

Raguel and Ragnel: Notes on the Literary Genealogy of a Devil

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IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH POEM *Patience*, Jonas is described as sleeping in the hold of his stormtossed ship while the sailors and his fellow passengers desperately try so save the ship by bailing, throwing overboard their luggage, and praying to the god of their choice. Eventually the wisest among them, close to despair, suggests that they cast lots to see if one among them has “greued his god (171).”¹ At this point one of the sailors undertakes to look for the men on board and bring them to the lot.

Bot him fayled no freke þat he fynde myzt,
Saf Jonas þe jwe, þat jowked in derne;
He watz flowen for ferde of þe flode lotes
In-to þe bopem of þe bot, and on a brede lyggede,
On-helde by þe hurrok, for þe heuen wrache,
Slypped vpon a sloumbe-selepe, and sloberande he routes.
Þe freke hym frunt with his fot and bede hym ferk vp;
Der Ragnel in his rakentes hym rere of his dremes! (181–188)

The last line in the passage, specifically the reference to “Ragnel in his rakentes” raises some interesting problems. The first is simply paleographical — the fourth letter of the name Ragnel is ambiguous in the manuscript and various editors have taken it either as “u” or “n.” Gollancz suggests that the name might actually be “Raguel” and points out that Raguel was one of the names of the seven angels who guard over the earth in the pseudo-epigraphal *Book of Enoch*.² Anderson, the most recent editor of *Patience* comments on the problem as follows:

Bateson reads *Raguel*, following Gollancz in his first edition, but *Raguel* is not found as a devil’s name elsewhere in ME., while *Ragnel* is attested at least three times, in the Digby play of *Mary Magdalen* 1200 (EETS. ES. 70), in some MSS. of the Chester play of *Balaam* (EETS. ES. 62, p. 91, footnote), and in the Chester play of *Antichrist* 655 (EETS. ES. 115). In the *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, Dame Ragnell is a ‘loathly hag’ possessed of supernatural powers. *Raguenele de Moncler* occurs as the name of a Saracen King in the OF. *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne* 1059 (ed. J. Couraye

¹ All quotations are from *Patience*, ed. J. J. Anderson (Manchester, 1969) by line numbers unless otherwise cited.

² Israel Gollancz, *Patience*, second ed. (London, 1924), p. 41.

du Parc, Paris 1884), suggesting that it is through the Charlemagne stories that the name comes into ME., although it does not appear to be found in any of the extant ME. stories.³

While Anderson's argument establishes the fact that it is at least quite possible that the Pearl-poet or the scribe intended to write Ragnel rather than Raguel, he does not discuss the history of the name except by suggesting briefly (and tentatively) that the name might be derived from Old French epic. But I think it is possible to trace the literary genealogy of the devil Ragnel or Raguel; and this genealogy is I think relevant to the problem which the text presents, and is of some interest in the context of the historical development of medieval popular religious culture.

Raguel is, as I have already mentioned, named as one of the seven archangels in the *Book of Enoch*. In that work the names and the functions of the seven archangels are described as follows:

And these are the names of the holy angels who watch. Uriel, one of the holy angels, who is over the world and over Tartarus. Raphael, one of the holy angels, who is over the spirits of men. Raguel, one of the holy angels who takes vengeance on the world of the luminaries. Michael, one of the holy angels, to wit, he that is set over the best part of mankind and over chaos. Saraqael, one of the holy angels, who is set over the spirits, who sin in the spirit. Gabriel, one of the holy angels, who is over Paradise and the serpents and the Cherubim. Remiel, one of the holy angels, whom God set over those who rise.⁴

While the *Book of Enoch* was not widely known in the west in the way in which various apocryphal New Testament books were, it apparently was known and had considerable influence on early Irish Christian culture. At any rate there seems to have developed a fairly widespread *cultus* devoted to the seven archangels; prayers to them are preserved in a variety of Irish and Irish-Latin texts, and such prayers are also attested in Anglo-Latin liturgical and religious documents.⁵ A full survey of this problem

³ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴ *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford, 1913) II, 201.

⁵ For a recent convenient survey of the influence of the Book of Enoch on Old English literature see R. E. Kaske, "Beowulf and the Book of Enoch," *Speculum* 46 (1971) 422-423. For the influence of the Book of Enoch in Ireland see St. John D. Seymour, "Notes on Apocrypha in Ireland," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 37 (1924-197), 107-117. On the specific problem of Enochian archangels see M. R. James, "Names of Angels in Anglo-Saxon and other Documents," *JTS* 11 (1909-10) 569-571 and R. E. McNally, *The Bible in the Early Middle Ages* (Westminster Md., 1959) pp. 26-28. A full listing of instances of this motif would be superfluous at this point; but for two instances which are not listed in these works see Whitley Stokes, *The Saltair na Rann, Anecdota Oxoniensia, Medieval and Modern Series*, I no. 3 (Oxford, 1883) 12, lines 781-804, and the prose OE Pater Noster dialogue printed by J. M. Kemble in *The Dialogues of Salomon and Saturnus* (London, 1848), p. 147.

would well be worth undertaking but in this context it is perhaps sufficient to mention that the *Book of Cerne* contains a prayer to the seven archangels⁶ (not including Raguel), that the coffin of St. Cuthbert is inscribed with the names of seven archangels of which three have been lost⁷ and that the name Raguel occurs in the *Durham Ritual*⁸ and in the *Textus Roffensis*.⁹

But if some members, at least, of the Irish and Anglo-Saxon clergy were prepared to admit four unscriptural angels to the celestial hierarchy, the attitude of the continental clergy was considerably more reserved. One of the problems which Boniface had to deal with in his missionary work were the claims of a certain Aldebert who claimed apostolic status for himself. Aldebert — who was, interestingly enough, associated with an Irishman called Clement — composed a prayer which Boniface had read to Pope Zacharias during the proceedings against Aldebert:

Cumque per ordinem legeretur, pervenit ad locum, ubi ait: 'Præcor vos et coniuro vos et supplico me ad vos, angelus Uriel, angelus Raguel, angelus Tubuel, angelus Michael, angelus Adinus, angelus Tubuas, angelus Sabaoc, angelus Simiel.

Dum vero haec oratio sacrilega usque in finem perlecta fuisset, Zacharias sanctissimus et beatissimus papa dixit: 'Quid ad haec, sanctissimi fratres, respondites? Sanctissimi episcopi et venerabiles presbiteri responderunt: 'Quid aliud agendum est, nisi ut omnia, quae nobis relecta sunt, igni concrementur, auctores vero eorum anathematis vinculo pervellantur? *Quia octo nomina angelorum, quæ in sua oratione Aldebertus invocavit, non angelorum praeterquam Michaelis, sed magis demones in sua oratione sibi ad prestandum auxilium invocavit.* Nos autem, ut a vestro sancto apostolatu edocemur et divina tradit auctoritas, non plus quam trium angelorum nomina cognoscimus, id est Michael, Gabriel, Raphael. *Vel siquidem iste sub obtentu angelorum, demonum nomina introduxit*' (italics mine).¹⁰

⁶ "In Nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti. Gabrihel esto mihi lurica. Michahel esto mihi baltheus. Raphahel esto mihi scutum. Urihel esto mihi protector. Rumihel esto mihi defensor. Phannihel esto mihi sanitas. et omnes sancti ac martyres depræcor. Ut adiuunt mihi apud justum iudicem Ut dimittet mihi in die iudicii peccata mea in nomine domini nostri iesu christi . . ." (*The Book of Cerne* ed. A. B. Kuypers [Cambridge, 1902] p. 153).

⁷ See C. F. Battiscombe, ed. *The Relics of St. Cuthbert* (Oxford, 1956) pp. 273–277.

⁸ *Rituale Ecclesiae Dunelmensis*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson and V. Lindelöf, Surtees Society, 140 (Durham and London, 1927), 198.

⁹ Peter Sawyer ed., *Textus Roffensis*, Part I, E.E.M.F. VII, (Copenhagen, 1957), fol. 116 v.

¹⁰ Michael Tangl, ed., *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, MGH, Epistolae Selectae, I (Berlin, 1965), 117.

Thus Raguel is explicitly defined as a demon in a text which was at the same time authoritative, accessible, and likely to be of some interest to educated religious Englishmen. And I suspect, although it cannot be proven, that the definition of “Raguel id est fortis id est satahel”¹¹ in the *Durham Ritual* implies demonic status. “Fortis” is a neutral adjective, but “Satahel” is quite close to “Sathael,” which Honorius Augustodonensis cites as the true name of the devil and glosses as meaning “Deo contrarius.”¹² And one of the variant forms of the name “Sathael” according to the most recent editor, is actually “Satahel.”¹³

Thus I would suggest that the form Raguel/Ragnel in *Patience* derives ultimately from the name Raguel as cited in *Enoch*, and that the conception of Raguel as actually demonic reflects the assumption that an unorthodox angelic name would probably refer to one of the adversaries of the angels. One immediate problem which this argument raises is why all the ME forms of the name, except in this single ambiguous instance, are “Ragnel” rather than “Raguel.” As far as the paleographical development of the form is concerned, the ambiguous form in *Patience* illustrates how readily “n” and “u” could be confused in Gothic script. And there are also linguistic considerations which are relevant. “Raguel,” however it is to be pronounced seems strikingly esoteric in the context of ME proper names. The name “Ragnel” however seems quite familiar and homely by contrast.¹⁴ The only real alternative to the derivation I am proposing is the possibility of French influence. But the form “Raguenel” which Anderson cites is the name of a pagan king not a devil and the name is not identical in form with the Middle English “Ragnel.”

In a problem of this kind one can really only be concerned with the balance of probabilities; but if the argument I have outlined seems at least generally probable, the literary genealogy of Raguel involves some striking paradoxes. Originally an archangel honored as one of the seven who watch over the world in a Judaic eschatological text roughly contemporaneous with Christ, Raguel may well have been one of a group of angels who were involved to protect the soul of no less an ecclesiast than St. Cuthbert. Yet Raguel and his fellow apocryphal angels were immediately recognized as demons by Pope Zacharias and the bishops and abbots at the synod condemning Aldebert, as well as by Boniface himself. And finally, by the Middle English period Raguel had been redefined as a devil and the form

¹¹ *Durham Ritual*, 198.

¹² Honorius of Autun, *Elucidarium* I, 30 ed. Yves Lefèvre in *L'Elucidarium et les Lucidaires* (Paris, 1954) p. 366.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ “Ragnel” is, after all, quite similar to the attested Early ME feminine name “Ragenilda” (E. Ekwall, *Early London Personal Names* [Lund, 1947] p. 80).

of the name had become changed to Ragnel. This sequence of development is, I think, significant as well as curious, in that it enables us to see how one specific feature of medieval popular religious culture evolved. If it is heterodox to assert that Raguel is an angel, it is fully acceptable to apply the traditional name to a devil. Though one may not presume to speculate about heavenly mysteries which have not been revealed, there is room for the imagination in Hell.¹⁵

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¹⁵ I am indebted to Professor Joseph C. Harris of Stanford University for reading this paper in manuscript and making several helpful suggestions.

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