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SNOW WHITE AND RELATED TALES

The question ‘How old is Snow White?’ is asked less often than ‘How old is Cinderella?’ One reason is that there are markedly fewer modern texts, and there has been little study, of tales which overlap with the Snow White tale itself (AT Type 709). Nonetheless, the evidence is just as clear that the tale and some of its close relatives have an ancient pedigree as distinguished as that of Cinderella itself.

One obstacle, as with Cinderella, is that scholars outside the field of folklore have a stereotype of the tale as inappropriate as is Perrault’s Cinderella to define its own type. A Brothers Grimm version supplies what is usually recognised as the classic form:

A queen wishes for a child as white as snow, as red as blood, as black as ebony, and dies when such a child is born. The girl’s stepmother has a magic mirror which declares the princess to be the fairer of the two. The jealous queen sends the child into the wood with a huntsman who has instructions to kill her; instead he sets Snow White free and takes the lungs and liver of a boar back to the stepmother. Snow White comes on a house with seven tiny sets of household articles, uses its amenities in turn and sleeps in the seventh bed. Seven dwarfs find her and agree to keep her there; she keeps house for them, and must not open the door to strangers. The magic mirror informs the queen, who attempts three times to kill her stepdaughter, first by tacking her dress too tightly, then by combing her hair with a poisoned comb. The dwarfs twice revive her, but on a third occasion, when the stepmother produces an apple with one side poisoned, fail to do so. They lay Snow White on a bier encased in glass and mourn her on top of a hill. A prince comes by; they refuse to seal the coffin, but give it up on entreaty. In the movement of the coffin the apple fragment is dislodged from Snow White’s throat, and she can marry the prince. The stepmother is forced to dance in red hot shoes till dead.

Here, as in the Perrault Cinderella, we have just those details most likely to be familiar to western European readers: snow-white-rose-red, the queen and her magic mirror, exposure in the forest, seven dwarfs, a poisoned apple, and the glass case with the unburied and ever-fragrant princess. There seems the obvious connection in the first instance of snow with the girl’s name. But even that is not guaranteed, especially in areas where snow is less prominent than in some parts of Europe: a modern Jewish-Egyptian version has the heroine going through quite obviously Snow White-type adventures under the name Pomegranate. From the repertoire of over seventy oral versions collected by Ernst Boeklen up to 1915, we can note the following trends in the European/West Asiatic versions as a whole, and these will be important when we come to consider a Snow White romance. The mainspring of the story is the avenging jealousy of another woman. Usually she is the avenging stepmother, but sometimes a jealous sister or some other associate. In one French version reported by Paul Delarue, the heroine is the servant of her rival. Several Snow Whites have a beginning where the heroine is accidentally worshipped, or gossip makes her the equal of a goddess. The ‘magic mirror on the wall’ is the standard version to establish Snow White’s beauty and survival, but it is far from being the only one: the rival may consult the sun, the moon, or some other agent as an oracle. This is consistent with the role of Apollo and Artemis in the mythical forms of the tale; Artemis need only ask her oracle-giving brother about Snow White’s beauty, which he has himself experienced.

The rival gives orders for Snow White’s exposure, usually in a wood, but sometimes on a mountain, and she is taken in to live, not always by seven dwarfs or indeed by dwarfs at all; sometimes it is simply a case of one or more dwarfs, robbers, or the like. Usually Snow White finds the rustic dwelling by herself and ingratiates herself by keeping house for her master(s). One thinks of a Portuguese version where the heroine lives with a single swineherd; an Italian version from Abruzzi has her enclosed in a hut by the sea, and fed
on bread and water; or when the faithful servant refuses to go through with the killing, she eventually falls in with robbers in the wood. Sometimes there is an adventure where she meets a tormented soul or suchlike. In a Breton version she hides in the dog’s stall, and in others dire consequences are to follow if she does not feed dogs. A number of variants have the finder of the coffin taking it home and subjecting it to unending devotion; in a small number of cases the coffin is put to sea and found by fishermen. There are even Kabyle and Arabic versions where Snow White, still in her coffin or equivalent, is carried by a camel. In some versions, the heroine is supplanted after marriage by a bizarre rival bride. One German variant has the hero-prince as a pilgrim. Many of these incidental deviations from our ‘expected’ version will assume a good deal of importance when we come to look at an extended ancient version.

There is a great degree of flexibility in Snow White’s protectors—most obviously in the nature of the dwarfs, who can just as readily be giants, or supernatural beings of some kind, or simply a peasant or peasants, especially where the whole handling of the tale is more realistic. The glass case sometimes has adventures of its own, as when it is a chest found by a fisherman, but again deposited in the custody of the prince; the jealous rival need not always be the stereotypical stepmother either. And the ‘oracle mirror’ can be some other kind of informant. What we also notice however is that the simple tale as illustrated by the Grimms omits certain fairly common episodes recurrent elsewhere in this tale-type: one is the presence of a dog or dogs which the heroine must feed, often with no immediately obvious motivation. Another is the appearance of a ‘substitute bride’ motif: the prince may forget the heroine, who can be turned by a rival into something else, most often a bird; and he must be reminded of his obligations, most often by some magical means.

When we take these variations into account we tend to find a rather different looking structure, which produces examples like the following:

A young girl called Pomegranate is persecuted by a sister/stepmother; she flees and falls among forty robbers, for whom she keeps house. A magician is sent to kill her with a bracelet and a ring; a prince rescues her from the glass case, but then the magician turns her into a dove by sticking a pin in her head, while the prince marries her servant; only by means of a ribbon round the dove’s neck does the deception come to light.

The story is still recognisable, even without the Snow White name. But there may also be an odd feature, of a Snow White ‘colour code’ encoded in the text. In the celebrated Grimm version, her mother wishes for a child white as snow, red as blood and black as the black windowsill. In this case we have a competition between the two girls over washing: the heroine is told not to wash till a river is not black or red but white; her rival disobeys the instruction.

We can look also at an obviously recognisable Snow White from Abruzzi in Italy where very few of these features are directly in evidence, but where the tale itself is still quite clearly part of a Snow White group nonetheless:

A mother and daughter keep an inn, where the mother asks the guests if they have seen anyone lovelier than herself. When one says ‘her daughter’, she has the girl enclosed in a hut by the sea, to be looked after by the kitchen-boy; the beautiful girl is still detected and reported, so that the mother bribes the kitchen boy with marriage if he will kill the daughter. He brings back the eyes and blood of an animal instead; he allows the girl to flee to twelve robbers in a wood; and she is treated as a sister and keeps house for the robbers. A robber accidentally betrays her to the mother, who hires a witch to kill her with a pin; she is buried in a hollow tree trunk by the robbers, found by a prince’s dogs, revived by the removal of the pin and marries the prince.

The tale is still quite recognisable despite the substitution of robbers for dwarfs, a much more ordinary background, a mother rather than stepmother as the persecutor, and the absence of any miraculous means of divination, the absence of any glass coffin, and only two rather than the usual four attempts to kill the heroine (one by means of the compassionate executioner, a run of three by the rival directly). What it usefully shows is how far the tale has to change to accommodate a realistic background.
What, then, is the essence of the Snow White story? We need a persecuted heroine, some kind of prophetic or oracular function for her female persecutor, a series of attempts on the heroine’s life, usually involving animal substitution and a compassionate executioner. We should look for some context in which the heroine is transplanted into an alien environment where she nonetheless finds protection, friendship and loyalty in some kind of otherworldly or outside alternative community. We might also look for at least one failed resurrection attempt, followed by a successful one, as well as at least a gesture towards petrification of some sort (enclosure in glass case).  

The Snow White version of the story—by whatever name—has been collected from Europe, North Africa and Western Asia (and corresponding colonial areas). But there are a number of overlapping tales which should be noted as well, and are likely to be useful in investigating ancient versions. The most obvious of these is Sleeping Beauty: this time there is only one attempt on the heroine’s life, and no seven dwarfs or other protectors; and the maleficent rival is usually a supernatural agent slighted at the heroine’s birth; again the question of the false rival can be found after the encounter with the prince. And again there is room for surprisingly ‘un-fairytale-like’ material: the first modern European Sleeping Beauty, that of Basile, has the prince rape the heroine while she is still asleep—then forget the girl he has thus presented with twins, before his legitimate wedded wife is cast as the false bride. Other related tales, those involving a girl with Snow White characteristics in search of lost relatives or being searched for by them, are postponed for the sake of clarity to the end of this chapter and to Chapter 13.

Some ancient Snow Whites

Are there, then, any ancient Snow Whites? There certainly are a number of mythical or semi-mythical heroines whose names are Chione (‘Snowgirl’, ‘Snowey’). The few scraps we have seem to do rather more than reflect the properties of the name itself. We find a Chione, daughter of the Nile and Ocean’s daughter Callirhoe, maltreated on earth and evidently raped by a peasant (the text is defective at the critical point) and brought by Hermes into the Clouds, to give her name to snow. This offers us more than meets the eye. One of the associations of the Nile is with pecheis, dwarfs depicted or described as children, and sometimes implied to be the offspring of the river itself. This would give any such Snowgirl either a set of dwarf brothers or at least a supporting cast of dwarfs. A second such tradition makes Chione daughter of Boreas and Oreithuia (Northwind and Mountainmaid). This again is a suggestive parentage for ‘our’ Snow White, since this couple also are credited with two sons Zetes and Calais who change into birds, thus providing the given material for type AT 451, ‘the search for lost brothers (changed into birds)’, as we shall see below. A third has the girl as daughter of Arcturus (North Star) raped by Boreas (Northwind) and reaching a mountain Niphantes (‘Snowfall’). All three traditions are clearly aetiological in character; they account for two obviously observable facts about weather: that snow is connected with water and falls from the sky, and that snow is blown by fierce winds onto mountain tops. Moreover, two of the three are just long enough to contain the notion of a suffering heroine, in one case at least supposedly ‘rewarded in heaven’. But a fourth version has at last the pattern of a detailed episodic story: Chione, daughter of Daedalion, has a thousand suitors; Apollo and Hermes rape her in a single day and night; Hermes puts the girl into a magic sleep; Apollo, the latter of the two, comes disguised as an old woman; Chione has twins Autolycus and Philammon; their mother antagonises Artemis with her boasting, and the latter kills her with an arrow.

There is a further variant, in which a Chione is among the daughters of Niobe: one Manto (‘prophetess’) commands the latter to acknowledge the superiority of Apollo and Artemis, which Niobe refuses to do. Her own boasting on behalf of her children antagonises Artemis, who again shoots the girl with an arrow. According to this story Zeus changes all the inhabitants of Thebes, presumably including Chione, to stone. This is as far as the language of myth can be seen to take us on present evidence, but it is clear enough to suggest materials for a folktale or a romance about a persecuted heroine. The considerable variety of genealogies may conceal a common identity, at least for some of them; brothers turned into birds and a company of dwarfs are at least implied for good measure. In some cases the connection of the name is quite directly with reference to the creation of snow, but in one case quite conspicuously we have very much more. Where we have a Snow White name and an obvious Snow White motif or motifs we are entitled to claim that we are looking at a genuine version of Snow White and that the tale itself is at least as old as our example. We

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should note, too, a certain difference in the balance of forces in the tale. Normally we expect the magic mirror on the wall (or its equivalent) to tell Snow White’s rival that Snow White is the fairest of them all; in the Niobe story we have one Manto (‘prophetess’, and reasonable equivalent to the mirror) warning Chione’s mother not to boast about her daughter’s beauty for fear of offending the gods. It is as if the magic mirror in the Grimm tale were being used here not to tell the queen that Snow White is the fairest of them all, but instead to tell Snow White that she must not boast of being fairest of them all for fear of offending the queen! But the clearest view we are offered so far is of the Chione who appears in Ovid’s Metamorphoses:

[Chione’s father Daedalion, son of Lucifer] subdued kings and their peoples by his prowess…He had a daughter Chione. She had reached the age of fourteen and was ready for marriage; and endowed as she was with exceptional beauty, she had a thousand suitors. It so happened that Phoebus and Maia’s son Mercury were returning, the one from his favourite haunt of Delphi, and the other from the summit of Mount Cyllene. Both of them saw the girl at the same time and both, at the very same moment, fell in love with her. Apollo (Phoebus) put off his hopes of making love to her till night, but Mercury did not put up with any delay: he touched the girl’s cheek with his sleep-inducing wand. At that powerful touch, she lay there, and suffered the god’s violent act. When night had scattered the sky with its stars, Phoebus took the form of an old woman, and enjoyed the same pleasures that Mercury had stolen earlier. When her pregnancy had taken its full course, Chione gave birth to twins: to Mercury with his winged feet a cunning child, Autolycus, who would turn white to black and black to white; and to Phoebus, a son Philammon, famed for his singing and the music of the lyre...

But glory is an obstacle to many, and certainly to her: she had the audacity to think herself more beautiful than Diana, and found fault with the goddess’s appearance. This provoked the goddess to savage anger: ‘You will not find fault with my actions!’ she cried, and without delay she bent her bow, shot her arrow from the string, and sent her shaft through the tongue which had brought it on herself. Her tongue fell silent; and the words she was trying to voice failed; her life-blood left her as she was still trying to speak…But her father…bitterly lamented the loss of his daughter. And when he saw her body burning, four times he tried to rush into the heart of the funeral pyre; four times he was driven back. Then he abandoned his limbs to a frenzy of flight (and became turned into a hawk).

Here, then, we have Snow White in a mythical form. Artemis (Diana) is the persecutor, but it is Chione’s boasting that is punished—an outrageous injustice to twentieth-century sensibilities. But Chione’s sufferings and fate are scarcely exceptional in classical myth, where the gods may not be consistently immoral but are certainly not accountable to humans; and where, as implied in Ovid’s version, the attention of gods has been construed as a privilege rather than a degradation by the victim. Of the three encounters only one is a murder; but the means of carrying out the rape—disguise as an old woman (Apollo) and putting the victim to sleep (Hermes) —have a role to play in the modern tale, which can be discreetly expurgated without losing its three-fold central action. The disguises for the rapes are in effect recycled in the modern tale into additional murder attempts, thus providing much needed expurgation if the story is to serve as a nursery tale. The fire need not surprise us: it occurs as an alternative to the heroine’s coma in AT Type 451, and as a threat to the girl in the related Sleeping Beauty type as well. It is not too difficult to see that a version in which Chione is daughter of Niobe will have something in common with this version: here it is the mother, not the daughter herself, who boasts and offends Artemis, and the result is death from an arrow; not enclosure in a glass case, but a different sort of immobility, petrifaction, when Niobe and all her family are turned to stone, Chione presumably included.

We have already seen that Chione, daughter of Nile, has an assured connection with dwarfs, the commonplace associates of the river. And Chione, daughter of Daedalion, indeed has a father with dwarf implications in the diminutive force of his name (‘little craftsman’); we can now look for any other girls with dwarf connections and see whether their stories tally at any point with Chione’s or with those of modern Snow Whites. We have the report of a Hellenistic treatment of a girl connected with dwarfs (Athenaeus 9.393ef):
And concerning the crane Boios says that there was a woman of consequence among the Pygmies, and her name was Gerana. This woman was worshipped as a god by the citizens (of the Pygmies), and had a low opinion of the real gods, especially Hera and Artemis. Hera was therefore indignant and changed her into a bird unsightly to look at and made her an enemy hated by her former worshippers the Pygmies; it is said that she and Nikodamas were the parents of a land tortoise.

We have a similar presentation of this information in Antoninus Liberalis 16, where the central figure who is obviously the same girl is called Oenoe (‘Winey’, which of course might indicate wine-red or wine-white). This adds little, and has Mopsus, the musician, as child of Oenoe, as well as making her the cause of the war between pygmies and cranes. But both texts converge in making a girl an object of worship on the part of pygmies, and in making her undergo metamorphosis. But we also have a girl surrounded by dwarfs, and the same arrogance towards Artemis as we found in the case of Chione herself. Her giving birth to a tortoise actually fits better than it promises: Philammon, offspring of Chione daughter of Daedalion, is a musician; the tortoiseshell is associated with the origins of the lyre as early as the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.

Another case of a dwarf context for the heroine of a tale is that of King Pygmalion: this Cypriot king worships the stone statue he creates himself, and, thanks to the pity of the gods, the statue comes to life. He himself by his very name is connected with pygmies (‘king little-dwarf’), and that in turn encourages us to view the change from statue to woman as corresponding to the coming alive of Snow White.33

How, then, do all these mythological scraps relate to the familiar folktale of Snow White? We can note a considerable collection of recurrent motifs between the versions which suggest the form in which motifs are likely to present themselves in the classical variants. We can point to snow in the name and connections with water, a vindictive rival very often in the person of Artemis, a death that seems to entail some kind of resurrection or transformation, hints of dwarfs, hints of military rivalry and zoomorphic elements in the Gerana stories, and hints that the glass coffin may be expressed in different terms, such as a stone statue. There is also an element of sexual threat or even rape that is far more explicitly developed than in the modern tale.

Chione in the romances

These cases, then, will serve to show that there was a varied Chione tradition in the classical world; and that other types related to AT Type 709 were already known (AT Types 451, 884). But there is another recourse, for we do have at least one surviving and one fragmentary romance connected with the outlines discussed above. First, the fragments: three certain and one probable fragments survive from a romance containing a character called Chione (‘Snowgirl’).34

One of the Chione fragments seems to be pointing in a Snow White direction:

*(fr. 3) These men were determined to deliberate. Quickly the rumour went right round the city about the wedding and nobody talked about anything else. All were anxious at the thought of their barbarous threats and especially since the parties in the Panionion were all to choose a husband for Chione. But no one dared ask the girl after them. But Chione, hearing this from her mother, no longer…*

Someone is expecting the hand of Snow White, and threatening to have it under duress. But this beginning is found in a medieval Western Snow White known since the late nineteenth century. Marie de France’s old French *Lai of Eliduc* opens what is quite obviously a mainline Snow White tale (AT Type 709) with this motif as well:35

*The Breton hero Eliduc comes to the rescue of lady Guilliadun when her father, the king of Exeter in England, is being forced to give her to a bullying local suitor, whom Eliduc is able to kill. She later faints (on finding him already married to the ‘wrong’ woman), and is laid out and worshipped by him in a chapel in a wood, until revived and enabled to marry him by the resignation of his original wife to a nunnery.*

Moreover, the last Chione fragment, assigned as simply ‘likely’ to the *Chione* text,36 does actually correspond so far as we can construe its context to the most conventional of Snow Whites, that of the
Grimms. The expression *tei zonei* (‘with a girdle’) occurs at the end of one column: in the next some sort of panic is going on: people are forcing in a door, and someone is lying there. In a Snow White context, *so far as we can infer from so little*, this would be at the point in the action where the rival has attacked the heroine with a tight-fitting bodice, leaving her to suffocate, usually as the first or second murder attempt; she would now be found by her friends and protectors, be they brothers, dwarfs, herdsmen, or the like.37 There is really no obstacle that I can see to regarding the Chione text as a narration of the fairy-tale Snow White. The name should have suggested this in the first place; and the *Lai of Eliduc* is our guarantee that a ‘political’ beginning concerning a forced marriage does occur in this tale-type.

In another case we have a complete specimen of a romance for consideration either as a complete Snow White or as strongly ‘Snow White related’. The plot of Xenophon of Ephesus’ *Ephesiaca* (‘An Ephesian Tale’) can be summarised as follows:

A girl called Flower (Anthia) is so beautiful that she outshines Artemis. She has attendants White (Leucon) and Rose (Rhode); her parents send her and her husband abroad in response to an oracle of the sun-god. Captured by pirates, the girl falls into the hands of the jealous rival Manto (‘prophetess’); she is sent to live with a peasant (who respects her); called on to execute her, he lets her go. She falls in with robbers, who eventually help her. She takes poison from a visiting beggar which she intends to use to kill herself; it only makes her sleep, and she comes round alive in the tomb. Eventually a fisherman shows the rich husband who is searching for her the corpse of a woman mummified, who reminds the seeker of his lost wife. He then goes on to be reunited with his wife at Rhodes: the event is anticipated by a children’s oracle.38

It might be tempting simply to regard this as a free fantasia on some Snow White names and motifs. But the coincidence of these names is very cogent. The heroine Anthia (‘Flower’) has its equivalent in Snow White tradition (Fluorita in a modern Rumanian version); but the names of her servants Leucon and Rhode (‘White and Rose’) seem to give the game away. It is not very easy to arrange in a realistic narrative for ice mountains and a glass-encased heroine who will revive; but an otherwise unmotivated digression where a wife is subjected to some form of mummification serves to include an equivalent of this motif without actually subjecting the heroine herself to an unacceptable magic world. The robbers serve as protectors (eventually—their previous designs are either murderous or erotic); while the single peasant doubles as humble host (together with the robbers themselves) and compassionate executioner. The oracle delivered by children might also be construed as an interpretation of the role of the dwarfs in the story.

This text is the lynchpin for suggesting connection between the ancient novel and Euripides because of the motif of the peasant who respects the heroine’s chastity, which also occurs in Euripides’ *Electra*; but since we shall have occasion to notice the connection of the Electra/Iphigenia complex with the Snow White complex anyway, we now have an alternative explanation: that the ‘considerate peasant’ is a rare but normal equivalent of the heroine’s living with male company in the wilds, and who helps her rather than poses a sexual threat. In effect, one single peasant can play the essential role of seven dwarfs without any other consequence to the story. Xenophon’s novel has often enough been connected with folktale; we should now identify it as a Snow White in its own right.39

The relationship of Snow White with Xenophon’s *Ephesiaca* is best seen in the first instance in tabular form. The following discussion then attempts to account not only for the similarities between Xenophon and the folktale tradition, but also the kind of adjustments necessary to make such a tradition conform to the tastes and conventions of romance. Here, then, is Snow White Xenophon-style:

See Table

There seems little doubt that Xenophon’s story does indeed correspond to a number of features of mainly European Snow Whites, and indeed it seems fair to regard Xenophon’s version as one of them in its own right. It had long been noted as having the feel of a folktale, but so far as I am aware no attempt has hitherto been made to identify it as any folktale in particular.41 The identity of Leucon and Rhode immediately points
to the actual tale,\textsuperscript{42} and the correspondence obviously extends beyond the points of contact one might have inferred from the Grimm version. A number of rare modern variants in the oral tradition now appear as integral parts of the ancient tradition of Snow White itself.

Nonetheless, it seems equally clear that Xenophon’s choice of details and variants has been dictated at least in some measure by the more limited constraints of romance as a genre. Seven dwarfs may well have been at his disposal in ancient tradition,\textsuperscript{43} but if they could have had a place in myth, it is more difficult to accommodate them within the realistic and bourgeois notions of romance. Yet they probably emerge in the children who cluster round just before the final recognition scene and foresee the meeting of the protagonists.

We can now study Xenophon’s options and the ways in which he has used them.

In the first place, the name Anthia: this may well be an authentic name within the folktales tradition. The modern occurrence turns up close to the geographical area of the Greek world, i.e. the Balkans.\textsuperscript{44} The choice is convenient for a romantic heroine. The choice of Chione might have entailed the long explanation of the original mother’s wishes; Xenophon goes for a simple explanation of the name as indicating the bloom of youth (\textit{anthei de autes to soma ep’ eumorphhiai}) (cf. the name Chloe in Longus).\textsuperscript{45} The tell-tale labels white and red are applied to the couple’s servants, who are introduced late only after the pair are married.

The next feature of the folktales is another matter. The heroine is the most beautiful girl in the world: we are told that Anthia \textit{polu tas allas hypereballeto parthenous}.\textsuperscript{46} The heroine in a Norwegian version is proclaimed most beautiful by three poor youths to whom the heroine has been kind; in Ephesus, as conventionally in the romances, it is the urban crowd as a whole who performs the ecstatic recognition.\textsuperscript{47} This is in the heroine’s fifteenth year, as it is in the Polish version.\textsuperscript{48} A Greek variant has her as beautiful as a hunting dog; Anthia has two such dogs in her retinue, and indeed dogs play a far more significant role in the story than in any other romance except Longus.\textsuperscript{49} People wonder that she has not got angels’ wings in the third Greek version: Anthia’s spectators see her as the goddess Artemis herself.\textsuperscript{50} Note, however, that Xenophon makes her blonde; the canonic Grimm version prefers black hair (as ebony).

The normal rival of Snow White is her stepmother or her mother (the latter perhaps the earlier, as Boeklen suspected).\textsuperscript{51} Xenophon avoids any suggestion of this, and not unexpectedly. Close family tensions tend to be toned down in the romances, and their role supplied by external rivals instead. Hence Nape in Longus is the tamest of taskmistresses. It should however be noticed that in \textit{Apollonius of Tyre}, where folktales reflexes are well to the fore, the rival is a foster-mother and her child,\textsuperscript{52} while in Euripides’ \textit{Electra}, as we shall see in due course, it is the heroine’s mother.

The south-east European versions tend to assign the role of the magic mirror to the sun: this is the case for the Balkan, Chian, South Italian, and second Roumanian versions.\textsuperscript{53} So in Xenophon, Anthia’s parents correspondingly consult an oracle of the sun-god Apollo at Colophon.\textsuperscript{54} But at this stage there is no rival, so that the oracle is not concerned with Anthia’s beauty, which is already established in any case. What turns up here, instead, is a rather ineptly garbled oracle about the couple’s future sufferings.\textsuperscript{55} Where the sun is used in the folktales, it usually gives the rival her continuous news that the heroine is still alive; in one variant this role is supplied by a witch instead.\textsuperscript{56} There may be a trace of such a motif in Xenophon: an old woman called Chrysion turns up and informs Habrocomes that Anthia is still alive.\textsuperscript{57}

A small number of versions have some preliminary attempt by the rival to spoil the heroine’s beauty by some menial occupation: in an Italian version from Abruzzi she is enclosed in a hut by the sea and fed on bread and water, but accordingly becomes more beautiful; other romance versions vary this motif.\textsuperscript{58} The detail of the hut by the sea may be significant: Xenophon’s text embodies an apparent reference to the sea in relation to Lampon’s house, perhaps a careless reminiscence of such a variant.\textsuperscript{59}

There is considerable flexibility in the tradition as to how the cruel rival will arrange to dispose of Snow White. Usually the servant’s instructions are to kill her in a wood, and to bring back her heart, liver, or the like, and those of an animal are then substituted as a ruse.\textsuperscript{60} Xenophon omits this detail (by no means uniquely): it belongs to a rural, hunting culture and does not accord comfortably with the values and tastes even of ‘cheap’ urban romance. The persistence of such a motif in the popular tradition points rather to a primitive rural ruse of great antiquity.

There are other subterfuges en route: the queen can contrive that Snow White will be lost in the wood,
knowing that the seven dwarfs kill any maiden who comes near them; Snow White may be bound to a tree and eaten by wolves, or relegated to the garden of a wild man, a return once more to the abandonment to a peasant in Xenophon’s version.  

An Albanian variant has each of the rival sisters receiving a visit from the Moerai, the Fates, prophesying their fate: Anthia receives a visit in the wild from her rival’s husband, Moeris—characteristically turned into an erotic temptation scene for its new context in romance.

The reception by a kindly but humble or unlikely host or hosts is also accorded considerable latitude in the versions. We should forget at times about seven dwarfs: they can be giants, robbers, cannibals, Draks, hunters, fairies, accursed souls, or the like; and their lair varies accordingly—they may live in a glass mountain, a feature which obviously accords very well indeed with the theme of Snow White and which fits very well with the genealogies in the Chione myth. There are considerable variations in the number: two dwarfs in Icelandic or Finnish versions, an indeterminate number in Ligurian and some Portuguese versions, and the single swineherd in the third Portuguese version. In a few zoomorphic variants the hosts are bears by day, princesses by night: note the ambiguous status of Xenophon’s robber Hippothous and his band—aristocrat turned brigand, and reverting finally to his original privileged status.

Sometimes Snow White meets a tormented soul or the like. This motif actually occurs in Xenophon as part of the brothel scene when she makes the (false) excuse that her (pretended) epilepsy was caused by the assault of a departed spirit. Anthia makes these excuses at Tarentum. It is noteworthy that Snow White variants of such an encounter occur as near as Sicily.

Snow White usually reaches the robbers’ or dwarfs’ den in their absence and cooks and tidies the house for them. Of course Anthia will presumably have done all this for her peasant ‘husband’ —and nothing more, but there is no indication of her co-operating with the robbers in this way. In neither case is her initiative in question: Greek aristocrats are not expected to volunteer to do menial work, and that is reflected in the proprieties of the novel. Hence we simply find Hippothous capturing Anthia among a party wandering in a wood.

Some other features of the stay with the robbers are presented in Xenophon. When she is put in a trench with two wild dogs, one of the robbers, an admirer, is careful to feed them, so that they do her no harm. In a Breton version we find Snow White hiding in the dog’s stall, and in others dire consequences follow if she fails to feed dogs. The usual tradition is that the robbers or dwarfs take their new guest as a sister. Lampis treats his guest in this way in Xenophon, as does Hippothous, who respects her chastity when at last he comes round to merely trying to assault it, rather than to killing her. In one Russian version she is already a prince’s bride, and she is already married to the aristocratic Habrocomes in Xenophon. In some versions, Snow White marries the equivalent character to Hippothous, who is accordingly promoted. The person who administers the poison to Snow White is sometimes a beggar. In the nearest version to Xenophon, the second German, it is a Jewish doctor Sambul, who corresponds to Xenophon’s doctor Eudoxus: he poisons half the apple, but only with a sleeping drug.

Snow White’s sleeping draught, the method found in several versions and widely spread, is also the ‘correct’ version for an urban novel with its Scheintod scene, where the heroine will be left unguarded in a normal Greek burial vault and will simply wake up. Many of the other Snow White methods, such as a poisoned needle or an apple stuck in the throat, will require some additional intervention to wake the heroine. The Snow White versions use a variety of methods to preserve and encase the girl’s corpse in her suspended animation, most often a transparent glass case. But gold, silver, and even iron coffins are found. A number of variants also have the finder of the coffin taking it home and applying unending devotion to it. In a small number of different cases the coffin is put to sea and found by fishermen. It is in the context of these versions that we have to consider the most distinctive episode in Xenophon: Habrocomes meets a poor fisherman in Sicily (really a Spartan nobleman fallen on hard times), who keeps his dead wife Thelxinoe embalmed in Egyptian style in the inner room of his house.

This bizarre exhibit has rightly puzzled students of the novel: why should Xenophon introduce the fisherman and his bizarrely preserved wife at all? As far as he is concerned it provides only another opportunity to remind us that Anthia is still missing. But it makes little sense as it stands. Why preserve the corpse of an old woman, and how did he learn Egyptian embalming in Sparta or Sicily? It seems difficult to
escape the suspicion that what Xenophon is really handling is a common variant, or combination of variants, of the glass coffin scene itself. It should not be the fisherman’s wife Thélxinoë, but Anthia who should be in the coffin, having been preserved alive in glass. She should then awaken and recognise the long-lost lover there and then. But Xenophon wants to keep the plot running and opts for the grand reunion at Rhodes. So he relegates the alternative to a very unsatisfactory subplot. In any case, it is not physically possible to keep real people alive in enclosed mummy cases or the like for long periods.

Various other fragments of the tradition turn up in Xenophon. Anthia finds herself sold to an Indian prince who takes her on a camel, before she is rescued by Hippothous and his men. There may be a hint of this in the North African Kabyle and second Arabic version, where Snow White, still in her coffin or equivalent, is being carried on a camel, usually prior to her discovery by the prince. This in itself might be due to coincidence, since the camel is such a standard mode of long-distance transport in the Near East. But against that should be balanced its rarity, even in Greek novels dealing with Egypt.

In some versions of Snow White the heroine is supplanted after marriage by a bizarre rival bride, and has to torment the prince while metamorphosed into a bird. The latter detail is of course impossible in a quasi-realistic romance. But Xenophon may have included a clumsily detailed treatment of the motif of the rival wife. Habrocomes is subjected to the unhealthy attentions of an ugly old woman called Kyno (‘Bitch’). Much more distinctive, however, within Xenophon is the fact that the robbers incarcerate Kyno with two wild dogs, which however a friendly robber contrives to feed.

Several hints of such an episode do occur in the Snow White tradition. In one Breton version the heroine hides in a kennel and feeds the dogs just prior to her discovery by the robbers/dwarfs. A number of Knidian Snow Whites have a much more extended presentation: while staying with the dwarfs/robbers the heroine must feed the dog/cat or a giant will come and get her. In Xenophon this is cut down to realistic size: the dogs will simply eat her if they are not fed. But again Xenophon may retain a hint of some monster or other. She is rescued from the trench by one Polyéidos (‘many form’): in a true folktale version one should expect some kind of Protean shape shifter here.

So much, then, for a fairly complete rendering of the folktale into romance. It seems clear enough that Xenophon has adapted a folktale, and that the surviving version of Xenophon’s tale did not develop into the folktale: it is difficult to distinguish the outlines of the folktale from the additional overlay of romantic melodrama, and a stripped down summary of Xenophon would scarcely produce a version like that of the Grimms. But we do find incorporated into Xenophon the essential mainspring of Snow White—the motif of white-and-red, and two versions of the motif of divination; the heroine’s jealous female rival; two different versions of the kindly protectors (the peasant and the robbers); the deathly sleep produced by poison (but differently motivated), and even a hint of the glass coffin, now relegated to a subplot. And it is worth stressing that nothing like this collocation of motifs occurs in any of the extant romances related to different folktale plots.

There is also a stray connection between Xenophon and the Chione fragments: the relatively rare name Megamedes, who appears here either as Chione’s father, or less likely as some importunate suitor. As it happens Megamedes is the father of Anthia in Xenophon’s version. In etymological terms the name might serve also as an equivalent to Daedalion (‘of great skill’ or the like), and thus duplicate the father of the Ovidian Chione.

At this point there is just one more addition to the Snow White repertoire. In 1922 Lavagnini published two short papyrus excerpts in which the names Anthia and Euxinos occur. The latter is the name of a pirate in Xenophon’s romance, and these fragments could well be from some other form of it. Lavagnini spotted the resemblance, but not a third factor—the presence of the word pharmakos in one of the fragments. This episode ought to be sited at the point where Anthia receives the sleeping draught. Other names occur in this new text: Thalassia, which might turn out to be Anthia’s mother (if we bear in mind the genealogy of Chione), and Thraseas, who might at this point in the story be a new name for Perilaus, whom Anthia does not wish to marry. None of this offers enough to go on, and all of it must remain provisional guesswork.

What then, can now be said about Snow White in antiquity? We should feelentitled to conclude that there was already a diversity of versions, and that the dwarfs could be represented in some form in the story. We shall see below and in Chapter 12 that the relationship between a form of Snow White and ‘the search for the
lost brothers’ already existed, inter alia in the *Iphigenia* complex. The outline of the folktale is provisionally implied in at least one of the mythical versions, that of Ovid, and regional variations of the folktale offer at least the kernel and some of the less conventional episodes of more than one romance. As in the case of Cinderella we must expect to come to the conclusion that myth, folktale and novel represent different presentations of the same basic material. Nor is this the last case of such common ground we shall find.

### The search for the lost husband (AT Type 451)

So far we have concentrated our attention on the normal ‘Snow White’, AT Type 709. But there is substantial overlap in the modern repertoire between this type and one other in particular, AT Type 451. Here the heroine finds that for some reason connected with her birth and prospects of inheriting the kingdom, her brothers have been driven out of it by their father; she goes in search of them, but they are changed into birds or animals. However, she survives, as in *Snow White* texts, in the custody of giants or dwarfs, and may have some feature parallel to the *Snow White* glass case—such as going into a mountain of ice, or experiencing a long period of silence—before saving the brothers by disenchantment. This type may be prosecuted without any ‘marriage to the prince’ at all, but where it contains the presence of dwarfs and/or some equivalent of the glass case, its cognates are clear enough and marriage to the prince can also be included. The type may be illustrated from one of several Grimm versions side by side with an English example:

See Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AT Type 451</th>
<th>English Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The kingdom goes to her and her future consort, and so it is necessary for us to take counsel now in order to reach an irrevocable decision. We have thirty days to make up our mind, which to this end from them...</em>[rest unintelligible without context].</td>
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As far as it goes this would fit the idea that Chione, finding that her brothers have had to go to clear her claim to the kingdom, should follow them into the *Snow White*-related adventures of AT Type 451. But without being sure that the speakers are her brothers, we can only suspect.

We should also note a strong resemblance to the lost brother type of tale in at least some treatments of the story of Iphigenia, Orestes and Electra. Iphigenia’s name does not help us (‘princess noble’), but the arrangement of motifs is telling. She is a girl promised to a prince (Achilles). She is threatened with sacrifice at the behest of a prophet Calchas, though at the last moment a hind is substituted; she now appears in a hostile far-away land where there are bull-men (Taurians), who offer human sacrifice to their goddess. Along comes a brother and friend, who take her away, *together with a statue of Artemis*. This combines the idea of taking the girl away from her other-worldly environment and the idea of the hero taking away a statue; the Snow White prince often carts off the body of the benumbed girl worshipped by the dwarfs. In addition, Orestes and Pylades, according to Lucian (*Toxaris* 7) were celebrated by the Scythians as *Korakoi*, either cognate with, or easily misunderstood as *Korakes* (ravens).

If we see this simply as a puzzling series of mythological footnotes to the legend of Orestes and Iphigenia, it remains one of the peculiar dead ends of myth, so frequent when the principal characters find themselves beyond the familiar pale of the Greek world. But if we attempt to translate the sequence into terms of Snow White motifs we get the following:

*A noble princess is the victim of the envy of Artemis because of an offence by her father;*
an oracle orders her sacrifice; Artemis has a hind substituted on the altar, and the girl disappears, to be found among the wild Bull-men; she finds her brother and his friends there as Raven-men (?); they steal the holy image worshipped by the Bull-men. (By implication) the raven men lose their bird identity when they escape from the land of the bull-men.

We should stress the provisional nature of such an outline, cobbled together from very disparate strata of mythological information; we should stress, too, the oddities it offers as a folktale variant. We notice the compassionate executioner motif, here discharged by Artemis herself; the fatal oracle, functioning rather differently from the modern magic mirror; the prince’s taking away of the statue, not identical with the heroine. But after all the reservations have been made, such a version is still clearly recognisable as belonging to AT Type 451, though it leaves a good many questions unanswered.

It is difficult to detach another branch of the family of Agamemnon from the Chione-complex as well: Iphigenia’s sister, Electra, is persecuted by her mother and stepfather; she is put out in the wild to live with a peasant, who serves the same purpose as the wild bull-men in relation to her sister, the role of unlikely protectors in a wild but hostile environment; she shows concern for her brother Orestes (‘mountain-man’), and eventually will be married to his companion Pylades. She and the ignoble sister Chrysothemis have the same kind of colour contrast in their names (Amber and Gold-law) as found in some parts in the Snow White complex (Pomegranate and Lemon in the Jewish-Egyptian version). If, as seems likely, Electra was persecuted by the Erinyes, then we might have the possibility of a madness scene of some sort, or a hostile encounter with bird creatures. Before marriage to Pylades we have no scene of an ice mountain, glass coffin or any such thing, but her name Electra ought to mean ‘amber-girl’, i.e. transparent preserving substance. This again suggests a hint of the preserving glass case so prominent in the modern Snow White tale, and unexplained in the parts of Electra’s story that we actually know from the Tragedians and the mythographic record.

Again, we must ask at this stage, as in the case of Cinderella, whether there is a case for an ancient Near Eastern predecessor of our classical examples. It is of particular interest and consequence that the same Sumerian goddess who offers a proto-Cinderella can offer us a proto-Snow White as well. In Inanna and the Nether World, which exists in both Sumerian and Akkadian recensions, Inanna wanders down to the underworld, where she is strung up as a naked corpse by her sister Ereshkigal. Only by courtesy of the Annunaki, seven inhuman, sexless creatures, who act as judges of the dead, is she allowed back to life (in the Akkadian version). Here we have the jealousy of a close female relative and murder attempt that form the basis of Snow Whites; in the Annunaki we may well be looking at yet another perspective on the Seven Dwarfs—as underground personnel out of the normal sphere of human activity. It may be worth recalling that the Grimm dwarfs spend their day in a mine.