIE'S RE-WRITING OF THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NOVELISTIC CONVENTIONS IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

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Of the five types of transtextuality which Genette's study provides (1982), two seem to stand out above the rest: *hypertextuality* and *archtextuality*. The former, which is defined as the relation between a text B (hypertext) and a text A (hypotext), established through transformation or imitation (1982: 11-12), has characterised most of the transtextual analyses carried out on *Midnight's Children* (Bader 1984; Reimenschneider 1984; Batty 1987; Cronin 1987; Alexander 1990). It is the intention of this paper to carry out an archtextual analysis, that is, one which takes into account the generic status of a text (1982: 11). It seems only right that *Midnight's Children* be the subject of a wide variety of intertextual approaches, a fact fully endorsed by its inclusion within the postmodern movement: a true postmodern novel "keeps one foot always in the narrative past" (Barth, 1984: 204), it "confronts the past of literature" (Hutcheon, 1989: 118). Hutcheon, closely following Barthes and Eco, reinforces the essential role of past texts (both historical and fictional) in contemporary fiction, which she defines as the "parodically doubled discourse of postmodernist intertextuality" (1989: 128). Thus, parody becomes from the very beginning a fundamental feature when analysing postmodern fiction: