

Stith Thompson - The Folktale - p 122-123

Another tale which has many points in common with *The Maiden Without Hands* (Type 706) is *Our Lady's Child* (Type 710).⁽³¹⁾ In one way or another the heroine of this story secures the ill will of some powerful person. In some forms of the tale she is under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin, whose enmity she incurs by falsely denying that she has looked into a forbidden room. As a punishment, the girl loses her power of speech. In other variants, instead of Our Lady, the opponent is a witch or some naturally malevolent woman; occasionally even a man appears in this role. In any event, the maiden becomes the wife of the king. But when she gives birth to children, she is punished by having them stolen one by one. Only when she finally acknowledges her guilt are they returned to her. .

This tale shows so much variation from the time it appeared in Straparola in the sixteenth century and a hundred years later in Basile that its history might be difficult to work out. It shows frequent contamination with other tales, especially *The Maiden Without Hands*, and the uncertainty of whether we are dealing with a pious legend of the Blessed Virgin or with a story of a cruel witch has introduced many inconsistencies into the tradition. It is known in all parts of Europe, the Near East, North Africa, and Jamaica, but seems nowhere to have achieved great popularity. On the whole, the witch as the foster mother seems to be better known than the Blessed Virgin. The central incident of the loss of the children, as well as the marriage of the king to a girl who has been mutilated or disabled, makes understandable the confusion of this tale with the two just discussed.

(31). The oldest known version of this story, that in Straparola's *Nights*, is a thorough amalgamation of the two tales.