

Stith Thompson - The folktale- p 134

2. Wishes Rewarded and Punished

One of the purposes of the good teller of folktales is to see that wickedness is properly punished. It is not always easy to discover the unworthy or the evildoing. But, as all story-tellers know, one of the best ways to search the heart is to see what use one will make of unlimited power. If a person is naturally modest and kind, such power will be only a strength; but if he is overbearing and unkind, it will certainly bring about his downfall. So it happened in the amusing old story of *The Fisher and His Wife* (Type 555). As it is told in the German-speaking and Slavic countries, and occasionally in France and Spain, a poor fisher catches a fish who is really a transformed monster. He heeds the pleas of the fish to be put back in the water and is rewarded by the promise that all the wishes of the fisherman's wife shall be granted. In the Italian versions, and sometimes in the French, the granting of these wishes is secured in another fashion: the husband climbs a beanstalk to heaven,⁽⁹⁾ and there secures this concession either from God or from the doorkeeper of Paradise. In any case, the wife begins to use her wishes. The principal point of the story consists in a description of the increasing extravagance of the wife's wishes and their amazing consequences. She wishes to be a duke, then king, then pope. When at the end she aspires to be God himself, she loses all her good fortune.

As we have indicated, this story is well known in both eastern and western Europe. It has been carried by the Spanish to Puerto Rico and by the Dutch to the East Indies. In Indonesia it is told alongside of similar tales, presumably native, but parallel to a story current in Japan.⁽¹⁰⁾ In this tradition it is also brought into close relation with a cumulative story known as *Stronger and Strongest* (Motif 241.2). A peculiar development of *The Fisher and His Wife* in a few variants among the Russians and Letts has the man as the maker of the foolish wishes.

(9). Like Jack with his beanstalk; see Type 328.

(10). For discussion, see De Vries, *Volksverhalen*, I, 356, No. I; II, 356, No. 100.