



# **Spinning Straw into Gold: What Fairy Tales Reveal About the Transformations in a Woman's Life**

*Joan Gould*

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What's your favorite fairy tale? Whether it's "Cinderella," "Beauty and the Beast," "Hansel and Gretel," or another story, your answer reveals something significant about you, your experiences, and your soul. In this penetrating book, Joan Gould brings to the surface the hidden meanings in fairy tales and myths, and illuminates what they can tell you about the stages in your own life. As Gould explores the transformations that women go through from youth to old age—leaving home and mother, the first experience of sexuality, the surprising ambivalence of marriage, the spiritual work required by menopause and aging—her keen observations will enrich your awareness of your inner life.

Full of archetypal figures known to us all, *Spinning Straw into Gold* also includes stories from the lives of ordinary women that clarify the insights to be gained from the beloved tales that have been handed down from one generation to the next.

## **Spinning Straw into Gold: What Fairy Tales Reveal About the Transformations in a Woman's Life Details**

Date : Published February 14th 2006 by Random House Trade Paperbacks (first published February 14th 2005)

ISBN : 9780812975451

Author : Joan Gould

Format : Paperback 448 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Fantasy, Fairy Tales, Mythology, Feminism, Psychology, Folklore, Womens

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# **From Reader Review Spinning Straw into Gold: What Fairy Tales Reveal About the Transformations in a Woman's Life for online ebook**

## **Kit Dunsmore says**

This book spoke to me on many levels. My favorite thing about it is the deep understanding she has of what fairy tales offer us. She looks past the Disney versions of princes rescuing helpless females and digs out the older and richer heroine versions of the stories, then shows us how they apply to our life transitions today. Her discussion of the stages of a woman's life and the transitions she undergoes (and how she gets through them) matched well with my personal experience. Added a bunch of new books to my TBR list because she referenced them.

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## **Cara Marie says**

Is quite interesting in its discussion of the fairy tales, but irritating in saying woman=mother, and then I was tempted to throw it across the room when the author suggested that people with depression were somehow to blame for it. Would be better with less of the author's attitude.

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## **Teresa says**

I'll never quite look at the story of Cinderella the same way again and that's a good thing. This work is brilliant! Nothing less than a woman-centered response to Joseph Campbell's A Hero's Journey. Joan Gould's efforts to hunt down the traditional versions of the fairy tales she analyzes (rather than relying on the Disney versions we're more familiar with) and her subsequent analysis of their themes and subtexts is illuminating to say the least.

Without giving anything away, Gould delves deeply into how women's fundamental biological differences from men (revolving around the ability to bear children) have profound emotional and psychological consequences for individuals and how fairy tales attempt to address these issues with metaphor. To me, the book was uncomfortably Freudian at times and there are places where I think she takes biological determinism too far, but even so this is a very insightful book. Fans of Jean Shinoda Bolen will very likely enjoy.

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## **Tina says**

no matter how many times I read this book, I'm always picking up something new. It's the kind of book that

can be opened at any point & read & enjoyed

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## Helynn says

This is such an interesting study (although it sometimes does get a little too Freudian for my taste; more on that later) about the psychology behind some well-known fairy tales and how they typify dilemmas and choices that have faced women for centuries. Author Joan Gould designates three phases of a woman's life--the maiden, the mother and the crone--that are analyzed by various tales. One of the chapters, entitled "Cinderella: Surviving Adolescence" states that all of us women are cinderellas of some sort--"overworked, unappreciated, biding our time, until we gather strength to step into our glory" (40). We stay with the program, as did Cinderella, because we figure it's all part of our growth. The fairy godmother does not equal enchantment so much as guidance to a higher level of consciousness. Gould claims that all the great Cinderella figures in literature and film--Jane Eyre, Hester Prynne, Celie from *The Color Purple*, etc., *actually support themselves when need be, without reliance on a man. (I like that!)* The *Sleeping Beauty* chapter is interesting as well. Gould notes that the sleeping aspect of the heroine's life is an avenue toward creativity. "We, too, are often half asleep in our daily lives, sometimes because we are in the midst of transformation," says Gould. "If we watch carefully we see that our feelings, our intellect, our will, even our bodies, drowse at critical times, if we are not ready for the adventure that confronts us. We black out when life demands too much . . . we also sleep if life demands too little, leaving us no outlet for our talents, feelings, sexuality, and ambition . . . we aren't fully awake . . . we resist this idea, but should realize that sleep is a positive force that makes life and creative work, as well as transformation possible (90-92). . . No great work of art was ever created by the conscious mind alone--the period of germination at the deepest level, followed by gestation, still in darkness, is crucial" (98). Now, here is where Gould gets Freudian and a little weird. Continuing with the ideal that sleep incubates maturity as well as creativity, she says, "the 15-year-old princess unlocking the forbidden door to the spinning wheel is a sexual metaphor . . . the spindle a phallic symbol that draws blood . . . the menstrual 'curse' . . . or first intercourse blood" (100). Despite the typical difficulties of female adolescence--i.e., wishing to sleep through the painful transitions to adulthood--we eventually wake. "Why do we wake when we do? Call it an inner migration from the underworld to the upper world, brought about by some seasonal change in the light. At any age, if we get a taste of who we are, if we fall in love with life in whatever form we find it and choose to embrace it, we can fairly call that moment 'the Prince's kiss.'" (125). Gould frequently comments on how the modern Disney versions of fairy tales have watered the original stories down to pale imitations of their original selves. "What *Sleeping Beauty* experiences in the Disney version is rescue, not transformation" (132). Other interesting chapters examine the psychology behind *Beauty and the Beast*, *Rapunzel*, and *The Seal Wife*, and *the Fitcher's Bird*. A very interesting chapter analyzes the crone, or woman in her later years: "She faces what she fears, she grows in spirit (291) . . . at 50, one is more or less either reborn or moribund" (294). Finally, the author reflects on her own great-grandmother, who briefly appeared to her after her death. Gould thinks also of her own granddaughter. "I am her past, but also her future" (312). Well, I found this book thought-provoking and I took a ton of notes. See what you think.

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## Dayna says

This book was not quite what I was expecting. I guess I thought it would be more of a scholarly work, with lots of references and facts. It has some, but mostly it reads like a collection of Gould's personal opinions . . . as influenced by her experiences as a mid-century woman. I was a bit disappointed by that. Beyond that,

Gould's writing is nice, almost lyrical. Some of her theorizing was interesting, and I thought she made some good points. But a lot of it was totally subjective to your point of view, and so much of it wasn't completely relatable for women today. Especially the younger ones, who have not been brought up with fairy tales as a standard. My generation has been told that fairy tales don't reflect life, that there is no prince, and that it is our job to take care of ourselves ... we can do anything we want to, no matter our biology. So, it was interesting, but only just. It was a little too Freudian, and I thought it was hilarious how everything came down to sex. I would have liked to of read something a bit more celebratory of womanhood, and less disparaging. But I don't think Gould's intent was to be disparaging ... it just came off that way, to me, in more than one instance. So, while I liked it, I couldn't love it, and I probably won't ever come back to it.

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## **Car Mint says**

This is interesting book !  
I scan contents of this book that wonderful topic.  
I just get in from bookshop in this week !  
Don't pass it ! Buy it now !

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## **Tracy says**

This marvelous book caught my eye because of its title, *Spinning Straw into Gold*. I instantly recognized the reference to *Rumpelstiltskin*, one of my favorite fairy tales. I was exceedingly impressed with the thoughtful research and insights of the author Joan Gould that I discovered inside.

Gould illustrates and examines the themes of female transformations and burdens throughout her life as dramatized in fairy tales. I've always loved fairy tales and of course recognized some of the messages about growing up, but I now have a much more profound appreciation and understanding of my own life thanks to Gould.

Her guiding point was that women are ruled by biological transformations that have huge impacts on their lives. The girl matures into a woman. A transformation. The young woman enters a sexual time. Another transformation. The woman bears children. A startling physical transformation. The woman grows old and loses fertility, and transforms into the final stage of life.

Many fairy tales and popular stories address the girl to sexual woman stages because this is the fun and sexy part. But from Gould I learned to think more deeply about the stages of matron and crone. I especially liked her interpretation of the Seal Wife stories. In the Seal Wife, a fisherman catches a seal and brings her on shore. He takes her seal skin and makes her a woman. He hides the seal skin because without it she cannot return to the sea. She is trapped on land with him and becomes his wife and the mother of his children. But one day she finds her seal skin, puts it on, and returns to the sea. The story connects with the general longing of mothers to escape their responsibilities and return to the freedoms lost to marriage and motherhood. Or it can represent the mother who recalls her former self and resumes some of her interests beyond the rigors of diapers and soccer practices.

I also liked Gould's words on the subject of old age. She explained how in earlier days most people did not live long enough to become elderly, so an old woman was considered to have some kind of strange magic

keeping her alive. Now that old age is much more common, Gould said that it was a great gift of life for her free of the daily demands of nurturing the next generation as the matron must do.

I highly recommend *Spinning Straw into Gold* for people who like fairy tales and who really like to explore the deeper realities of life.

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### **Lisa H says**

I both love and hate this book.

I hate it because it focuses so much on the idea that biology is destiny. Then I find myself trying to defend this in that many fairy tales (ok almost all of them) were written when this wasn't even up for debate. But part of me longs for a progressive stance on fairy tales. A stance that includes queer and transfolk because part of me wants to believe with all my heart that we don't need to throw out everything about our current culture, we just need to modify it for it to be inclusive. As the author points out very rarely did fairy tales remain the same even when they were written down. Maybe it's our turn to change them.

That said I loved how this book went through and explained fairy tales, and not the Disney versions of them. It showed that in pre-Disney tales the heroines had spunk, and power, and didn't need to be saved by a prince.

Maybe it really isn't a surprise that I have a love/hate relationship with this book, because I have a love/hate relationship with fairy tales.

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### **Elizabeth says**

It's an interesting read connecting popular themes in fairy tales with the conflicts women deal with at varying stages of a woman's life. I felt some of her claims of symbolism were a bit of a stretch, and the general feel was that women are hopelessly bound to urges and cultural expectations beyond their control. There were a couple of great passages that rang true to common frustrations, but I felt the analysis of the solution offered in the fairy tales was sketchy and incomplete and ultimately no type of a solution at all.

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### **Phair says**

Very interesting and full of ideas (I took 4pp of notes in my journal). Author has annoying habit of interjecting her own life story in illustration of some points that I found jarring & even a tad whining and/or grandstanding in tone. Some bits dragged & felt a little tedious and she seemed to lose focus toward the end and turn more toward illustrating her personal agenda rather than explaining the fairy tale/ folklore connections. [I never realized that *The African Queen* is essentially *Beauty and the Beast*!:]

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### **Andrea says**

This is a really interesting study of fairy tales and (like the title says) what they reveal about women. It's not a perfect book, but I was expecting this to say how fairy tales are crap and help our society keep women

down, but it's quite the opposite. Who knew that fairy tales could be about womens' transformations into decisive, independent beings? I learned that my knowledge about fairy tales is based on Walt Disney movies, and those aren't the good fairy tales. The dark, creepy "real" fairy tales are where all the fun is.

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### **Samantha Lazar says**

This book was really interesting because it talked about many characters that are from well-known fairytales. This book really examined the way the women characters are portrayed in society. For example, Cinderella is a character that is examined very closely in the book.

I remember reading stories like this when I was little, but I never really thought about the "stereotypical" woman character. She is the helpless character who needs to be rescued by her prince. Now, as an adult, I look at these stories in a very different way. However, I would not introduce these issues to elementary students. This is something I would use with high school students during a fairytale unit. It would be wrong to ruin these stories for young children, and I don't think that they would be able to fully grasp this type of analysis.

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### **Cassandra says**

I like the idea behind *Spinning Straw into Gold*, but I did not agree with some of the author's ideas. The analysis of the fairy tales were really enjoyable even though they may have been over analyzed. Overall, *Spinning Straw into Gold* is a unique book that would suit fairy tale lovers.

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### **Alexis Johnson says**

4.5 stars. I loved this book. While I think a few of the interpretations are kind of bizarre, or a bit of a stretch at times, I adored the author's deep insights and critical thinking on fairy tale heroines. It's just a fascinating read that gets your wheels turning. This book is something that has definitely helped my own character and story development, and I will be buying myself a copy in the near future.

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