Greek Gods Zeus and Hera

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When we consider these earliest documents of the Western tradition—the Iliad and the Odyssey, which were composed prior to philosophic thought and prior of course to Christianity—how do we view their deepest insights? How do we view Homer’s portrayal of the gods? We have records of these same gods from many sources; so we know he didn’t make them up: he didn’t see them simply as poetic fictions, but as a part of the truthful portrayal of human strivings. He saw human life as permeated with their actions. And he took the
most poignant subject of the ancient world, the Trojan War, to portray the full reality of how things come about. And this involved for him, as for many of us, something supernatural, not just human psychology. When you study Paradise Lost, you will encounter Milton’s statement of purpose: to justify the ways of God to man. That’s Homer’s intent also; and we might dare to say that he was more successful at portraying spiritual presences than Milton. (Most people agree that Milton’s God the Father is a little wooden.) Homer seems to indicate that the beauty of it all justifies the horrors—and that the level eyes of the gods
admire this beauty. So what are we to think of these presences that in the poem are seen to permeate human life and determine so much of its meaning? How do we as modern readers view them? When you read Plato or Aristotle, you take seriously their reasoning processes, even though centuries of Christianity have superseded them. So is it not patronizing to view these creations of perhaps our greatest poet as mere superstitions? And isn’t it naive of us to think of them as trivial and shallow?

The persistence of these mythological fables for centuries is some sort of testimony (we first know of them with Hesiod and Homer,
around the tenth century B.C.); they were still functioning for the magnificent Greek dramas in the fifth and fourth century.) But though they were given luminous form in poetry, still they were not, as far as we can tell, invented by the poets who wrote of them. They circulated among the folk; there were cults and rituals long before Homer. They made up a body of presences that, though mischievous and unpredictable, were largely benevolent, accounting for the beauty and the meaning of the world.

The skeptic sees them, of course, as the products of naive, credulous minds. It is hard
to think of Homer, however, as naive. And harder still to view Sophocles in that light. No, the gods hardly seem to be projections of what one desires; nor are they products of fear. Rather, can they not be viewed as enhancements of the world, the way the mind views reality when it senses mystery and has not been dominated by literalism? They are figures that an entire folk accepted—and preserved—because they seemed to do justice to the way a people experienced the multiplicity and richness of the world. They came into being before the existence of a certain kind of mindset that we think of as modern. They came into the world,
by the way, at about the same time as the special revelation to the Israelites. It's almost as though the burst of that explosion reverberated in another part of the world, like the cloud of radiation from an atomic bomb. A novelist who once lived on our campus, Caroline Gordon, preoccupied herself intensely with the significance of the Greek gods. At one point in her novel *The Glory of Hera*, she has Zeus pause, hearing something the other gods do not hear: the voice of the psalmist. Only he among the Olympians can hear it. It is her attempt to pull together, as she said, the two sides of our heritage.
It is not the voice from the burning bush that Zeus hears, to be sure, but the human voice of another lineage praising and calling out to a God beyond the gods.

But that is in a novel. **How are we as Christians really to think of the Greek gods?** Would we rather believe that such beautiful minds as the Greeks possessed (that gave us epic and tragedy, philosophy and architecture) would be completely deluded about the nature of spiritual reality? We who are being inundated in our time by the myth of fact—who are being told that we are naive in thinking of our religion as given to us by revelation, by
something outside our own minds, since scientists are discovering more and more (so the story goes) the way we call the mind works. And, as their experiments seem to demonstrate, it works by purely material means; we are hard-wired, so they like to say, for religious experience.

For establishing final causes, the panoply of Greek gods seems preferable to synapses and DNA’s. And so it behooves us not to fall into the familiar pattern of patronizing these bright and beautiful beings but to find a way to think of them that takes them seriously. How would we describe it if some kind of sharp inner
warning makes us suddenly change a course of action, so that we are rescued from doing something catastrophic? A hunch? Luck? The Holy Spirit? or good angel? Something left over from the days when our ancestors roamed the forests? The Greek gods are a beautiful system of thought that attempts to account symbolically for the inner experiences of life, as well as the large overwhelming external ones. What I want to maintain is that we might do well to take these presences seriously—as seriously as the human characters in the poem—to “suspend our disbelief” and look closely at their significance.
I want to examine today the general interpretation of two of these immortals: one, Zeus as philanderer and two, Hera as shrew. My effort is to restore to both of them their dignity. And I want my remarks to culminate in the account of the hieros gamos, the celestial union depicted in Book XIV. [Zeus]

First, I want to quote the former president of this university, Donald Cowan, on something he had to say about Zeus in an article he wrote on the topic:

"Zeus is the generative principle that sustains history, magnifies it, and gives it form. His father, Kronos, may have started time, but
it is Zeus who engenders history, something that has sequence and recount-ability—that is to say, has meaning.

Dr. Cowan goes on to show that Zeus’ amours are not simply evidences of a shallow philandering nature. It is through his encounters with mortal women that heroes come into the world. The divine makes contact with the human through the generative process. (C. S. Lewis’ comment); 1. Semele: - Dionysus; 2. Alcmena: - Herakles 3. Leda: - Helen and Clytemnestra; 4. Mnemosyne (Titaness): - nine muses; 5. Metis-Hermes; 6. Dione: - Aphrodite; 7. Leto: - Apollo and Artemis.
Dr. Cowan goes on: “Zeus the intellect is the one to whom earthly events have meaning and beauty. His is the clear intelligence that the Greeks speak of as nous.” He cites the mythographer Karl Kerenyi, who declares: “With Zeus, the Nous shows itself pure and perfect . . . it discovers everything without seeking, indeed everything discovers itself to it . . . the object of nous is what really is.” Rachel Bespaloff (in her book On the Iliad) calls him “Zeus the watcher,” and attributes to this divine spectator the meaning of the poem. It is Zeus’ observation of all, she says that keeps
the Trojan war from being merely a bloody battle. “The heroic action, the beautiful deed, the sacrifice—all these take on meaning to the shining eyes of the god who feels not love for his creatures such as Israel’s Jahweh feels, but admiration and sometimes friendship.”

Passages from the Iliad give some sense of Zeus’ “watching” of earthly events, not simply observing, but brooding, gazing, assessing, contemplating, knowing. “I think of these men though they are dying,” he says to the assembled gods. “Even so I shall stay here upon the fold of Olympos, sitting still, watching, to pleasure my heart.” Agamemnon prays to him in
Bk III as “Father Zeus, watching over us from Ida.” (276) And in Bk XI, 80 when the fight is raging so fiercely below that the other gods draw back in a kind of horror”

To these gods
the father gave no attention at all, but withdrawn from them
And rejoicing in the pride of his strength sat apart from the others,
looking out over the city of Troy and the ships of the Achaians,
watching the flash of the bronze and men killing and men killed.
And we are told in Bk XVI that Zeus, after the
death of his son Sarpedon, will not “turn the
glaring of his eyes from the strong encounter
but kept gazing forever upon them, in spirit
reflective and pondered hard.” (644)

It is in Zeus’ eyes that valorous deeds have
an ultimate meaning. . . . So who or what is he,
this lord of Olympos?

Lloyd Jones writes, “It is difficult to know
Zeus’ nature; is he the necessity of Nature or
the mind of man?” It seems better to think of
him, Cowan says—as the Greek poets obviously
did—as in some sense the god beyond the
gods—theos, the god. Several centuries later,
Aeschylus has his chorus in Agamemnon speak,
out of their foreboding of ill for the House of Atreus:

Zeus, whatever he may be, if this name pleases him in invocation,/thus I call upon him./I have pondered everything yet I cannot find a way,/only Zeus to cast this dead weight of ignorance/finally from out my brain

By the time of Aeschylus, at any rate, the Athenians thought of Zeus as we think of God the Father, as the all-powerful, all-knowing god beyond the gods. And it seems to me that he is in the process of assuming this role in the Iliad.
When we turn to Hera, however, we find her to be the most difficult of all the Olym-pians to comprehend. Homer depicts her as moved by such savage wrath that her consort Zeus must from time to time rebuke her. "Dear lady," he protests in Book IV, what can be all the great evils done to you by Priam and the sons of Priam that you are thus furious/ forever to bring down the strong founded city of Ilion? If you could walk through the gates and through the towering ramparts and eat Priam and the children of Priam raw, and the other
Trojans, then, only might you glut at last your anger.”

Something monstrous seems indicated by the intensity of Hera’s vengeful ire—the devour-ing of her enemies raw, as an animal might do. This queen goddess is in several ways uncomfortably close to the monstrous. Hesiod tells us that she nursed the Lernaean Hydra and the Nemean lion, both of whom Herakles has to confront in his ordeals. The most appalling account of her fury, however, is given in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, in which it is said that she gives birth to the monster Typhaon out of her rage against her husband. Indignant at Zeus’ having borne
from his own head Athena, daughter of Metis,
Hera goes to the realm of the Titans, strikes
the earth with her hand and prays for a child of
her own stronger than Zeus. Then, the story
goes, in time,

the dreadful and baneful Typhoan, a scourge
to mortals/ whose aspect resembled neither
god nor man’s/ Forthwith cow-eyed, mighty
Hera took him and, piling evil/upon evil, she
commended him to the care of the she-dragon
(who is a terror to the human race). (Homeric
Hym to Apollo) (HOMERIC HYMNS - group of 34 hexa-
meter poems erroneously attributed to Homer by the ancients;
they were written a century or two after his time.)
Hera’s mysterious and ungovernable wrath indicates a dark force in her that places the goddess in a different category from the other Olympian deities. She has access to an obscure interiority in her own psyche, and knows the cosmic unlit regions of gloom as well as light. The Orphic hymn addressed to her, however, views this somberness as something gracious and beneficent:

You are ensconced in darksome hollows, and airy is your form, O Hera, queen of all the blessed, consort of Zeus. You send soft breezes—such as nourish the soul— you nurture the winds and give birth to all.
there is neither life nor growth./
And mixed as you are in the air we venerate,;
you partake of all,/ and of all you are queen and mistress.

Hera is here conceived of as a benevolent earth goddess and "queen of all the blessed." She is present in the very air we breathe, a kind of life spirit of nature and, as well, a ruling deity, "queen and mistress" of all. [One thinks of the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "The Blessed Virgin as the Air We Breathe."/ Two sets of myths seem to be associated with Hera — those stemming from her cultic worship as earth goddess and the
others from stories recounted by later collectors such as Hesiod, in which she is named in the divine genealogy as daughter to Kronos and Rhea and sister to Zeus.

The Homeric Hymn addressed to her is thoroughly complimentary: XII. TO HERA (5 lines)

I sing of golden-throned Hera whom Rhea bare. / Queen of the immortals is she, surpassing all in beauty:/ she is the sister and the wife of loud-thundering Zeus/ -- the glorious one whom all the blessed throughout high Olympus reverence/ and honour even as Zeus who delights in thunder.
Hera was originally, most scholars think, a queen in her own right, the primeval great goddess of the Minoan people, whose way of life was matriarchal.


Her first cults were probably at Argos, the second oldest city in Greece, so ancient that Homer called all the Greeks Argives. Her temples were at Samos and Olympia, and as British classical scholar and prof. of archeology at Cambridge, Jane Harrison tells us, her status as queen is marked in all her archaic representation. She became the tutelary goddess of heroes: her name is the feminine form of hero; and heroes, the spirits of dead warriors were consecrated
to her. But even early traces of the Lady (the literal significance of her name) show her to be considered not the primal earth mother herself but a version of that divine force, powerful and independent, governing all things and retaining her connection with earth. Fulfilling the nature of woman, as John Jacob Bachofen (author of Mutterreich in the 19th century) wrote of the feminine in general, "she is unable to cast off materiality, while the man becomes wholly removed from it and rises to the incorporeality of sunlight."

One account of her union with Zeus has it that the intruding young sky god, desiring her, caused a storm to break out on Mt. Thornax, where, taking the form of a cuckoo, he flew wet
and bedraggled to her breast for comfort. Out of pity, Hera tenderly received him and held him close to her bosom, where he soon resumed his true shape and his amatory prowess. Afterward, Hera insisted upon marriage to preserve her honor, and so resulted the marriage of earth goddess and sky god in the hieros gamos (sacred marriage). When we encounter Hera among the Olympians she has assumed a different mythic identity. She still possesses her native authority but has allied herself with another majestic divinity, her husband-brother Zeus, who having deposed his father Kronos, establishes the rule of intellect in the cosmos. Kerenyi speaks of the pair as the “archetypal couple whose two components
belong to one another like the halves of a unity.” But Hera retains her essential character in the union: each year she regains her virginity by bathing in the spring at Kanathos—a ritual that in permitting her to bestow herself afresh in marriage is a sign of her independence as well. She does not belong to Zeus, but gives herself to him anew each year in a free act.

Thus, by the time we really come to know Hera in Homer’s Iliad she has the identity of both sets of myths; but she has in effect relinquished some of her cultic status to be part of a higher society: the family of gods on Mt Olympos. With a kind of composite identity, earth mother, sister, and spouse, Hera is the
wedded consort of the father God Zeus, but as Kerenyi points out, without herself really quite being the mother goddess. In fact, her role as mother is somewhat dubious. Hephaistos, Ares, and Hebe are her children, the first two considered in some sources to be her own alone, along with the monstrous Typhaon, produced parthenogenetically. Kerenyi advances the ideas that “the patriarchal triangle was not properly completed in the Olympian divine family . . . What is missing is the son who might unite this couple in a patriarchal sense as a worthy first-born.” (This, by the way, is the task Caroline Gordon took on in her book The Glory of Hera, in which, with enormous scholarship, she makes a novel of all the
mythology, ending with Herakles (whose name means glory of Hera) ascending into Olympus after his fiery death and Hera, after harrying him throughout his life, accepting him as their son. "Ours all along,' she says to Zeus, with the fullest look of love she has ever given him."

Gordon was an authentic scholar of the myths. Her father was a classics professor, and she grew up reading Greek from childhood. An ardent Catholic, she saw however in Greek mythology patterns that she considered foreshadowings of fulfillment—and that she considered Christian in hope.

But let's get on with our interpretation of Hera. Homer speaks of her golden throne and names her immortal queen, next to Zeus the
thunderer the most eminent of figures, his wife and sister. Her basic equality to Zeus is acknowledged. “All the gods of Olympos revere her. They honor her even equal to Zeus, the lover of lightning.” But from the beginning of the poem, in Bk I, he establishes the rivalry between them. When Hera is suspicious of his interview with Thetis, he rebukes her sharply, reminding her of the time when he had to punish her physically and telling her that even she cannot know all his thoughts. Hephaestos, Hera’s crippled son, is apprehensive of a rift between them and cautions his mother to “approach him again/ with words made gentle, reminding her of the time he was thrown out of Olympos.” —and his mother smiles at him and
accepts a goblet from his hand.

The Hera of the cult had her own compelling power and beauty. She was protagonist in her own drama, having her own quest for meaning in her story. Her status in the Iliad however, seems somewhat paradoxical and even precarious. Though she is recognized as the Queen of Heaven and sits on her golden throne, she is by and large portrayed as simply one of the contending gods who take sides in the battles between the Achaians and the Trojans and at times even an obstacle. Homer describes her as white armed, a tribute to her nobility, and oxeyed--a remnant of her connection with the sacred cow ceremonies at Euboeia and Boeotia. She is recognized as possessing great
beauty, though she does not flaunt it and--except for references to one event—seems unaware of it. This one event concerns the fateful story of the golden apples, in which Paris, the Trojan prince, chooses not Hera but Aphrodite as the most beautiful among goddesses. Both Aphrodite and the other contender, Athena, are inferior to Hera in station; neither has been a goddess queen; neither is sister and consort to Zeus. It is this affront to her honor that Hera cannot forgive. Her grudge against the Trojans and their city is one of the angers fuelling the Trojan War. Like Achilles, who also cannot overlook a slight to his honor, Hera exhibits a wrath that, though excessive, has its own nobility and fine display.
Zeus seems somewhat afraid of Hera and apparently controls her only by threats and at least once, outright force. (He hung her by her wrists in the sky, with golden anvils at either ankle.) She accepts his authority, and his numerous amours excite her vengeance not so much against him as his partners. It is her rank and station as queen and goddess that are insulted, not her sexual standing. Yet the galling effect of Zeus’ infidelities remain; In her outrage, Hera periodically flees to the ends of the earth to seek solitude. One of the ways in which she differs from her husband stems from her having been one of the children swallowed by Kronos, an indignity to which Zeus was not subjected. She therefore has a
knowledge of the shadowy, cavernous underworld (not the chthonic region), where everything is hidden away, lost and forsaken. It is to this realm that she descends when her sense of insult proves insufferable. And it is in one of these times of seclusion that she gives birth to the monster Typhaon out of her jealousy and resentment against Metis. Hera is convinced that she should be supreme among goddesses and is offended and vengeful if she is not given her due.

Leader of the opposition on Mt. Olympos, she is cohort of Athena on the battlefield, sponsor of the Achaeans, hater of the Trojans, maternal confederate to Hephaistos, bargainer with all the gods, jealous wife, conniving
rebel—in general, or so Zeus himself seems to think—troublemaker. She has been blamed by readers over the centuries for her destructive anger, her jealousy, and her scheming. But the worst charge of all against her is the one made by many scholars to the effect that she has relinquished her own authority and depends only on her consort for identity. Even the great mythologist Karl Kerenyi writes, "Zeus does not need the marriage, but Hera does." What Hera needs, on the contrary, I would maintain, is an unbiased reading, avoiding the stereotypes that sometimes obscure her character.

What we have to do with Hera, as with any of the gods and goddesses, is to see the form, in the theologian Hans ur von Balthasar's
phrase. For if we are to know her, we have to take seriously the clues in Homer's and Virgil's poems which are remnants of artifacts, fables, and myths in an attempt to envision the true character of this powerful goddess. The spirit of a thing cannot be apprehended by the process of accumulating facts, one needs to sense the intention (the telos) behind the evidence. And though Hera is not Homer's chief focus, her mission can nevertheless be discerned from the shape Homer gives his material.

For the other, hidden side of Hera's story is that in order to be where she is she has relinquished a high status for something more meaningful. As an older, more powerful god than
any of the other Olympians—-even than Zeus—­she has assented to be part of the Olympian project. And though she rebels at times against Zeus and opposes him frequently, she never rebels against the marriage. In joining him on Mt. Olympus, her assent was spoken of course not to Zeus, but to that power over both of them which the Greeks called Fate. But there is another force connected with Fate with which Hera works—Charis, Grace, a force that invisibly yet unmistakably reanimates events and persons and brings them to a different conclusion from the one apparently intended. Hera's way is an alternate way of doing things—that does not contradict but supplements. She has her own authority and
identity then—not so much as an earth mother image as a prefigurement of the balance between masculine and feminine.

Unlike the other goddesses, Hera confronts the masculine in her own person, stands before its manifestation as herself, as the fully formed, complementary aspect of existence that does not depend on the male to confer value. Hera is the female in all its power, with political authority as well as closeness to the earth and nature. In submitting to the confederacy of Olympos and renouncing her older rites, she contends with a world that is no longer a region, but the cosmos itself. She refuses to rule over a mere portion of it. A queen over all of being, she sits on a golden
throne, the consort of Zeus, and cannot in any sense be construed as an anima figure—a mere projection of the masculine. Hence she is the only goddess who can make a successful marriage. If Athena is maiden and warrior, then Hera is woman and wife.

Why do we not like her, then? First of all, precisely because she is not a projected exemplary image. She does not fit our ideas of what the model wife should be. And second, we feel distanced from her because she is not a person of relationships. She is in herself and this independence is always annoying to gods and men. But can one say that she is not a person of relationship if she defines herself in marriage? So extreme a statement can be
made only in light of the proposition that marriage is not really a relationship; marriage is a new entity which can take place only between two beings who are in themselves whole and who will bring that wholeness fully to bear in a union. When such a conjunction occurs, it initiates as Pope John Paul II wrote (in The Original Unity of Man and Woman), a new cosmos, a new epoch, a new polis, or a new metaphysical entity. It renews the earth.

Hera, then, represents that other side of being which can hardly even be acknowledged in the mythological fables because it is invisible and concealed under the obvious path of the logos, appearing either as obstacle or as ineffectual protestation. She represents
Sophia, the feminine portion of the soul and of the cosmos, which, hidden away in darkness, unintelligible and sometimes unruly, ultimately manifests itself quite discernibly by modifying, delaying, altering the course of destiny. When she withdraws from Zeus, she stays away from him for a year while pregnant with the monstous Typhaon, as we're told in the Hymn to Apollo,^ Homeric
^ Pythian
She never came to the bed of contriving Zeus/nor pondered for him sagacious counsels sitting as before on her elaborate chair but staying in temples where many pray . . . Her role in the marriage has been to provide "sagacious counsels." She is not simply, as Zabriskie has written, "restless matriarch in a
patriarchal world.” Hera is perfectly at home in her gender. Hera has entered into a permanent partnership with the masculine as consort and cohort, not primarily for amorous delight, though that perquisite no doubt follows. (Their wedding night was said to be three hundred years long), but for the completion of being and the co-creation of history.

If the gods represent not only forces in the soul but aspects of being, then the quality that Hera represents is marriage. Now wife-hood has had a quite negative image in the West for some centuries—perhaps from the very beginning. What gives wivery such a bad press? Is it because it has been portrayed in story and
legend so frequently as little-minded, jealous, possessive, trivial, parasitical, lacking in courage, fundamentally dishonest and conniving? [It still goes on. Look at the current TV show, "Desperate Housewives"]

Perhaps we could maintain that wifehood has been portrayed in such a way because the tellers of the tales are masculine, those chanters of the epos by which our culture since the Greeks has known its destiny. And we ourselves as readers are masculine in our expectations. (The spinners of other sorts of tales are feminine—the stories that tell of our old griefs and old joys and remind us of our ties to earth—folk tales, comedies, and lyrics). But the epic tale telling is in itself logophallic,
The epic (a new kind of reality, not just a new art form, says Suzanne Langer) came into being with Zeus’ reign— with the beginning of history. In this essentially masculine tale, Hera, the troublesome other half, is perceived as impediment to the ongoing of “the plan” and hence portrayed in a dubious, largely ignominious and even ludicrous light. Judged from the point of view of the story, its masculine perspective, Hera is unruly, possessive, a troublemaker, shrewish, vengeful. But this judgment of her actions is likely influenced by the masculine desire (the poet’s and ours) to see action proceed in a straight line, observing the clear relationship between cause and effect.
Homer, who “invented” a new form in the Iliad, the epic, is writing of the essentially masculine virtues: honor and courage. Similarly, the tragedies in 5th-century Athens were also celebrating the masculine. (Comedy and lyric celebrate essentially feminine virtues of charis, grace, forgiveness, and love). So in the epic, the feminine either assumes Athena’s warlike characteristics or Hera’s duplicity in working for another kind of good.

But Homer gives us one stunningly beautiful passage in Book XIV, portraying something of the splendor and mystery of the hieros gamos. The lyrical celebration between Zeus and Hera on Mt. Ida is a high point of the poem, even though Hera has contrived it all in order to seduce her husband away from his watchfulness of the battle (so that Poseidon may fight on the side of the Achaians.
Now Hera, she of the golden throne, standing on Olympos’ horn/ Looked out with her eyes and saw at once how Poseidon, who was her very brother and her lord’s brother, was bustling about the battle, and her heart was happy.

Then she saw Zeus, sitting along the loftiest summit/On Ida of the springs, and in her eyes he was hateful. She is “divided in purpose as to how she could beguile the brain of Zeus of the aegis.” She devises a plan to seduce him but does not rely simply on her “adorable body,” but goes to Aphrodite and Hypnos, whom she has to deceive, telling them that she wants their help in order to go to the aid of Kronos and Rhea, who are quarrelling). Aphrodite is perfectly amiable, (line 210), saying, “I cannot and I must not deny this
thing that you as for, you who lie in the arms of Zeus, since he is our greatest." . . .
from her breast she unbound the elaborate, pattern-pierced zone, and on it are figured all beguilements and loveliness is figured upon it, and passion of sex is there, and the whispered endearment that steals the heart away even from the thoughtful." From her success with Aphrodite, Hera, taking no changes, approaches Hynpnos, the god of sleep. She entreats him to accompany her so that after their lovemaking Zeus will fall sleep long enough for Poseidon to give success to the Danaans in their fighting. Sleep demurs; but is persuaded by a bribe. Thus we are given a view of Hera as full of wiles and deceptive—though, as the poem makes us see, for a good purpose.
Most of all, however, she has to deceive Zeus. But the passion and the lovemaking are genuine. It establishes the generative effect of their union on all the vegetative life of the cosmos. Hera has borrowed Aphrodite’s loveliness and desirability (these aphrodisiac qualities no doubt symbolizing a distinct change from Hera’s usual regal pride) for the purpose of enticing Zeus, who when he looks upon her feels desire as “a mist about his close heart as much as on that time they first went to bed together and lay in love and their dear parents knew nothing of it.” (294) This is a reference to one version of the story in which the two, from the beginning, were lovers. Zeus feels a resurgence of that early love and entreats her, “Hera...
to bed and turn to lovemaking. For never before has love for any goddess or woman so melted the heart inside me, broken it to submission, as now—and then he rather naively enumerates his many loves, including, finally, Hera. “Not even yourself,” he says, “have I loved so much, as now I love you, and the sweet passion has taken hold of me.” (346)

The son of Kronos caught his wife in his arms. There underneath them the divine earth broke into young, fresh grass, and into dewy clover, crocus and hyacinth so thick and soft it held the hard ground deep away from them. There they lay down together and drew about them a golden wonderful cloud, and from it the glimmering dew descended.
Here Homer has allowed himself to portray the generative power of the marriage bond between Zeus and Hera, showing it as an analogue to the original hieros gamos, in which as the Theogony tells us, “great Uranus came, bringing on night and longing for love and lay about Gaia, spreading himself full upon her.” (Sky and earth) The union of Zeus and Hera, despite their quarrels, is a genuine incarnation of the original holy marriage, and it is through this Olympic pair that the face of the earth is renewed. (Karol Wotyla’s study of marriage entitled The Original Unity of Man and Woman, in which he writes . . . that when a man and a woman come together in the marriage act, the earth is restored to its primordial freshness.)
So what I am maintaining is that, apparently, according to scholars, Hera is a much older goddess than the others, a pre-Olympian, out of an epoch preceding the Homeric age, perhaps out of the time when the mother goddess was the object of worship. Homer does not consciously refer to any of that preceding lore, but the character of Hera, still available to the poet in the mythological imagination of the community, maintains as mythological fables do, tag ends of older images and incidents, of which the origins have been forgotten.
Buried within the poem—in Hera's insubordination—are the hopes for something that is not the repetition of the old: a patriarchal city like Troy—or even a royal city like Argos, but a new kind of city, that can maintain a balance between the polis and the oikos and above all establish peace. It is this vision that her son the crippled blacksmith artist makes for Achilles' re-entry into the battle, a re-entry that will ensure the defeat of the Trojans. Hera will continue her harrowing, though, as Juno in Virgil's poem—and will see to the founding not of a New Troy, but of the noble and long-lasting city of Rome.