

TRANSCRIPTION

Duncan Williamson talks about how God sent Lucifer to be king under the earth

ScottishVoicesProj.0358

[This recording was made in July 1984 at the Williamsons' home, Kincaigie Farm Cottage, near Strathmiglo, Fife. Present were Duncan Williamson, his wife Linda, and John Niles. Also present, coming in and out, were the Williamsons' two children Betsy and Thomas. The initial words of this exchange, not captured in this excerpt, are set between square brackets.]

[JN: Do the Travellers believe in powers other than God?

DW: That's true.] God is the favorite. Noo don't run away with it, God is the favorite. But the idea was that God never came and helped them in any way. But they loved him and they still do, but they had tae have another source, someone that could help them. They had tae turn to another thing and they turned to the brownie,* the little spirit, who was — back before your day or mine, we don't know — who was sent by the God in the airth to take care o the people, that they believe that—

So, God has sent Lucifer tae airth to rule a kingdom under the airth. Like the devil, who was under the kingdom o the airth. To keep things square, God in the travelling tradition, they had to send someone else tae take care of the people above the earth. Ye see, John, you must realize, John, ye dinnae know much about the legend atall, but the travelling people does. Dinnae be offended; I'm only talkin about *wir* way of religion.

LW: *[Starts to ask about the wicked queen in the song "Lady Margaret," but Duncan, who has had a bit to drink at the hour goes later, continues to develop his train of thought, now in the form of a story.]*

When Lucifer went up tae the Lord, he said, "Luik, my God," he said, "luik, why are you bein so high man in this heaven?" He said, "I'm just a good man as what you are. Why don't you make me your captain?" But he was wicked, you know, and God knew that he was wicked. Lucifer was wicked. He said, "If you're sendin anybody to airth, why don't you send me?"

An God said, "I'll send you tae earth."

"Oh, Thank you, my Lord," he said. "You send me — "

"I'll send you to airth," he said, "but I won't send you to airth direct, I'll send you *under* the earth! And *there* you can be king."

"Ah want to be king," he said.

"Well," says God to Lucifer, "you can be king under airth as long as you want to. You can reign under there forever more. No one will ever disturb you." So he sent Lucifer down to

airth to be king under the airth. (You know, this is travellin — tae believe it; this is good.) “You can reign under the airth as long as you like, but nothing at the airth.”

But he said, “My Lord,” he said, “it’s a terrible time to reign under the earth for all these years and never be able to come back.”

“Oh yes,” he said. “You can come back — only *oncet a year* you’re allowed tae come back.” Cause God was powerful! God was more powerful than Lucifer. He was an archangel, Lucifer was an angel, one o God’s right-hand men, you know? Lucifer was the devil, what we call him. He was God’s right-hand angel. He says, “You come back *oncet*, one night in every year, the night of Halloween. You are free to do as you please but one night in the year.”

—Now I mean you dinnae want to hear this. Dae you want tae hear this?

JN: Yes, please! [*Laughs.*]

DW: So he said, “You are free, Lucifer,” “he says, “to go to airth and reign under airth as long as you like.”

But he said, “My Lord,” he said, “it’s a long time to be under the airth.” (I mean, Hell, as far as you can know). “Tae reign in hell!”

“Your reign you have to take. Do what you like,” he said. “Anything you want. You can reign under the airth as long as you feel fit. So,” God says, “you can do that if you want.” But he says, “I’ll tell you, I’ll give you one reprieve. You’re free for one night in the year.” And he named the time o the year he can be free for one night: on Halloween. Halloween, ye know, Halloween? “You can do what you like and do as you please for one night in the year, but one night only. And then your power is lost, because I’ll send you back to hell.”

See? See, Travellers believe these — for ages, these are the Travellers’ beliefs. These are the beliefs of the Travellers. They believe that. Woe be tae any travelling people who’s caught in a New Year’s night! No way in the world are they caught in a New Year’s night, they’d only be caught on Halloween night, no way in the world. No Traveller would be caught after twelve o’clock on a Halloween night.

JN: [A bit confused.] But which is New Year’s?

DW: Na New Year. Halloween.

JN: Halloween night —

DW: Halloween night. The last night of October. The last night of October. No Travellers would be caught out after twelve o’clock on a Halloween night, cause that’s [when] the devil’s loose. That’s the devil’s privilege.

[The excerpt stops here though the session continues.]

Note

“Caught in a New Year’s night.” Here, perhaps just for a moment, Williamson seems to be conflating New Year’s night (by current reckoning, in January) with the last night of October; that is, Halloween. Does this reflect a sense on his part that this night, when myriad dangerous spirits intersect with the human world, marks the major turning point in the year, as in the ancient Celtic calendar?