



IONA and PETER OPIE

# THE CLASSIC FAIRY TALES

'It is grown people who make the nursery stories; all children do, is jealously to preserve the text.'

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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had been the two former times; he arrived at the Giant's mansion in the evening, and found his wife standing at the door. Jack had disguised himself so completely, that she did not appear to have the least recollection of him; however, when he pleaded hunger and poverty in order to gain admittance, he found it very difficult indeed to persuade her. At last he prevailed, and was concealed in the copper. When the Giant returned in the evening, he said, 'I smell fresh meat,' but Jack felt quite composed, as he had said so before, and was soon satisfied; however, the Giant started up suddenly, and, notwithstanding all his wife could say, he searched all around the room. Whilst this was going on, Jack was terrified exceedingly, and ready to die with fear, wishing himself at home a thousand times; but when the Giant approached the oven, and put his hand upon the lid, Jack thought his death-warrant was signed. The Giant ended his search there, without moving the lid of the copper, and seated himself quietly. This fright nearly overcame poor Jack; he was afraid of moving or even breathing, lest he should be heard. The Giant at last ate a great supper; when he had finished, he commanded his wife to fetch down his harp. Jack peeped under the copper-lid, and soon saw the most beautiful harp that could be imagined; it was placed by the Giant, he said 'play,' and it instantly played of its own accord, without being touched. The music was very fine, Jack was delighted, and felt more anxious to get the harp into his possession, than either of the former treasures. The Giant's soul was not attuned to harmony, and the music lulled him into a sound sleep. Now therefore was the time to carry off the harp, and the Giant appeared to be in a more profound sleep than usual. Jack quickly determined, got out of the oven, and took the harp. The harp was a fairy; it called out loudly 'master! master! master!' The Giant awoke, stood up, and tried to pursue Jack, but he had drunk so much that he could not stand. Poor Jack ran as fast as he could; in a little time the Giant was sufficiently recovered to walk slowly, or rather to reel, after him; had he been sober he must have overtaken Jack instantly; but, as he then was, Jack contrived to be first at the top of the bean-stalk, the Giant calling to him all the way he went, and sometimes he was very near him. The moment Jack set his foot on the bean-stalk, he called for a hatchet; one was brought directly; he soon reached the ground, just at that instant the Giant was beginning to come down; but Jack with his hatchet cut the bean-stalk close off to the root, which made the Giant fall into the garden—the fall killed him. Jack's mother was delighted when she saw the bean stalk destroyed;\* he heartily begged his mother's pardon for all the sorrow and affliction he had caused her, promising faithfully to be very dutiful and obedient to her for the future. He proved as good as his word, and was a pattern of affectionate behaviour and attention to parents. His mother and he lived together a great many years, and continued to be always very happy.

\*At that instant the fairy appeared; she first addressed Jack's mother, and explained every circumstance relating to the journey up the bean-stalk. Jack was now fully cleared in the opinion of his mother. The fairy then charged Jack to be dutiful and affectionate to his mother, and to follow his father's good example, which was the only way to be respectable and happy. She then took her leave of them, and disappeared. [Editor's note 1807.]

## SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

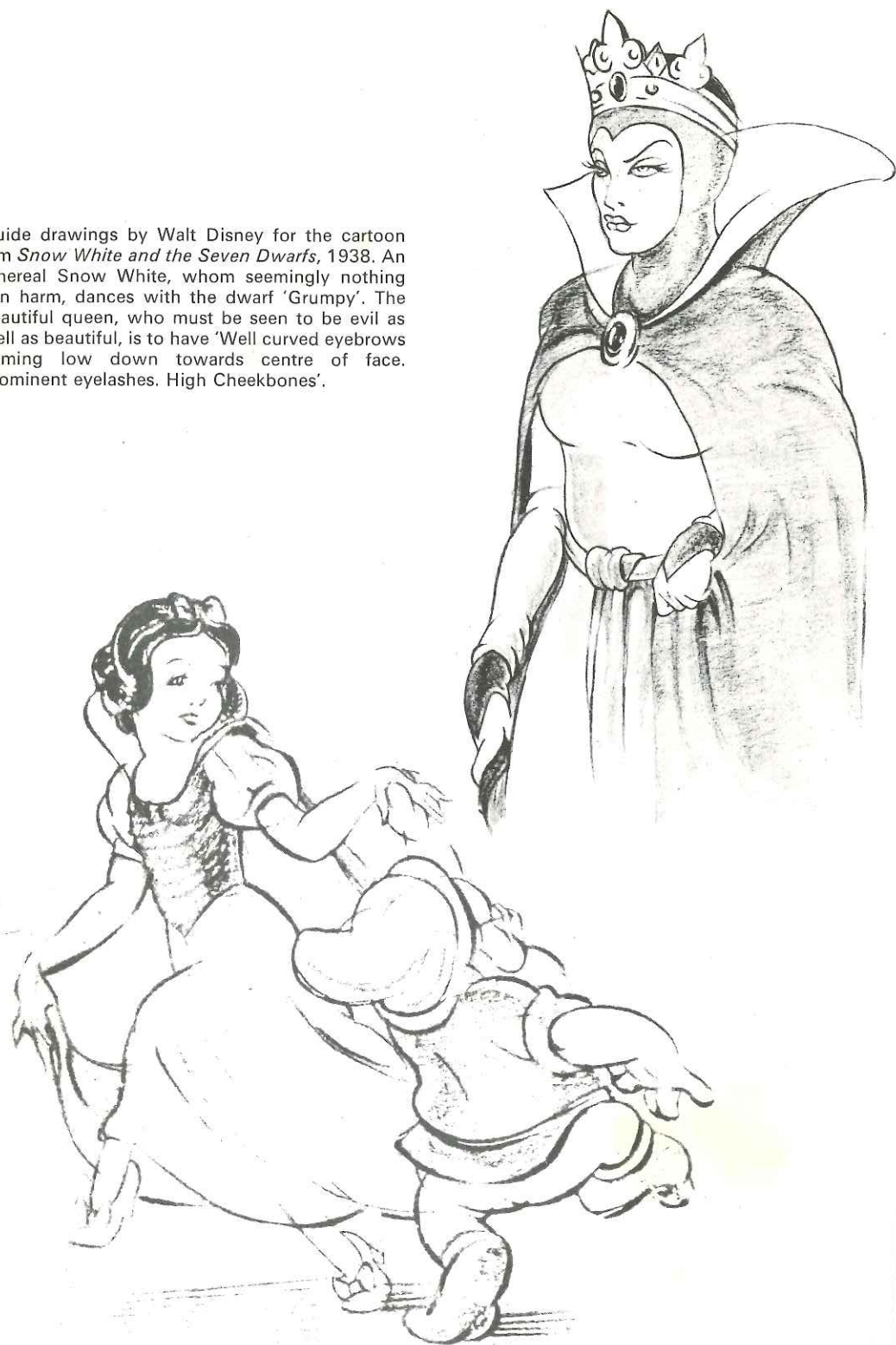
The story of Snow White was one of the tales Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm collected in Cassel from two sisters, Jeannette and Amalie Hassenpflug, whose brother Ludwig was to marry their sister Lotte. The story, a morality, perhaps, on the spitefulness of which beauty queens are capable, was in fact well known in Hesse at the beginning of the nineteenth century; and it has subsequently been found with little variation over a wide area from Ireland to Asia Minor, and in several parts of North and West Africa.

The tale contains elements that lie deep in European folk tradition; but it is not necessarily an old story, and has probably come under literary influence. Thus the theme of the glass coffin, in which lay Snow White's body, remaining ever as beautiful as the day it was laid to rest, was a feature of the story of Lisa in the *Pentamerone* (Day 2, tale 8) published 1634. Lisa, like Snow White, was a lovely seven-year-old child, and she died, or appeared to have died, through having a comb stuck in her head. For years her body was kept secretly in a casket of crystal; and it remained lovely, so lovely that when her uncle's wife discovered it in a locked room, it aroused her most intense jealousy. Further, the story in the *Pentamerone*, printed more than three hundred years ago, throws light on an anomaly in the story of Snow White which—to the rational minded, if to no one else—has always seemed to need explanation: the fact that Snow White, who was seven years old when abandoned in the woods, and apparently not much older when murdered, should be thought mature enough for marriage when the Prince discovers her in her coffin. In the *Pentamerone* it is explained that Lisa, after her apparent death and incarceration, continued to grow like any other girl, and the crystal casket lengthened with her, 'keeping pace as she grew'. The tale in the *Pentamerone* is in fact more satisfactory than the

present-day tale in that Lisa's casket, unlike Snow White's glass coffin, was kept hidden, so no one would have seen her growing. In addition the aunt's extreme enmity is shown to have been due to her supposing that her husband was having an affair with the beautiful girl. The aunt did not know Lisa was her husband's niece, and does not seem to have been aware that the girl had for years lain in a coma. When the aunt opens the casket she thinks the maiden merely asleep, takes hold of her by the hair and drags her out, fortuitously dislodging the comb in her head and restoring her to life.

The text that follows appeared under the name 'Snow-drop', in *German Popular Stories, Translated from the Kinder und Haus-Märchen, collected by M. M. Grimm, from Oral Tradition, 1823*. It was the Grimms' version of the tale which Walt Disney brought to the screen in 1938, in a cartoon film (the first of feature length) that seemed at the time a work of compelling power and humour, but which, when seen again in later years, has not lived up to the first impression. The film has, in fact, had an unfortunate effect on fairy-tale illustration. It is interesting, however, that in the film story Disney chose to re-establish an incident glossed over by the early translators, that the queen not only ordered Snow White to be killed, but ordered that her heart be brought back as a token that the deed had been accomplished. In fact in the German original the story was even more unpleasant. When the servant, particularized as a huntsman, came back with the heart of a young boar he had killed, the queen is stated to have had it salted, and to have eaten the heart in the belief that it was Smeewitchen's. To match this, the queen's fate, at the end of the story, was more terrible. At the wedding-feast, when the queen's crime was exposed, slippers of iron were heated in a fire until red hot, and the queen was forced to put them on, and to dance until she dropped dead.

Guide drawings by Walt Disney for the cartoon film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1938. An ethereal Snow White, whom seemingly nothing can harm, dances with the dwarf 'Grumpy'. The beautiful queen, who must be seen to be evil as well as beautiful, is to have 'Well curved eyebrows coming low down towards centre of face. Prominent eyelashes. High Cheekbones'.



## SNOW-DROP

It was in the middle of winter, when the broad flakes of snow were falling around, that a certain queen sat working at a window, the frame of which was made of fine black ebony; and as she was looking out upon the snow, she pricked her finger, and three drops of blood fell upon it. Then she gazed thoughtfully upon the red drops which sprinkled the white snow, and said, 'Would that my little daughter may be as white as that snow, as red as the blood, and as black as the ebony window-frame!'<sup>1</sup> And so the little girl grew up: her skin was as white as snow, her cheeks as rosy as the blood, and her hair as black as ebony; and she was called Snow-drop.

But this queen died; and the king soon married another wife, who was very beautiful, but so proud that she could not bear to think that any one could surpass her. She had a magical looking-glass, to which she used to go and gaze upon herself in it, and say,

'Tell me, glass, tell me true!  
Of all the ladies in the land,  
Who is the fairest? tell me who?'

And the glass answered,

'Thou, queen, art fairest in the land.'

But Snow-drop grew more and more beautiful; and when she was seven years old, she was as bright as the day, and fairer than the queen herself. Then the glass one day answered the queen, when she went to consult it as usual,

'Thou, queen, may'st fair and beauteous be,  
But Snow-drop is lovelier far than thee!'<sup>2</sup>

When she heard this, she turned pale with rage and envy; and called to one of her servants and said, 'Take Snow-drop away into the wide wood, that I may never see her more.' Then the servant led her away; but his heart melted when she begged him to spare her life, and he said, 'I will not hurt thee, thou pretty child.' So he left her by herself; and though he thought it most likely that the wild beasts would tear her in

<sup>1</sup>Another tale the Grimms collected, 'The Juniper Tree', opens in a comparable manner. A woman is peeling an apple when she cuts herself, and the blood falls on the snow. 'Ah,' she sighs, 'if I had but a child as red as blood and as white as snow.'

<sup>2</sup>An earlier instance, of striking similarity, of a maiden's beauty being magically revealed occurs in the *Pentamerone*, Day IV, tale 7. Some geese, which the unfortunate Ciommo has been forced to look after, and which his beautiful sister Marziella has been secretly feeding, push their way into the King's garden, and sing under his window:

Pire, pire, pire!  
Fair is the sun and fair is the moon,  
But the maid who feeds us is fairer still.

pieces, he felt as if a great weight were taken off his heart when he had made up his mind not to kill her, but leave her to her fate.<sup>1</sup>

Then poor Snow-drop wandered along through the wood in great fear; and the wild beasts roared about her, but none did her any harm. In the evening she came to a little cottage, and went in there to rest herself, for her little feet would carry her no further. Every thing was spruce and neat in the cottage: on the table was spread a white cloth, and there were seven little plates with seven little loaves, and seven little glasses with wine in them; and knives and forks laid in order; and by the wall stood seven little beds. Then, as she was very hungry, she picked a little piece off each loaf, and drank a very little wine out of each glass; and after that she thought she would lie down and rest. So she tried all the little beds; and one was too long, and another was too short, till at last the seventh suited her; and there she laid herself down, and went to sleep. Presently in came the masters of the cottage, who were seven little dwarfs that lived among the mountains, and dug and searched about for gold.<sup>2</sup> They lighted up their seven lamps, and saw directly that all was not right. The first said, 'Who has been sitting on my stool?' The second, 'Who has been eating off my plate?' The third, 'Who has been picking my bread?' The fourth, 'Who has been meddling with my spoon?' The fifth, 'Who has been handling my fork?' The sixth, 'Who has been cutting with my knife?' The seventh, 'Who has been drinking my wine?' Then the first looked round and said, 'Who has been lying on my bed?' And the rest came running to him, and every one cried out that somebody had been upon his bed. But the seventh saw Snow-drop, and called all his brethren to come and see her; and they cried out with wonder and astonishment, and brought their lamps to look at her, and said, 'Good heavens! what a lovely child she is!' And they were delighted to see her, and took care not to wake her; and the seventh dwarf slept an hour with each of the other dwarfs in turn, till the night was gone.

In the morning, Snow-drop told them all her story; and they pitied her, and said if she would keep all things in order, and cook and wash, and knit and spin for them, she might stay where she was, and they would take good care of her. Then they went out all day long to their work, seeking for gold and silver in the mountains; and Snow-drop remained at home: and they warned her, and said, 'The queen will soon find out where you are, so take care and let no one in.'

But the queen, now that she thought Snow-drop was dead, believed that she was certainly the handsomest lady in the land; and she went to her glass and said,

<sup>1</sup>The compassionate executioner is, understandably, not uncommon in popular literature, the renowned example in English balladry being the ruffian in the 'Children in the Wood' who slew his comrade rather than murder the two babes.

<sup>2</sup>The dwarfs portrayed here correspond with the description of dwarfs in the preface to *Das Heldenbuch*, the collection of thirteenth century epic poetry. 'God . . . produced the dwarfs, because the mountains lay waste and useless, and valuable stores of silver and gold, with gems and pearls, were concealed in them. Therefore God made the dwarfs right wise and crafty, that they could distinguish good and bad, and to what use all things should be applied.'

'The queen and her glass', illustration by R. Anning Bell, from *Grimm's Household Tales*, 1901



'Tell me, glass, tell me true!

Of all the ladies in the land,  
Who is fairest? tell me who?'

And the glass answered,

'Thou, queen, art the fairest in all this land;  
But over the hills, in the greenwood shade,  
Where the seven dwarfs their dwelling have made,  
There Snow-drop is hiding her head, and she  
Is lovelier far, O queen! than thee.'

Then the queen was very much alarmed; for she knew that the glass always spoke the truth, and was sure that the servant had betrayed her. And she could not bear to think that any one lived who was more beautiful than she was; so she disguised herself as an old pedlar, and went her way over the hills to the place where the dwarfs dwelt. Then she knocked at the door, and cried 'Fine wares to sell!' Snow-drop looked out at the window, and said, 'Good-day, good-woman; what have you to sell?' 'Good wares, fine wares,' said she; 'laces and bobbins of all colours.' 'I will let the old lady in; she seems to be a very good sort of body,' thought Snow-drop; so she ran down, and unbolted the door. 'Bless me!' said the old woman, 'how badly your stays are laced! Let me lace them up with one of my nice new laces.' Snow-drop did not dream of any mischief; so she stood up before the old woman; but she set to work so nimbly, and pulled the lace so tight, that Snow-drop lost her breath, and fell down as if she were dead. 'There's an end of all thy beauty,' said the spiteful queen, and went away home.

In the evening the seven dwarfs returned; and I need not say how grieved they were to see their faithful Snow-drop stretched upon the ground motionless, as if she were quite dead. However, they lifted her up, and when they found what was the matter, they cut the lace; and in a little time she began to breathe, and soon came to life again. Then they said, 'The old woman was the queen herself; take care another time, and let no one in when we are away.'

When the queen got home, she went straight to her glass, and spoke to it as usual; but to her great surprise it still said,

'Thou, queen, art the fairest in all this land;  
But over the hills, in the greenwood shade,  
Where the seven dwarfs their dwelling have made,  
There Snow-drop is hiding her head; and she  
Is lovelier far, O queen! than thee.'

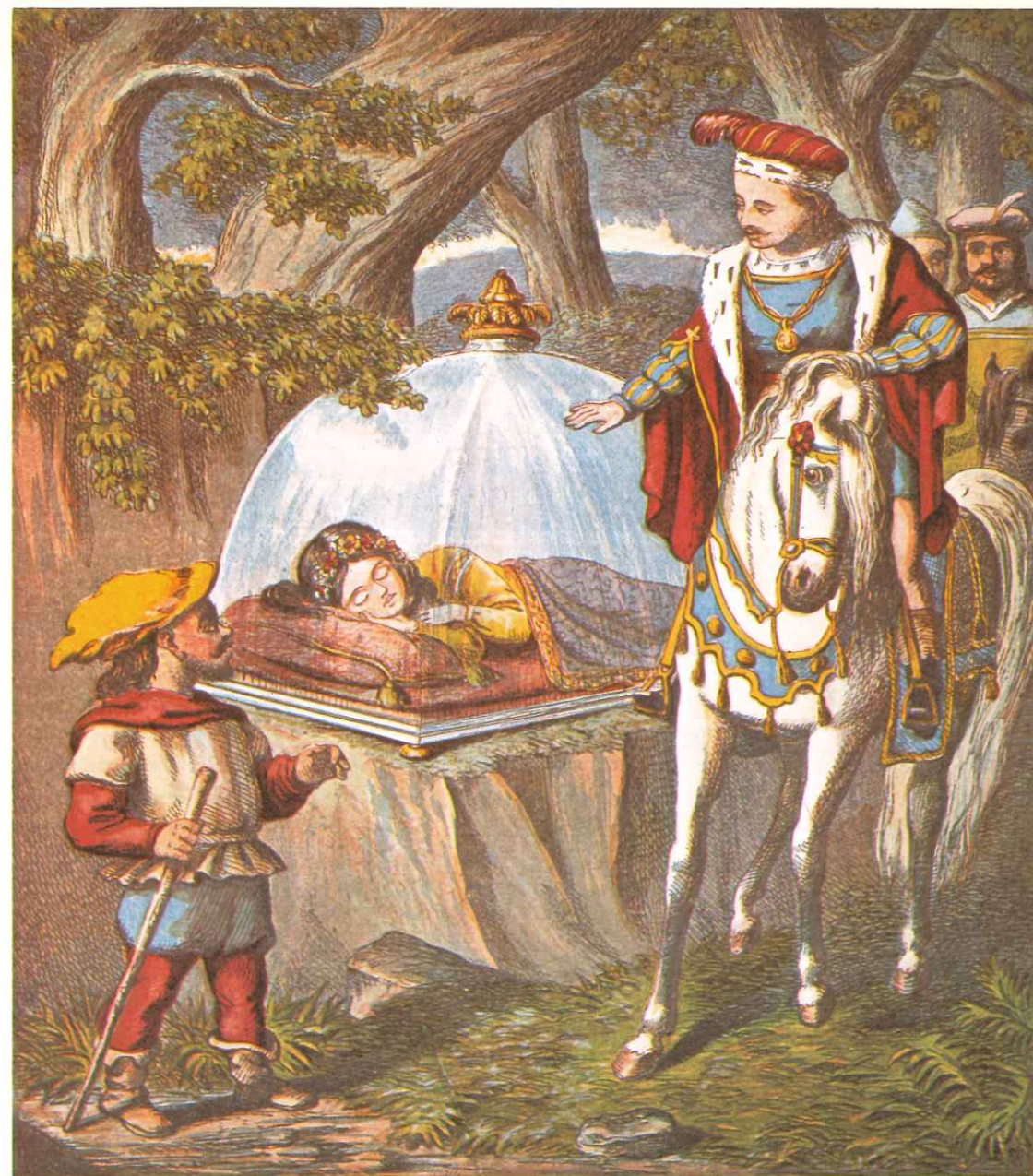
Then the blood ran cold in her heart with spite and malice to see that Snow-drop still lived; and she dressed herself up again in a disguise, but very different from the one she wore before, and took with her a poisoned comb. When she reached the dwarfs' cottage, she knocked at the door, and cried, 'Fine wares to sell!' but Snow-drop said, 'I dare not let any one in.' Then the queen said, 'Only look at my beautiful combs;' and gave her the poisoned one. And it looked so pretty that she took it up and put it into her hair to try it; but the moment it touched her head the poison was so powerful that she fell down senseless. 'There you may lie,' said the queen, and went her way. But by good luck the dwarfs returned very early that evening; and when they saw Snow-drop lying on the ground, they thought what had happened, and soon found the poisoned comb. And when they took it away, she recovered, and told them all that had passed; and they warned her once more not to open the door to any one.

Meantime the queen went home to her glass, and trembled with rage when she received exactly the same answer as before; and she said, 'Snow-drop shall die, if it costs me my life.' So she went secretly into a chamber, and prepared a poisoned apple: the outside looked very rosy and tempting, but whoever tasted it was sure to die. Then she dressed herself up as a peasant's wife, and travelled over the hills to the dwarfs' cottage, and knocked at the door; but Snow-drop put her head out of the window and said, 'I dare not let any one in, for the dwarfs have told me not.' 'Do as you please,' said the old woman, 'but at any rate take this pretty apple; I will make you a present of it.' 'No,' said Snow-drop, 'I dare not take it.' 'You silly girl!' answered the other, 'what are you afraid of? do you think it is poisoned? Come! do you eat one part, and I will eat the other.' Now the apple was so prepared that one side was good, though the other side was poisoned. Then Snow-drop was very much tempted to taste, for the apple looked exceedingly nice; and when she saw the old woman eat, she could refrain no longer. But she had scarcely put the piece into her mouth, when she fell down dead upon the ground. 'This time nothing will save thee,' said the queen; and she went home to her glass, and at last it said

'Thou, queen, art the fairest of all the fair.'

And then her envious heart was glad, and as happy as such a heart could be.

When evening came, and the dwarfs returned home, they found Snow-drop lying on the ground: no breath passed her lips, and they were afraid that she was quite dead. They lifted her up, and combed her hair, and washed her face with wine and water; but all was in vain, for the little girl seemed quite dead. So they laid her down upon a bier, and all seven watched and bewailed her three whole days; and then they proposed to bury her: but her cheeks were still rosy, and her face looked just as it did while she was alive; so they said, 'We will never bury her in the cold ground.' And they made a coffin of glass, so that they might still look at her, and wrote her name upon it, in golden letters, and that she was a king's daughter. And the coffin was placed upon the hill, and one of the dwarfs always sat by it and watched. And the birds of the air



The prince finds Snow White in her coffin of glass. Colour wood-engraving from Routledge's Shilling Toy Book *Little Snow-White*, c. 1870

came too, and bemoaned Snow-drop: first of all came an owl, and then a raven, but at last came a dove.

And thus Snow-drop lay for a long long time, and still only looked as though she were asleep; for she was even now as white as snow, and as red as blood, and as black as ebony. At last a prince came and called at the dwarfs' house; and he saw

Snow-drop, and read what was written in golden letters. Then he offered the dwarfs money, and earnestly prayed them to let him take her away; but they said, 'We will not part with her for all the gold in the world.' At last however they had pity on him, and gave him the coffin: but the moment he lifted it up to carry it home with him, the piece of apple fell from between her lips, and Snow-drop awoke, and said 'Where am I?' And the prince answered, 'Thou art safe with me.' Then he told her all that had happened, and said, 'I love you better than all the world: come with me to my father's palace, and you shall be my wife.' And Snow-drop consented, and went home with the prince; and every thing was prepared with great pomp and splendour for their wedding.

To the feast was invited, among the rest, Snow-drop's old enemy the queen; and as she was dressing herself in fine rich clothes, she looked in the glass, and said,

'Tell me, glass, tell me true!  
Of all the ladies in the land,  
Who is fairest? tell me who?'

And the glass answered,

'Thou, lady, art loveliest *here*, I ween;  
But lovelier far is the new-made queen.'

When she heard this, she started with rage; but her envy and curiosity were so great, that she could not help setting out to see the bride. And when she arrived, and saw that it was no other than Snow-drop, who, as she thought, had been dead a long while, she choked with passion, and fell ill and died; but Snow-drop and the prince lived and reigned happily over that land many many years.

John Hassall's pre-Disney differentiation of the seven dwarfs by means of inscribed breeches, c. 1921



## THE FROG PRINCE

The Frog Prince is another tale in which a handsome husband is won by a girl's acceptance of a creature that is at first repulsive to her. It is another tale, too, with a textual history that reveals the dilemma editors of English fairy tales sometimes have to face. Almost certainly the story of the Frog Prince has long been known in Britain, yet no satisfactory text has been preserved. When Walter Scott saw the tale in the Grimms' *Kinder- und Haus-Märchen* he readily recalled from his childhood (he was born in 1771) a legend of a 'Prince Paddock' in which a princess was sent to fetch water in a sieve from the Well of the World's End, and that the feat was achieved by following the advice of a frog who obtained, in return, the princess's lightly-given promise to become its bride. John Leyden (born 1775) was another who recalled 'the popular tale': 'A lady,' he wrote in 1801, 'is sent by her stepmother to draw water from the well of the world's end. She arrives at the well, after encountering many dangers; but soon perceives that her adventures have not reached a conclusion. A frog emerges from the well, and, before it suffers her to draw water, obliges her to betrothe herself to the monster, under the penalty of being torn to pieces. The lady returns safely; but at midnight the frog-lover appears at the door, and demands entrance, according to promise, to the great consternation of the lady and her nurse.'

"Open the door, my hinny, my hart,  
Open the door, my ain wee thing;  
And mind the words that you & I spak  
Down in the meadow, at the well-spring."

The frog is admitted, and addresses her—

"Take me up on your knee, my dearie,  
Take me up on your knee, my dearie;  
And mind the words that you and I spak  
At the cauld well sae weary."

The frog is finally disenchanted, and appears as a prince, in his original form.'

This tale, often called 'The Well of the World's End', appears to be listed in *The Complaynt of Scotland* (1549), amongst tales which a group of shepherds are said to have told each other, 'The tayl of the volfe of the varldis end'—*volfe*, according to the lexicographer J. A. H. Murray, being a misprint for 'volle' or 'velle', meaning 'well'. Yet the tale was not recorded in narrative form until Queen Victoria was on the throne, when Robert Chambers, in 1842, set down as much of it as he could—or almost as much, for after the Paddo had asked for the door to be opened, and, that granted, to be given supper, and, that granted, to be put to bed, Chambers drew a veil, commenting 'Here let us abridge a little'. But he did record that afterwards the Paddo sang:

'Now fetch me an aix, my hinny, my heart,  
Now fetch me an aix, my ain true love;  
Remember the promise that you and I made,  
Down i' the meadow where we twa met.'

And that the lassie brought the axe, and chopped off the frog's head as instructed, 'and nae sooner was that done than he startit up the bonniest young prince that ever was seen'. This version Chambers had been given by the antiquary Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, who had learned it from his Annandale nurse, Jenny, about the year 1784. But the story, as taken down, was a fragmentary one, so that Halliwell, in *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales*, 1849, felt obliged to fill it out, claiming, with doubtful veracity, that he had had the metrical part of the tale 'from the North of England'. These patches of story were next sewed together by Joseph Jacobs for his *English Fairy Tales*, 1890; and more recent editors, not wishing to deny the tale to their collections, have further embroidered it, so that the English version now almost has a convincing life of its own.

The idea that a kiss, or the marriage bed, could release a person from the curse of monstrosity, was one that thrilled readers in the Middle Ages,