

Woodland nymphs, we may recall, were also associated with the Garden of Hesperides. Indeed they were also associated with the Mysteries of the ancient world, and any who heard the call of their double pipes in the woods knew well to keep well away, for that was the call for the initiates to assemble.

The singing maiden, like an initiatrix of old, bids Dante to look and listen; and through the wood there comes the most beautiful music, running on the shining air. On the far side of the brook a resplendent pageant approaches them. This marks the return of love, the personal presence of Beatrice. It also prepares Dante for his return to the conditions of the Earthly Paradise, long lost.

What is to come is the core of the Mysteries of the feminine principle. It is akin to the awakening of the sleeping goddess in naked glory and splendor in *The Chymical Marriage of Christian Rosencreutz*. And also the appearance of the great goddess Isis in all her splendor to the repentant Lucius the ass. Or to the sky-walking dakinis who are the consorts of the highest compassionate buddhas in the Tibetan system. Or to the source of the golden apples of the Hesperides that were the key to the possession of Atalanta, the pure maiden huntress. It is therefore not unfitting that at this point the author of the *Divine Comedy* pauses to invoke the virgin Muses on their heights on Mount Helicon, and in particular the Muse Urania. It is she who inspires knowledge of astronomy and heavenly things. The most divine secrets of love are, in short, held within "the starry wisdom."

The Pageant of the Divine Feminine

The interpretation of the symbolic Divine Pageant that then appears strikes even the poetic genius of Virgil dumb. It is better imagined and contemplated rather than explained. Seven golden candlesticks precede, akin to the seven lamps mentioned in Exodus that are a part of the symbolic accoutrements of the Ark of Covenant. They are also "the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God" in Revelation. In ancient Eastern esoteric lore they might be associated with the seven rays or seven modes of divine expression in the solar system. The light from these candlesticks spreads a rainbow canopy over all that follows.

This includes, first of all, twenty-four ancient men, two by two, crowned with fleurs-de-lys—or stylized lily flowers (the equivalent of the oriental lotus) that signify mystical wisdom. They are akin to the twenty-four elders mentioned in Revelation seated about the throne of God, but here