

Stith Thompson - The Folktale - p 124-125

Much less well known than Snow White is the tale of The Wonder Child (Type 708). It seems to be most popular in Scandinavia, though there are scattered versions as far away as Hungary and Brittany. Through the magic power of a witch stepmother, sometimes merely by a curse and sometimes by being fed a magic apple-a princess gives birth to a monster son. She is driven forth into the forest or abandoned in a boat on the sea. The monster son develops miraculous powers. He helps his mother in her work of spinning at a castle. He accompanies a prince in search of a bride, or on a hunt. When they are cast in prison together, the boy promises to rescue the prince if the latter will marry his mother. Though the prince imagines that the mother must be a monster also, he consents. He rejoices to find her like other people. At the wedding, the monster is disenchanted when his mother calls son. In some versions the disenchantment occurs when his head is cut off.

A study of this last tale might show some very interesting results. Though its area of distribution is relatively small and though it is nowhere especially popular, the tale seems well enough recognized to constitute a real tradition. No literary versions have been noticed, so that we are apparently dealing with something which is essentially, if not entirely, oral.

(35). The compassionate executioner appears in a number of stories from the time of Joseph on down; see Motif K512 with all its subdivisions. We have already met it in the tale of The Three Languages (Type 671).