

The Fairy Tale Sleeping Beauty and the Year 2020

By Richard John Fraser Cooper

Who has not been taken aback by the unprecedented events of this year? Going forward, we are undoubtedly in a time of change, but what kind of change, and what may be learnt from *times of change* that have gone before? Much can be learnt when we more deeply question the events of one hundred years ago and see the movement of spiritual history in relation to 2020. Rudolf Steiner has drawn our attention to looking at history through the lens of 100 years. Each 100-year phase carries $3 \times 33 \frac{1}{3}$ years within it, to make a total of one hundred. Steiner showed how the rhythm of $33 \frac{1}{3}$ years mirrors the life of Christ on earth, from birth to crucifixion and resurrection. It is therefore important to explore how we may reconnect with what was initiated 100 years ago, in its positive and negative aspects, to gain insight into mankind's struggle toward the Christ impulse.

100 years ago from the ominous outbreak of the Coronavirus Crisis in 2020, the official implementation of the Treaty of Versailles was signed on the 10 January, 1920. The Treaty, enforcing reparation payments on Germany for its war guilt, was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the historical events that would later unfold; notably, the rearmament of Germany leading to the Second World War and the world order that would later emerge after 1945. Quite aptly, the signing had taken place in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, in Paris, France, being rather symbolic of an elite struggling to pursue their own national and established political concerns separated from any of the spiritual implications of the decisions before them.



*Sir William Orpen **The Signing of the Hall of Mirrors**, 1919, Imperial War Museum, London.

1920 was also a crucial time for anthroposophy. After introducing the Threefold Social Order during the First World War to offer an alternative to the new world system taking shape, Steiner's impulse had failed to find resonance. In contrast to the tragic years of darkness with the First World War, the opening of the First Goetheanumⁱ on 26 September in that year can be seen as a light filled artistic response to the needs of the world. The Goetheanum, cited as a masterpiece of modern architecture, was named after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and was conceived as a '*total work of art*' (German *Gesamtkunstwerk*) that would bring together lectures, Steiner's new art of movement *Eurythmy*, *Speech Formation*, Sculpture, Painting and Theatre, including Steiner's own *Mystery Dramas*.

The three forms of Culture, Politics and Economy striven for in the Threefold social Order, Rudolf Steiner reworked into an impulse for a new spiritual understanding of Religion; Art and Natural Science.ⁱⁱ After the tragic burning of the First Goetheanum – it was destroyed by arson stemming from opposition to Steiner's work – just over two years later, at the New Year's Eve of 1922/1923, Steiner had referred to the spiritual '*sleepiness*' of the anthroposophists around him at the time; emphasizing the importance of *active* inner life. His complaint was of necessity and dire need; for he wished to encourage further and future spiritual engagement in spite of the deep pain that he himself felt, as did many others, at the tragic event of the burning.

In a lecture course given a year after the fire on 31 December 1923, now available under the title *World History in the Light of Anthroposophy*, Steiner made a comparison between the burning of the First Goetheanum and the burning of the Temple of Artemis (associated with the roman goddess Diana) at Ephesus 356 BC by Herostratus. He described

the spiritual background to this event as a deed expressing the *Jealousy of the Gods*: whilst with the First Goetheanum in more materialistic times, it was rather the *Jealousy of Men*. The Temple at Ephesus' high point was through the 6th and 5th century BC, notably the time of the Greek philosophers such as Heraclitus (535 – 475 BC) who dedicated his influential work *On Nature* to the temple of Artemis. Steiner explains how the pupils of the Temple of Ephesus, through spiritual training, would enter into a spiritual state and look down from within the life (etheric) realm of the spiritual world – from the etheric widths of etheric space – on the temple of Ephesus and that the Gods had felt jealousy of what man was thus experiencing. The historian Plutarch described that the goddess Artemis was more concerned with the birth of Alexander (the Great) than the burning of the her Temple at Ephesus, highlighting an awareness that from the spiritual perspective the course of history was changing, and that the focus would be more on those individuals who would carry the teachings of the mysteries into the world.

For Alexander the Great was indeed born in the same year of the fire, 356 BC. Though him the teachings of Aristotle (born 384 BC) from whom he was schooled, were carried by Alexander's conquests and seeded into the Middle East and further to India. Aristotle's synthesis of philosophy and ethics of nature observation, as had been once nurtured in the *Ancient Mysteries*, has laid the basis for almost every form of knowledge in the Western civilisation. Steiner places this in a wider spiritual context, in relation to Christ. He describes how the *Jealousy of the Gods* that had permeated the world from this time on.

When we consider Steiner's reference to the *Gods*, stated in the plural, with the quote from the Old Testament Exodus 34:14 – *For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God* – we may reflect on the monumental significance of times that were at hand. For with Christ, a *new testament* to the spiritual world would come to unite mankind in a new way with the spiritual world. Steiner emphasizes in the Ancient Greek times, Christ's had ever-closer approached to the earth, yet in Christ's case, rather than jealousy, Christ was filled rather with love for humanity. Christ's love for humanity when he walked the earth, therefore shows the fulfillment in deed of that great feeling of love that had carried him through time, in his spiritual descent to the earth.

The Ancient Greek Myth Persephone

In pre-Christian times, Demeter was the goddess for the growth of crops from spring up to summer, while in Hades they saw as the god of the winter season, when the sun seemed to sink into the earth. However, they also perceived this passage between growth and death, as the *movement* of nature itself through the seasons, as a goddess whose purpose was to connect the two realms, the over and the underworld. This figure was Persephone. The myth describes how when she was playing in a flowery meadow with her Nymph companions, Kore (the maiden 'name' of Persephone) was seized by Hades and carried off to the underworld as his bride. Her mother, Demeter, despaired and searched for her, accompanied by the torch-bearing threefold goddess of the underworld, Hecate. When Demeter learned that Zeus had conspired in her daughter's abduction she was furious and refused to let the earth bear any fruit until Persephone was returned. Zeus consented, but because Persephone had tasted of the food of Hades – a handful of pomegranate seeds – she was forced to forever spend a part of the year with her husband in the underworld.

The Ancient Greek times the myths would have been expanded upon to the pupils of the mysteries. Steiner describes how students of Ephesus would walk around the glades, paths and groves, with the sea to one side and the temple to the other. Their intimate conversations of spiritual teachings, perceptions of the twilight and the natural world around them, they would then carry with them, as a kind of soul preparation, into the nights where the spiritual world would speak to them. It is fascinating to reflect that John the Evangelist and Mary mother of Jesus spent their last years in Ephesus, a meeting of the old and the new mysteries. In contrast, to the times before Christ, John and Mary at Ephesus would teach from their personal witness of Christ's deeds and life on earth and revelation of the future meaning for the world of his resurrection.

Many of these new dynamics we may see in the plays of Shakespeare, notably and prominently in *Pericles Prince of Tyre*, where the Prince of the title also has to embark on a quest marked by sea catastrophes to re-establish the link between spiritual forces, nature and human society. The parallels to the story of Persephone are striking. Yet the message of hope for inner personal transformation, redemption and hope are *new*. After exile from a corrupt land where his life is in danger, and grief at his blows of fate, eventually Pericles rises triumphant. He recovers his lost daughter *Marina* and reunites with his wife *Thaisa*, after being called in dream by Diana to the temple at Ephesus:

Act V, Scene 3

The temple of Diana at Ephesus; THAISA standing near the altar, as high priestess; a number of Virgins on each side; CERIMON and other Inhabitants of Ephesus attending. [Enter PERICLES, with his train; LYSIMACHUS, HELICANUS, MARINA, and a Lady.

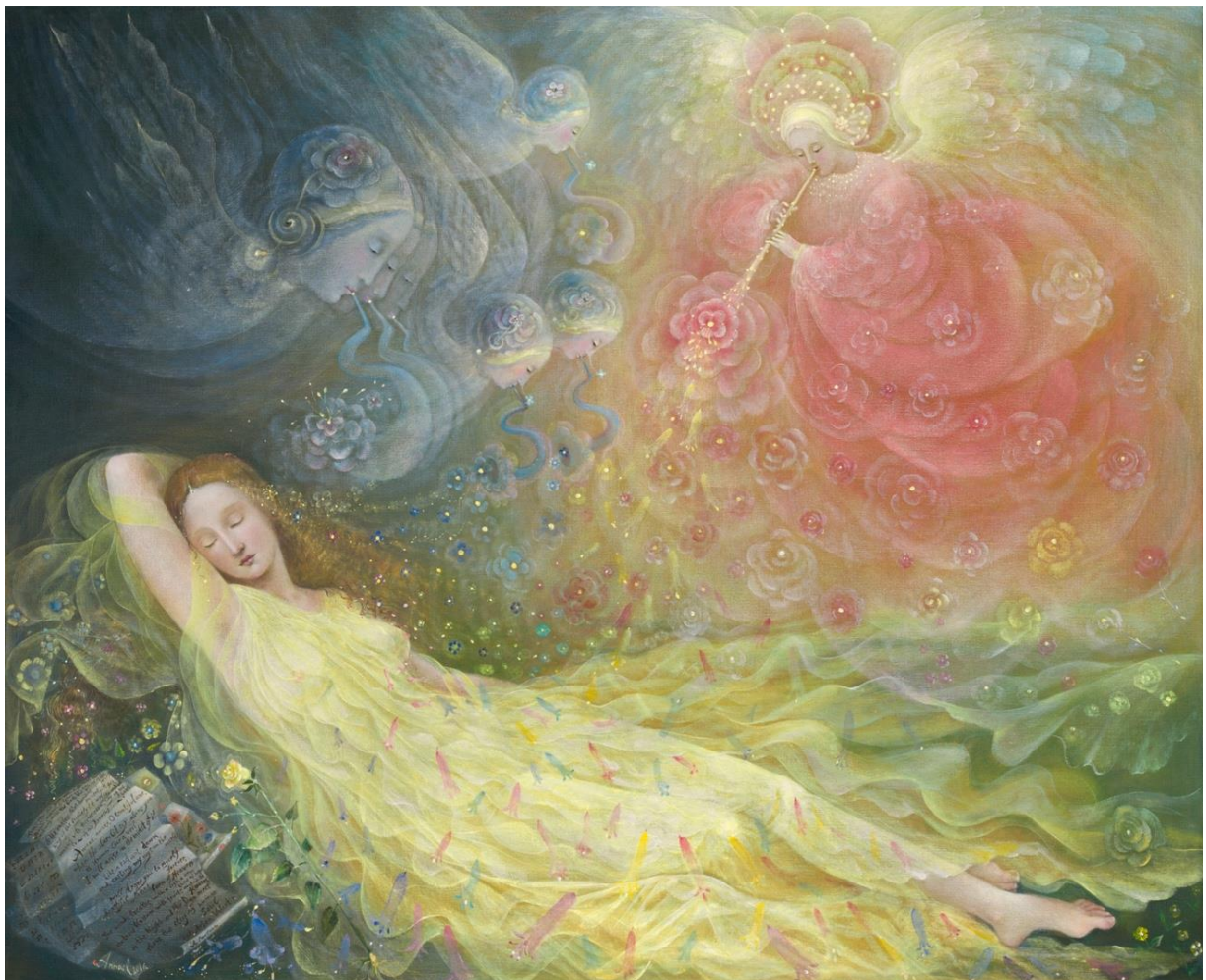
Pericles

Hail, Dian! to perform thy just command,
I here confess myself the king of Tyre;
Who, frighted from my country, did wed
At Pentapolis the fair Thaisa.
At sea in childbed died she, but brought forth A maid-child call'd Marina; who, O goddess,
Wears yet thy silver livery. She at Tarsus
Was nursed with Cleon; who at fourteen years
He sought to murder: but her better stars
Brought her to Mytilene; 'gainst whose shore
Riding, her fortunes brought the maid aboard us,
Where, by her own most clear remembrance, she
Made known herself my daughter.

Thaisa. Voice and favour!
You are, you are—O royal Pericles!

William Shakespeare **Pericles, Prince of Tyre**

When we consider that after Christ's resurrection the spiritual mysteries flow into society through individual impulse, the well-known fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* highlights how aspects of the the myth of Persephone has been woven into world history. The fairy tale can be found in numerous versions, from Grimm's German 1812 version *Little Briar Rose*, to Giovan Battista Basile's *Sun Moon and Talia* (1634), yet the themes of this story story go even further back to the mythological legendary compendium of stories about early Britain in *Pereceforest*.ⁱⁱⁱ In one excerpt drawn from Geoffery of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136) Pereceforest describes how Alexander is on his way by sea to the coronation of India's new king when they are blown off course in a storm. They arrive in Britain and discover the poor state of the country. Here the sleeping beauty figure is called Zelandine, for whom a prince is required to release from the enchantment.



A Dweller in Three Worlds

The basis of much of Rudolf Steiner's research method he describes in detail through the spiritual historical background to Rosicrucianism and its founder Christian Rosenkreuz.^{iv} We may consider here the rose (the emblem of Rosicrucianism), and specifically its thorny stem. Contrasted with the pure sap and fructifying lance of sun light, the stem hardens at various points and forms the spikes of the thorns, resting at intervals up the stem. This process of inwardly reflecting on the contrast of the tender blossoming of the flower and the hardened intervals of the thorns, is an example of natural sensual perception and thinking, which is thereby organic rather than intellectual.

In essence, the most ancient form of Rosicrucianism involves learning to think imaginatively *into* the natural world and thereby making connection to human society. The Sleeping Beauty fairy tale can be considered a meditation on the transformation and purification of these interwoven forces of life and destiny. The story starts with a king and queen who had longed for a child to no avail. In contrast to the joy when the queen finally gives birth, immediately an evil force confronts them. Here follows a part of the opening sequence to the Brothers Grimm *Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale, aptly named in another version *Brier Rose* or indeed the German 'Dornröschen' (thorn rose):

"When the christening was over, the feast came. Before each of the fairies was placed a plate with a spoon, a knife, and a fork—all pure gold. But alas! As the fairies were about to seat themselves at the table, there came into the hall a very old fairy who had not been invited."

The *Bad Fairy* in *Sleeping Beauty* is instrumental in leading to the cursed sleep of the queen. She states that if she should prick her finger on a spinning wheel she will die. The first king does all he can to prevent the princess from finding anything like a spinning wheel with which she might prick her finger and draw blood. When the inevitable happens, that the king had so sought to offset, the 100-year curse is enacted.

"At that same moment the king and his attendants returned, and everyone began to fall asleep: the horses in the stalls, the pigeons on the roof, the dogs in the courtyard, the flies on the walls. Even the fire on the hearth flickered, stopped moving, and fell asleep. (...) And a thorn hedge grew up around the entire castle, growing higher and higher, until nothing at all could be seen of it."

The action then shifts to a new time when a prince (following the failed attempts of many others before him) then seeks out the princess in new land hidden in dense forest. We can note how in the Giambattista version, the princess Talia gives birth to twins, *Sun* and *Moon*, who are instrumental in leading the story to its happy end, after the resolution of the curse, here represented as a splinter of flax:

"Now after nine months Talia delivered two beautiful children, one a boy and the other a girl. In them could be seen two rare jewels, and they were attended by two fairies, who came to that palace, and put them at their mother's breasts. Once, however, they sought the nipple, and not finding it, began to suck on Talia's fingers, and they sucked so much that the splinter of flax came out.."

In the beginning, the king symbolizes the intellectual defensiveness against spiritual knowledge that would increasingly gain ground as mankind lost this more ancient perception of the spiritual worlds. He then has to embark on the quest to reawaken the princess: as a symbol of spiritual wisdom. The original *Bad Fairy* also transforms; she becomes in the Giambattista version the jealous *Evil Queen*, to whose instrumental role we are granted the following insight in her confrontation with the princess, Talia:

"The queen, not for pity of the unhappy lady, but to gain also those robes, which were embroidered with gold and pearls, told her to undress, (...) With every item that she removed Talia uttered a loud scream. Having taken off her robe, her skirt, the bodice, and her shift, she was on the point of removing her last garment, when she uttered a last scream louder than the rest. They dragged her towards the pile, to reduce her to ashes."

At this moment the king enters and finally sees the impending evil before his eyes. Previously he had denied and defended himself against higher knowledge, yet now he has made the conscious journey through the enchanted forest of thorns and redeemed the spiritual relationship to his princess. He now sees where his spiritual ignorance has placed him, whereby, in this tale, the evil queen has fed him, as food without his knowing, his own murdered children

"Alas! Then I, myself, am the wolf of my own sweet lambs. Alas! And why did these my veins know not the fountains of their own blood?"

He orders the evil queen to be burnt in her own *wickedly-devised* fire. However, at this moment there is the wonderful revelation: the cook had not followed the her demands to kill the children and had substituted them for lambs. At this very moment, the cook steps forward to explain and bring forth the children: and the King realizes with great joy, how his wife and children have been saved by the cook.

"If it is true that you have saved my children, be sure that I will take you away from turning the spit, and I will put you in the kitchen of this breast, to turn and twist as you like all my desires, giving you such a reward as shall enable you to call yourself a happy man in this world."

It is a moment of deep humility and thankfulness; of the king's self-knowledge of his own connection to higher realities and their karmic effect on those around him. The Rosicrucian impulse is highlighted throughout the stories in their interweaving of the three realms: natural, human and spiritual, – of inner pictures of destiny and transformation, with the more ancient themes of rebirth, death, initiation and hope.



Anelia Pavolova "**Behold He Comes**" (Ecce Venit)", 2017

Awakening from Persephone to Michael

When we try to feel into these times, of 1920 and our own 2020, we are struck by dramatic spiritual events of the fire, and the artistic testimony to the Spirit. But we may also be touched in admiration for individual karmic tasks and courage. When speaking of the burning of the First Goetheanum, Rudolf Steiner refers, in contrast to the *Jealousy of the Gods* at Ephesus, to the *Jealousy of Men* of the more materialistic twentieth century. It was karma that was often deeply determinate.

Carl Unger, one of the leading original anthroposophists and industrialist pioneers of the threefold social order collaborative 'Der Kommende Tag AG' (in English, *The Coming Day*) was shot dead before a lecture in 1929, by a mentally disturbed anti-Semite; while Michael Bauer died in 1929, after needing to step back from public lectures in 1920, after giving a seminar before 200 people – the audience had been told beforehand to regard all he said about anthroposophy with suspicion and fear.^{vi} Steiner himself died before his time, in 1925, while Edith Maryon, Steiner's collaborator on the only surviving wooden sculpture from the fire, the *Representative of Man*, died in 1924. Both Rudolf Steiner and Edith Maryon had invested so much artistic life in their collaboration that the shock of the burning was for her especially devastating. *The Representative of Man* had been the center piece of the Goetheanum, depicting Christ holding the balance between the adversary powers of Lucifer and Ahriman. Miraculously, this wooden sculpture survived.

100 years on from 1920, we can remember Steiner's most pressing concerns: that others would take up the work of initiation and that a new spiritual science would permeate all areas of life and society. As with anthroposophy, and society in a wider sense, the princess in Sleeping Beauty awakes from her slumber with a kiss from the prince, yet the castle and all the attendants lie around her as if frozen in time. This year's Coronavirus Crisis revealed a stark resistance to conscious change, where once more multinational concerns seek to protect a system, which, in effect, is undermined by its own confused economic and materialistic policies. At Michaelmas 2020, we may find courage; creatively. As we see above, Michael carries the sword with the dragon curled below and the angels riding on the horses, heralding the advent of spiritual experience. Whether considering nature, karma or human society, active thinking is a deed which with the power of Michael's sword may unearth the fear and materialism that stands in contrast to Michael's serious and noble expression of cosmic intelligence, to present to us new vistas for practical human life.

Anthroposophicum

At Michaelmas 2020, when in Europe the dark of autumn and winter draws in again, we see Persephone's journey as only half complete. In the southern hemisphere spring starts to awaken. Together with the artist represented here Annael, in Australia^{viii}, in our Facebook groups *Anthroposophicum* and *Judith von Halle and Anthroposophy* we study aspects of the First-Class Meditation of Rudolf Steiner, Karma Research, Poetry, Christology and Art, and translations of German texts by Judith von Halle (a German anthroposophist focusing on esoteric Christianity). For contact and links to Facebook Groups, further artists' works and supplementary material to this article see Richard John Fraser Cooper, <https://www.anthroposophicum.com>

ⁱ The Second Goetheanum was rebuilt in a concrete form on the same site. While of a completely different form and expression, it has also been cited as a masterpiece of modern architecture.

ⁱⁱ Rudolf Steiner **Music, Mystery, Art and the Human Being**, Rudolf Steiner Press 2016, from 26 September to 16 October 1920: known as the first course of the School of Spiritual Science (where Steiner offered training and insight for developing faculties for experiencing and researching the spiritual world) and accompanied by numerous artistic performances and over 90 lectures on a range of specialist themes.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Pereceforest** (Manuscript C, written by David Aubert around 1459–1460).

^{iv} Rudolf Steiner An **Outline of Esoteric Science**

^v Versions of the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale: *Sun, Moon and Thalia*, Giambattista Basile (1614), Grimms' *Little Briar-Rose* version of 1812, and the Charles Perrault version of 1697.

^{vi} Peter Selg, **Michael Bauer**, Der Verlag am Goetheanum 2006, p.182 Footnote 205. Rudolf Steiners 8 volumes on *Karmic Relationships* were given in 1924.

^{vii} **Annael (Anelia Pavlova)** Annael is a professional artist, originally from Bulgaria, living in Australia. Her painting and poetic work is inspired by classical music, poetry, literature, the Bible and the Old Masters. It is remarkable that she describes that all her paintings develop and expand from an original and creative *One* painting. www.annael.com

***Paintings** "The Dream of Venus", painted in 2016, oil on Belgian linen, 137,5 x 168 cm. after the songs of Franz Schubert. "Behold He Comes" (Ecce Venit)", made in 2017, oil on Belgian linen, 183 x 259 cm. after Haydn's Missa in augustiis (Nelson Mass) Hob.XXII:11, Creation Mass Hob.XXII:13.

