

## ANALYSIS

*The Glory of Hera* (1972)



Caroline Gordon

(1895-1981)

"It is experimental, I suppose, in that the action takes place on the frontiers of the archetypal conscious mind--there is such a region."

Gordon

Letter to Stewart Richardson, her editor at Doubleday (1970)

"The lower pattern [*The Glory of Hera*] winds serpent-wise through the upper pattern [unfinished novel based on family history] of action and deals with the archetypal world which the present day Jungians and the archaic Greeks inform us lies at the bottom of every human consciousness."

Gordon

Quoted in Donald E. Stanford, "Caroline Gordon: From *Penhally* to *A Narrow Heart*"  
*The Southern Review* 7 (Spring 1971) xvi

"Sees the novel as 'an impressive...statement concerning man's mass-mythic consciousness and the progressive evolution of the hero/deliverer through the legend of Heracles.' Summarizes the divine-human entanglements of the action.... Gordon's prose has a 'cool acuity' and 'exquisite control.' The novel is 'an Olympian effort which requires an equal one of the reader'."

Anonymous

Review of *The Glory of Hera*

*Kirkus* 39:1330 (1971)

summarized by Mary C. Sullivan

*Flannery O'Connor and Caroline Gordon: A Reference Guide*  
eds. Robert E. Golden and Sullivan (G. K. Hall 1977) 285

"A richly descriptive novel written from evident research.' The novel which may be read as both adventure and philosophy defines 'various parallels between Greek myths and Christian legends,' and explores the psychological motives of Heracles and Hera."

Anonymous  
Review of *The Glory of Hera*  
*Booklist* 68:972 (1972)  
summarized by Sullivan, *Reference Guide* 294

"Gordon's new book is 'written in her graceful style with enough persuasiveness to give life to the old legends and an air of credulity to the belief in supreme beings with anthropomorphic attributes'."

Anonymous  
Review of *The Glory of Hera*  
*Virginia Quarterly Review* 48 (Summer 1972) xcvi  
summarized by Sullivan, *Reference Guide* 294

"*The Glory of Hera* represents and completes a 'more general development' in Gordon's work. 'From the first, her search has been for the hero per se--the masculine figure of reference by whom the human (and not just the Southern) enterprise may be transformed.' In her fiction, 'the enemies of the hero are likewise consistent: the 'monstrous,' the 'powers of darkness'; death, in its final essence, as nullity. As in her much earlier work (especially *The Garden of Adonis* and *Green Centuries*), 'she has once again located her exemplars in a classical, not a Christian context' for here 'the humanity of the hero may be most instructively explored; and it is the hero as *man* (rather than as demigod) which we most often misconstrue.'

In the novel the story of Heracles is 'fleshed out and circumstanced so as to re-interpret its subject'; hence the novel is 'more than a stylish updating of old mysteries.' Here Heracles 'personifies all the complete masculine exemplars, even the Son of Man'; and 'conscious moderns, accustomed to a Christ/Dionysus analogy [?], may be puzzled by this modest and yet formidable 'dragon slayer' and 'may quarrel with the honor given Heracles in his victory over death and in his rebirth as the child of Zeus and Hera'; yet Gordon intends this reaction: 'the deliverance of her Heracles is a surprise even to him.' Gordon compels us to recall that 'there is no transcendence without such a basis in will [Heracles' putting up a 'good fight all the way'], not knowledge'."

Melvin E. Bradford  
"Quest for a Hero"  
*National Review* (18 August 1972) 906-07  
summarized by Sullivan, *Reference Guide* 295

"The novel's repetition of 'essential incidents when a god or mortal is mentioned...add[s] to the deliberately timeless scene, since events appear to be constantly recurring.' 'Alternating between gods and mortals, Gordon achieves a stylistic tour de force'--treating the mortals with post-Jamesian resources, while heightening the estrangement of the gods by a 'more formal, sometimes ponderous vocabulary...' The gods remain 'incomprehensible and awesome, not amusing or rational.' The novel is learned, and consistent with the Greeks' outlook; it is 'a remarkable achievement'."

John W. Charles  
Review of *The Glory of Hera*  
*Library Journal* 97:515 (1972)  
summarized by Sullivan, *Reference Guide* 297

"The novel which I think is the best that has been written in something like the past half-century'.... A 'matchless book' and a 'peak' in Gordon's career... Whereas the ancients would argue that the 'ineffable stuff [of myth] could never be captured by a writer of mere prose,' Gordon has done this. Her Heracles is 'no "modernized" mythological figure like the Ulysses of James Joyce.' The myth of Heracles' life ends 'in a triumphant overriding myth' which 'is one of the mysteries of *The Glory of Hera*.' Gordon has 'formed a lifelong habit...of filtering her stratagems as a novelist through a screen of mythology; for this reason she is much more an impressionist as a writer than a realist'.... [Impressionism is a technique used by Realists.]

Gordon's stratagems are 'the stratagems of holding back, as if to get a firmer grasp on what is to come, of planning and timing, and of launching out finally in an unveering course.' In this she is like Hemingway who revealed in *A Moveable Feast* the theory that 'you could deliberately omit the key expository fact in a work of fiction "and make people feel something more than they understood".' [iceberg principle] Such lacunae as 'unstated foreknowledge' and 'omissions' can be 'calculated devices'.... *Penhally* must 'be viewed as a prelude to *The Glory of Hera*. I do not regard the Sophoclean culmination of family strife in fratricide as a matter of superficial resemblance.' Gordon must have known 'she was producing a local variant on an ancient theme'; another variant appears between Rion and Archie in *Green Centuries*....

Viewed with historical perspective 'the panoply of the Olympians is a first flowering' of Archetypal Religion. 'The chief stratagem of Caroline Gordon is to see it thus, unerringly and as a whole.' Thus, for her, Heracles' story contains 'a promise of deliverance.' Discusses the views of Claude Levi-Strauss and their correspondence with 'the high art of Caroline Gordon's novel-making.' *The Glory of Hera* is 'the archetypal form of religious faith...without, at this time, a visible doctrine.' Heracles's mission as Zeus's son is to 'spend himself in bringing to fruition the latent worth of his race.' Gordon has 'told it all, at length and in better form, I think, than it exists elsewhere in the surviving documents'."

Howard Baker

"The Stratagems of Caroline Gordon, Or, The Art of the Novel and the Novelty of Myth"

*Southern Review* N.S. 9:523-49 (1973)

summarized by Sullivan, *Reference Guide* 301-03

"Presumably since it is published first, the lower pattern [*The Glory of Hera*] of the double novel should be comprehensible without a knowledge of the upper pattern [Gordon's novel-in-progress]...but I confess to being considerably baffled by the lower pattern,' though it 'is the work of a writer who knows as much about the art of the novel and the practice of prose fiction as anyone living I can bring to mind.' [My] confusion stems from 'the conjunction of the quotations at the beginning and end of the story,' and the method 'which involves two different tones of narration and a great many different points of view. This method tends to break the movement of the story, preventing a build-up of momentum' [This technique is common in Modernist fiction] though 'presenting us with a number of vignettes, chapters which stand out clearly from the larger confusion and which are very fine in themselves'....

The scenes concerned with human beings are 'moving and more warmly rendered' [than the gods] because of 'the perpetual plight of humans bewildered by the intentions of the gods, attempting to understand and placate the non-understandable, the implacable, the whimsical. (This bafflement could be said to be the plot of the book.)"

Janet Lewis

"*The Glory of Hera*"

*Sewanee Review* 81:185-94 (1973)

summarized by Sullivan, *Reference Guide* 304

"The novel is 'a vivid and sensitive re-telling of one of the great archetypal stories of Western Civilization,' yet its 'full symbolic import' will have to 'await publication of Miss Gordon's companion volume, *A Narrow Heart: The Portrait of a Woman*' since '*A Narrow Heart* is the upper pattern of this double novel.' The 'lower pattern,' *The Glory of Hera*, winds through the upper pattern of action and deals with the archetypal world which, according to Gordon, 'Jungians and archaic Greeks inform us lies at the bottom of every human consciousness.' Gordon relates the novel 'with a cool, detached and at times slightly ironic realism.' The literal story is written 'with the wealth of perceptive detail and skillful arrangement of incident noted in her earlier fiction. Gordon sees Heracles 'as a God-like but still human champion who fights evil for the benefit of mankind but is himself destroyed (in a physical sense) because of imperfect knowledge of himself and of the will of Zeus.'"

Donald E. Stanford

Review of *The Glory of Hera*

*Michigan Quarterly Review* 12:89-90 (1975)

summarized by Sullivan, *Reference Guide* 305

"Gordon consistently presents images of heroic action, whether the heroes are involved in actual battle or in an equally deadly psychomachy. In *The Glory of Hera*...this experimental novel about the Greek demigod provides not only a model of bravery and strength but also a paradigm of the evolving human psyche.... The mythic action parallels the growth of the individual towards wholeness, the goal of such modern protagonists as Jim Chapman, Stephen Lewis, and Tom Claiborne....

Concentrating less on the specific psychological development of Heracles, she focuses on the more general meaning that his actions had for his fellow Greeks and continue to have for moderns. Moreover, Gordon expands her investigation of women, examining the wife and the mother, the prophetess and the priestess, as well as the goddess. The basic story of Heracles' Twelve Labors is enriched by image patterns that interconnect the feminine with prophetic powers and with divinity, in both malevolent and benevolent manifestations. Whether the hero is battling supernatural monsters, consulting a prophetess, or being directly guided by a deity, he encounters divinity in its many inscrutable forms. Furthermore, by a number of allusions to earlier Greek heroes and to Christ, Heracles' action is elevated to the archetypal. Although he is made into a real character, with his own thoughts, emotions, and distinct traits, Heracles is more important as a type, an interpretation reinforced by Gordon's working plan for the novel....

While no companion novel was published before Gordon's death, in a sense *The Glory of Hera* serves as the 'lower pattern' for all her work. Gordon's earliest novels relied on myth to help develop theme, but *The Glory of Hera* embroiders the fabric of myth itself. Gordon sophisticates the archaic pattern of heroism so that raw myth becomes the story of any man's triumphant confrontation with death. As the template for such modern heroes as Jim Chapman, Stephen Lewis, and Tom Claiborne, Heracles embodies certain essential qualities: he is attuned to spiritual realities; he is strong and courageous enough to battle all monsters--including his own dark self; and he is an unselfish and capable leader....

All of Gordon's fiction is concerned with...an 'ontological quest.' Historical and mythical allusions often provide ironic commentaries on the characters in the earliest novels: for example, Rion compares himself with the ever-turning constellation of the Greek hunter Orion, feeling caught in a futile search for a new Eden; Rives is a death-wishful Saint George, choosing to fight a doomed battle; and Chance Llewellyn is like Cain, a farmer who murders his brother and loses all that he would save. In *The Women on the Porch*, *The Strange Children*, and *The Malefactors*, literary allusions--especially to Dante's *Divine Comedy*--and references to saints' lives illuminate contemporary searches for meaning....

As Gordon's method implies, the individual's search for his own spiritual integration is as old as man himself.... Claude Levi-Strauss [compares] the fundamentals of mythology to the development of human consciousness. [Howard] Baker observes that *The Glory of Hera* assumes a number of these parallels and notes that a perceived division between earth and sky designates the beginning of time and consciousness of human mortality; that the stories of heroes who conquer monsters arising from the earth suggest the struggle in individuals to overcome the monstrous part of the self; that mythology also incorporates manners and customs which indicate a growing civilization; and that along with such growth come certain taboos, notably against incest, that encourage people to open up tightly knit groups and form larger communities. A complement to the scheme Baker discusses is the Jungian 'process of individuation,' another theory in which the development of the individual psyche recapitulates our human evolution....

In Gordon's story of Heracles, the 'approach of the unconscious' corresponds to the hero's first intuitions of his own special nature and of the mysterious, larger forces that influence his behavior. For instance, he is not entirely certain why he killed Linus. Through the omniscient narrator who shifts our view to the Olympians, we learn that two vultures Linus ordered Heracles to shoot were Zeus and Athene. To his foster father Amphitryon, however, it does seem, as Hera so spitefully phrases it, that Heracles' 'temper is...ungovernable' and that 'he will be safer living among beasts.' Heracles is sent away from the city....

Book I of the novel ends with Heracles' murder of the priest; these first fourteen chapters introduce us to the gods, goddesses, and mortals who will figure in Heracles' history, but it is not until Book II that we enter into the hero's consciousness. In a sense, he has not fully existed until he recognizes his own 'shadow' --his rage and violence, which, unchecked, cause his undoing but, disciplined for higher service, provide courage and strength. When we do enter the demigod's mind, he is tending King Amphitryon's cattle on

Mount Cithaeron. As on the day of the games when he struck Linus, Heracles senses a divine presence. This time the goddesses Athene and Aphrodite appear to him, and sagaciously Heracles chooses Athene as his guide. Athene becomes for him a positive aspect of his anima: as Wisdom personified, she helps Heracles through his many labors and trials, whereas Hera, who seemingly is tricked into declaring herself Heracles' foster mother, plays the part of the nightmare or bitch goddess while Heracles is on earth. Thus, when Hera drives Heracles into a mad fit, Athene is the one who stops him.

The roles these two goddesses play in Heracles' life can be understood in terms of the developing Self. Jungians describe four stages in the evolution of the anima in the male personality: 'The first stage is best symbolized by the figure of Eve, which represents purely instinctual and biological relations. The second can be seen in Faust's Helen: She personifies a romantic and aesthetic level that is, however, still characterized by sexual elements. The third is represented, for instance, by the Virgin Mary--a figure who raises love (*eros*) to the heights of spiritual devotion. The fourth type is symbolized by Sapientia, wisdom transcending even the most holy and the most pure.' In choosing Athene over Aphrodite, Heracles, in effect, rejects or represses these first two manifestations of the anima.

Whenever Hera strikes at him, she attacks his most vulnerable side; as the old witch, La Belle Dame undisguised, she destroys his sexual and familial relationships or, in the case of his birth, interferes with his biological development. Not only does Hera inflict upon him the madness during which he murders his first wife and his three sons, but while he is laboring in penance for King Eurytheus, the Queen of Heaven continues to meddle with his life. For example, she sends the bull of Crete all over the country with Heracles in pursuit. Even Eurytheus fits into Hera's plans for Heracles. To thwart her consort's boast that the child born to the house of Perseus by nightfall of a certain day should rule as king of Mycenae, Hera brings the baby Eurytheus two months early and delays Heracles' birth. Without always being actually present, she influences the hero's actions and character from the beginning: it is she who sends the two serpents into Heracles' cradle, and his strangling the creatures is the first indication of his supernatural strength.

With Hera apparently determined to torment and challenge him and with Athene advising him, Heracles is greatly affected by two markedly different female principles. In Jungian theory, the forces the goddesses represent would be termed the malevolent and positive aspects of the anima. Although his terminology is not psychological, Robert Graves describes such complex femininity in *The White Goddess*.... This goddess, who plays a central part in the archetypal myth which Graves delineates--'the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the God of the Waxing Year'--is a triple goddess. In the myth, she is 'mother, bride, and layer-out' of this god, and her nature is understood symbolically in terms of the moon. Graves explains, 'I write of her as the White Goddess because white is her principal color, the color of the first member of her moon-trinity, but when Suidas the Byzantine records that Io was a cow that changed her color from white to rose and then to black he means that the New Moon is the white goddess of birth and growth; the Full Moon, the red goddess of love and battle; the Old Moon, the black goddess of death and divination.'

In *The Glory of Hera*, the Queen of Heaven is sometimes accompanied by Athene or Aphrodite, suggesting the trinity of divine female principles they so clearly represent in the story of Paris choosing Aphrodite over Hera and Athene, the event that precipitated the abduction of Helen and the consequent Trojan War. Early in the novel, for example, we see that through the joint efforts of Hera and Athene, Teiresias has been brought up to Olympus for questioning. Although Athene is Zeus's daughter, born from his head, she is 'always becoming embroiled in Hera's follies, according to her father. Nor is the Queen of Heaven 'above borrowing' from the beautiful Aphrodite the magic girdle that inspires love. In addition to her associations with these two lesser deities, Hera herself fulfills each of the roles of the Triple Goddess: at various times, she is a winsome seductress of Zeus, a jealous and spiteful intriguer, and a wise nurturer.

Zeus's description of his consort details all of these qualities: 'Hera was stately of figure, white-armed, golden-haired, with eyes almost as large and as lustrous as those the ox turns upon the priest when he feels the sacrificial knife at his throat. She was also vain, capricious, overbearing, and inordinately fond of her own way.' Queen of Heaven, Hera is also the guide and inspiration of heroes. The one power Zeus objects to is Hera's ability 'to put into the mouths of any of the heroes any words she chose to have him utter! None of the other goddesses possessed this gift. He questioned whether such a gift should be bestowed upon a

woman. It made her almost equal to him, the Father of Gods and Men!' From what Hera remarks at the conclusion of the novel, she most certainly considers herself equal. However, the title of the novel refers not only to Hera's personal grandeur but also to her namesake, the hero Heracles--'the glory of Hera.'

Zeus's plan--to bridge the abyss between gods and men by creating a demigod who will reign forever--is incomplete without the contributions of the Queen of Heaven. Perhaps because she has been excluded from the inception of this plan, Hera seems to threaten Zeus's design. Yet the father of gods and men never seems completely aware that, in endowing his son with bravery and strength, he has not nurtured the intuition and emotions necessary to build his hero's judgment. Like his father, Heracles is unfortunately slow to acknowledge the importance of those female principles under the direction of Athene and Hera.... Heracles has matured significantly when he finally understands whose namesake he is. Repeatedly he identifies himself as the son of Zeus; and although this is true enough, he fails to give credit to the other deities who shape his character and fate. Only in the conclusion, when Hera actually gives birth to the apotheosized Heracles, is it clear that his foster mother is his real mother, too....

This divine rebirth of the hero at once symbolizes the final maturation of the individual psyche as well as a more complete notion of Godhead. Both concepts presuppose the union of masculine and feminine principles. Louise Cowan [says], 'Her early novels deal overtly with neither pagan myth nor Christian mystery; but, concerned with the polarities of thinking and feeling, they dramatize the feminine and masculine principles in a devastating society that cannot surrender itself to love and integration, where death is the overarching enemy.' That 'union of myth and mystery, nature and grace'...is nowhere so apparent as in Heracles' rebirth into Heaven.

Marriage as metaphoric union of the masculine and feminine is the focus in *The Women on the Porch*, *The Strange Children*, and *The Malefactors*; now we see the fruits of that union--a hero of such stature that he becomes a model for other mortals. In his final manifestation, Heracles is a complete being--his anima functioning as mediator between his subconscious and his conscious Self. For if Hera can be taken to represent the hero's feminine traits, she is ultimately the mother and nurturer of this new being. The Jungian paradigm of the developing animus--the masculine characteristics within a woman--is analogous to the male's integration. The pattern suggests, in addition, a maturing definition of the masculine. Appearing first 'as a personification of mere physical power--for instance, as an athletic champion or 'muscle man'--the animus next acquires 'initiative and the capacity for planned action.' 'In the third phase, the animus becomes the 'word,' often appearing as a professor or clergyman. Finally, in his fourth manifestation, the animus is the incarnation of *meaning*. On this highest level he becomes (like the anima) a mediator of religious experience whereby life acquires new meaning.'

So Caroline Gordon's description of the hero has grown. At first Heracles is little more than a 'muscle man,' but guided by his intuitions (and Athene), he becomes a more competent leader. Although he killed Linus in blind anger, Heracles next trains himself for worthier ends: ridding the earth of the monsters that plague mortals. At this stage, Heracles can be compared to heroes in Gordon's early fiction who have physical strength as well as some ability to lead. The protagonist of *Green Centuries*, Rion Outlaw flees his community after ambushing and killing some of the king's soldiers; as a settler in the wilderness, he accepts more responsibility, trying to live peacefully with the Indians and then protecting his family when the Indians decide to attack. Rives Allard in *None Shall Look Back* defends his homeland when Yankee soldiers menace it. Whereas both Rion and Rives are capable of meeting the literal enemies that confront them, they are not prepared for psychological battle. Rives would rather die than try to rebuild a defeated South. Rion becomes less heroic over the course of *Green Centuries* because he cannot respond to the new demands of his family and the growing community.

In the third stage of development, as the struggle within the self is won, the male impulses are directed towards guiding a larger group of individuals by imparting knowledge through the spoken or written word. Heracles becomes a kind of spiritual leader: in fact, the Thebans prematurely set him up to be worshiped as the sea-god Palemon. For this hubris, Hera drives him mad. Heracles is more truly a spiritual leader when he takes as his virgin bride Macaria, daughter of King Thespius, and makes her priestess of a temple dedicated to Zeus. In Macaria's first-person account of the ceremony to consecrate the temple, she refers to Heracles only as the Son of Zeus. Indeed, 'as priest of the shrine of Zeus the Savior,' Heracles has been

elevated, at least for the time being, to a purely spiritual role; and when he meets his death many years later, Heracles is officiating at a sacrifice to Zeus.

Similarly, Stephen Lewis, Jim Chapman, and Tom Claiborne become prophets of a greater reality. As intelligent men of letters, these modern protagonists seem ready by the end of the novels to serve as better models for their communities--to be like Kevin Reardon in trying to meet the spiritual as well as physical needs of their families and, by implication, in extending their knowledge to their readers and students. However, the conclusion of *The Glory of Hera* permits us to view Heracles in a way that these characters from everyday life cannot be seen. He has literally become a god, exalted because of his many glorious deeds. A Christ-like figure, as the many biblical echoes in the novel insist, Heracles is another incarnation, born of a mortal woman and a divine father. Triumphant over death, he is, at this final stage of development, an example of the integrated Self bridging earth and heaven.

The physician Podaleirius thus describes Heracles as a kind of savior to Arsippe, the wife of Eurytheus: 'Heracles is no ordinary hunter. The beasts which he hunts are those which deal death to mortals. It seems to me that when he slays them he is promising his fellow mortals deliverance from that which formerly threatened death.' Heracles conquers death in another way. Like many other archetypal heroes and like Caroline Gordon's modern protagonists who harrow their own infernos, Heracles must descend into hell and confront the terrible forms of despair and meaninglessness before he can reaffirm the value of life.

At the news of Heracles' death on the burning pyre, Zeus informs the other gods: 'The serpents that Hera sent to strangle Heracles were burned to ashes in a fire built of oak wood and the male wild olive. On this pyre built of the same woods, my son Heracles will slough off his mortal remains as serpents cast their skins.' The serpents--mysterious and deadly powerful--here suggest Heracles' links to Godhead. In the mythic world of *The Glory of Hera*, snakes are not necessarily evil, but they are associated with the inscrutable, which can appear evil because it defeats human rationality and notions of justice. Certainly the snakes that threaten Heracles in his cradle do not seem benevolent creatures, yet they serve Heracles in a curious way. In strangling them he reveals his divine origin. When Teiresias recognizes the portents of divinity, he instructs the Thebans how to dispose of the serpents' bodies and directs Alcmena to change the baby's name from Alcides to Heracles.

Agents of the supernatural, serpents can augur good or ill, and a seemingly fatal sign can actually promise good fortune. For instance, Zeus interprets a fisherman's dream of a huge sun with rays that 'quivered as if alive,' each one having 'the head and forked tongue of a serpent,' as a good omen that 'the hero Perseus is about to return to the earth.' The hero, in fact, is Heracles, a descendant of Perseus and the main figure in Zeus's 'scheme for the redemption of mankind.'

Whereas Athena's son Erechtheus, a reddish-colored serpent, is the 'respectable' ruler of the Athenians, monsters that destroy crops, livestock, and human lives are malevolent supernatural creatures only a hero can subdue. Even then, destroying a creature linked with divinity is not wholly condoned. Cadmus had to serve eight years for slaying the serpent, a son of Ares, that guarded the grove where he founded Thebes. Heracles, in his many wondrous feats, battles a number of monsters that are serpentine or at least, in being descended from the Earth, are the offspring of the great serpent Ophion: the fire-breathing lion of Helicon, the dragon protecting the Garden of Hesperides, and the Hydra of Lerna.

The Hydra--with a body 'shaped like that of a huge bitch' and 'covered all over with glittering scales ending in a forked tail'--has nine heads set on serpentine necks; the one immortal head 'had the face of a woman, but the locks that hung down on each side of the head were serpentine.' The Hydra's female face is a reminder of the symbolic connections between serpents and women developed in the Greek creation myth. In the Egyptian temple of Zeus-Ammon, the god instructs Heracles on the nature of women:

'In your dealings with women it would be well to bear in mind that they are all more nearly akin to the serpent than we are. One and all, they have inherited certain traits from our remote ancestress Eurynome, the Wide-Wandering One. She was dancing upon the waves in order to separate sea from sky, when the North Wind came past. She engaged him in dalliance to such good purpose that he underwent a metamorphosis in her hands, becoming the great serpent Ophion. Whereupon they domiciled themselves

upon Mount Olympus. He coiled about her seven times, and she laid the great Silver Egg, out of which all living creatures tumbled. But when Ophion claimed some share in this achievement, she kicked his teeth out and cast him down into Tartarus.'

Zeus is quite conscious of Hera's descent from the great serpent Ophion. Though he and his wife are children of the same father and mother (and so, Zeus is also Ophion's offspring), Zeus admits that Hera is the older deity and seems to be more strongly affected by her serpentine lineage. Hera's frequent rebelliousness indicates her confidence in the power she has inherited. Indeed, Hera and all women command forces stronger and more primal than those the male enlists. Thus, when Apollo slays the dragon of the great earth mother Gaia so that he may claim the oracle of Delphi, Gaia demands as recompense 'that the oracles that originated in Apollo's divine mind must be delivered through the lips of a woman, who was called the pythoness in memory of the dragon.' Perceiving that Apollo is irritated with this arrangement, Zeus reminds the younger deity, 'Women are ever in league with the older gods.... I see no help for it, my son. The older gods will have their way.'

Heracles also senses that women are in contact with the divine powers of creation. Upon meeting Lachesis, one of the Fates, he thinks, 'women...are all alike, be they goddesses or mortals--concerned only with birth and death, indifferent to what lies in between.' Although the hero's thought is an exaggeration, it contains an important observation: woman are naturally and traditionally associated with birth and death; and as mothers, midwives, layers-out, and mourners, they participate in the activities and ceremonies that define life's meaning. The attributes of women and of those men who have integrated these qualities sensitize them to spiritual matters. 'Receptiveness to the irrational, capacity for personal love, feeling for nature, and...relation to the unconscious'--these are the traits the Jungian psychologist von Franz identifies with the feminine. She adds, 'It is no mere chance that in olden times priestesses (like the Greek Sibyl) were used to fathom the divine will and to make connection with the gods.'

In Gordon's novel, women and the womanly are explicitly linked to oracles and prophecy. The pythoness or Sibyl at Delphi is one such example. Heracles questions her, then steals the sacred tripod upon which she sits when she will not tell him which deity drove him insane. The hero's descent into the strange, dark place to consult the cryptic priestess reminds us of Zeus's earlier long pilgrimage to Gaia, then to the oldest goddesses who possess the knowledge and the power to help Zeus claim the throne of Olympus.

The seer Teiresias, taking significant part in the action of the novel as well as in the myths of the ancients, has these feminine gifts of intuition and is able to interpret the signs and directives of the deities. Appropriately, he is a hermaphroditic creature. Once changed into a woman for seven years because he struck apart two coupling snakes and killed the female, Teiresias has fully experienced the feminine aspects of his personality. He is like the medicine men and prophets among the Eskimo tribes whom von Franz describes: 'Some of these even wear women's clothes, or have breasts depicted on their garments, in order to manifest their inner feminine side--the side that enables them to connect with the "ghost land" (i.e. what we call the unconscious).'

As the examples of Teiresias and the pythoness show, either the man who acknowledges the female principles within or the woman who is responsive to her own male attributes can have vision. In Jungian theory, as in myth, it is the whole individual who truly sees. The description of the animus at its last stage of evolution is very close to that of the anima at its peak of development: 'The animus in his most developed form sometimes connects the woman's mind with the spiritual evolution of her age, and can thereby make her even more receptive than a man to new creative ideas. It is for this reason that in earlier times women were used by many nations as diviners and seers. The creative boldness of their positive animus at times expresses thoughts and ideas that stimulate men to new enterprises.' At maturity, both forces--anima or animus--point towards spiritual truths and direct community action.

Not only does the rebirth of Heracles into heaven show the union of those female and male principles that have made his apotheosis possible, but also it designates a more complete notion of Godhead that makes female qualities compatible with those of a patriarchal deity. Again, the findings of Jung reveal a modern correspondence to this insight: 'In the manifestations of the unconscious found in our modern Christian culture, whether Protestant or Catholic, Dr. Jung often observed that there is an unconscious



tendency at work to round off our trinitarian formula of the Godhead with a fourth element, which tends to be feminine, dark, and even evil.' So too, Robert Graves shows that the primal conceptions of Godhead included a feminine aspect: the Triple Goddess as mother, bride, and layer-out. Graves's contention is that the patriarchal traditions of our Judeo-Christian culture have repressed our original understanding of the White Goddess.

Although he would have us pay tribute to these feminine powers, Graves does not offer as much hope for individual integration as Carl Jung or Caroline Gordon does. His description of male and female relationships implies perpetual conflict between two unequal principles: Man "is divine not in his single person, but only in his twin-hood... Man is a demi-god: he always has either one foot or the other in the grave; woman is divine because she can keep both her feet always in the same place, whether in the sky, in the underworld, or on this earth. Man envies her and tells himself lies about his own completeness.' What Graves advocates--essentially an idolatry of the feminine--is precisely Tubby's problem in *The Malefactors*. Because of his mistaken devotion to Isabel, he neglects his own spirituality. As a paradigm for male behavior, Graves's scheme is an immature one. To an extent, Caroline Gordon would agree with him that the proper theme of poetry is 'the relations of man and woman,' for she was concerned in her fiction to reveal the meaning of marriage.

Yet in Gordon's fiction it is 'relationship'--not merely sexual involvement--that nurtures the growth of the couple. While striving to show the goddess in every woman, Graves belittles the god in every man and, consequently, any mature masculine principle.... With such disparagement of the male, it is no wonder that Graves does not call for the integration of polarities within a single being. Admittedly, Hera is a White Goddess, but she is not, finally, the 'orgiastic' creature Graves describes. For good reason our last view of her is as the nurturer. Caroline Gordon's larger notion of the individual's psychic growth reconciles mythic patterns with Christian hope and archetypes with social institutions; but Graves holds that the impulses of poetry oppose those of Christianity.... Rather than simply opposing the image of the Virgin with the White Goddess, Gordon insists upon the inscrutable nature of the divine, thereby subsuming both notions in a more complex concept of divinity. As in Jung's theory, the Virgin Mary, or any of the female saints to whom Gordon refers, may serve as an example of a spiritual guide, a Beatrice. The highest level of spirituality, however, is an ineffable reality, which words grasp incompletely but which the mind seeks to contemplate through images....

Discussing twentieth-century perceptions of Godhead, von Franz explains that the dark, feminine, and often evil fourth element has always existed in our culture but has been 'separated from the image of God' and has become 'his counterpart, in the form of matter itself (or the lord of matter--i.e. the devil).' Our unconscious desire 'to reunite these extremes' of good and evil, as von Franz phrases it, is not far from the hope Saint Augustine voices in one of the novel's epigraphs: 'And the serpents will be good.... Their sting will not be poisonous or harmful.... They will pry into the secrets of the temporal world...only to catch a glimpse of eternity *as it is known to your creatures*. For these creatures are the servants of reason if they are allowed to be good and are kept from the path that leads to death.' But the epilogue, also from Saint Augustine, reminds us how inextricably mixed evil and good appear to us in this world: 'My ignorance was so great that these questions troubled me. I did not know that evil is nothing but the removal of good until finally no good remains'....

This last novel gives another shape to the dreams and subconscious phenomena that educate the protagonists of *The Women on the Porch*, *The Strange Children*, and *The Malefactors*. Gordon chooses myths that have been crystallized by tradition; they are not merely personal but communal images of truth. Moreover, she structures these inherited legends to show their mysterious relevance, so that the mythic story of the demigod Heracles illustrates the individual's quest to transcend the ordinary, to defy death, which threatens to make life seem meaningless. Like Heracles, the individual who recognizes a human purpose strives to become--given his biological and psychological inheritance--his best and most complete self and a responsible social and religious being.

Calling Caroline Gordon a White Goddess, Mary O'Connor asserts that 'writers such as Faulkner, Porter, Flannery O'Connor, Gordon (and I am in no sense rating them in any order of achievement) use their own mythical system, transforming the inherited material of the culture into a self-made account of reality

which resolves into sensuous apprehension all the knowledge we have of a place and time, and of the folly and tragic dignity of human life. Caroline Gordon makes the burden of heightened consciousness worth carrying and 'the shock of recognition' a healing experience. If she is a White Goddess, Gordon is not Robert Graves's irascible and patronizing creature but a Beatrice who presents her readers with visions, replacing deluded conceptions of life as irreconcilable conflict between such polarities as the corporeal and the nominal, evil and good, feminine and masculine, intuition and reason, with a more complete and more promising revelation of a physical world imbued with spiritual reality."

Rose Ann C. Fraistat  
*Caroline Gordon as Novelist and Woman of Letters*  
(Louisiana State 1984) 148-65

"In 1972, Gordon published 'the lower pattern' of her proposed project, *The Glory of Hera*, a novel that recounts the tale of Heracles, with a primary focus on his twelve labors and his eventual deification. This strange and lively novel, with the Olympian gods serving not only as active characters but also as intelligences by whom the novel is told, establishes Heracles as the primary archetypal hero and, with his deification, suggests that he was a precursor to Christ. The novel also laid the foundation of archetypal experience within which the action of the planned companion novel would be embodied.... Together the two novels would have signified the progression from classic to Christian vision and served as a just representation of her final artistic vision merging classicism and Catholicism, the two traditions so significant in Gordon's life and art."

Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr.  
*Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South*  
(U Mississippi 1985) 117

"*The Glory of Hera*...was the story of Heracles and his labors and his loves. Caroline used her vast knowledge of myths acquired during twenty years of serious study and wrote it in a style as limpid and pure as poetry. Allen wrote friends that it was a masterpiece, one of the great books of the twentieth century, a much greater work than Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the finest writing Caroline had ever done. John Hall Wheelock of Scribner's wrote her that she had organized a vast body of material and the way she had given a 'unifying and meaningful pattern to so huge a tapestry of myth and legend is...miraculous and thrilling.' Robert Fitzgerald wrote her that it was truly 'Homeric.' In spite of all this praise from friends, *The Glory of Hera* received very few reviews and it is hard to find anyone who has read it to the end.

Ashley Brown, faithful friend that he was, read it and called it a comedy of manners with the gods for characters. In spite of the flawless writing it moves so smoothly and so evenly that there is no shape; it flows along over many small climaxes; there is no big waterfall. She had abandoned the title of 'A Narrow Heart' and decided that *The Glory of Hera* would be one volume in a two-volume novel called 'Behold My Trembling Heart,' the title coming from a phrase of St. Augustine. The other volume would be called 'Joy of the Mountains' and would comprise her reminiscences, the stories of her ancestors, including Meriwether Lewis, and tales of Calvin, Locke, and Berkeley. 'The Dragon's Teeth,' which appeared in *Shenandoah* in 1961, showed, she said, how the two novels intertwine. 'The Dragon's Teeth' is a revision of 'Summer Dust,' the first story Caroline ever published....renamed 'One Against Thebes' when it appeared in *Old Red and Other Stories* two years later."

Ann Waldron  
*Close Connections: Caroline Gordon and the Southern Renaissance*  
(Putnam's 1987) 36-62

"Her last published novel, *The Glory of Hera* (1972), is an exposition of the myth of Hera and Heracles, which was to provide a context for her 'autobiography,' *A Narrow Heart*.... In an autobiographical sense, the unfaithful yet powerful and intelligent Zeus and the jealous yet strong Hera appear as another version of the Tates' marriage. The true theme of the work, however, is the way Heracles' battles with evil, particularly the serpents he strangled, prefiguring Christ's triumph over the serpent Satan. The novel contains passages of bravura description and dialogue--indeed, some of Caroline's best writing."

Veronica A. Makowsky  
*Caroline Gordon: A Biography*  
(Oxford 1989) 205, 218

"She taught a class in Greek and Norse mythology at the New School and began to write an essay called 'No Snake Has All the Lines; or, The Apotheosis of Heracles.' She felt she had discovered 'things about Heracles that nobody else seems to have noticed.' According to Caroline, the story of Heracles was 'one of the best stories that the imagination of man has ever conceived.' Heracles was the greatest of the Greek heroes, the only one to triumph over the powers of darkness and get to heaven, a prefiguration of Christ.... Heracles ultimately owed his fame and his ascension into the heavens to Hera's machinations.... Although Zeus was all-powerful and far-seeing, Hera and the other female deities obviously had far-reaching influence over the ways of both gods and mortals... Hera's power, and feminine wiles, would be more than sufficient to achieve whatever she desired....

Allen called it 'a masterpiece, one of the great books of the twentieth century, a much greater work than Joyce's *Ulysses*.' But *The Glory of Hera* received little or no public recognition: the *New York Times* did not even bother to review it. And as Caroline expected, it did not sell well. The novel was too long and tedious for most readers. Caroline used the perspectives of several characters to retell the story of Heracles, and she moved back, forth, and, in some sense, even beyond time in the narrative: an unwary reader could easily get lost in her labyrinthine tale.... And yet *The Glory of Hera* contained brilliant sections of writing, and the story more than repaid careful reading. It was not only a creative retelling of the life and labors of Heracles as a prefiguration of Christ, but it was Caroline's last story about the saving power of women.

In the character of Hera, Caroline created one more autobiographical fiction. Like Caroline, Hera was a long-suffering wife of a philandering husband. And yet Zeus could not truly frustrate Hera or render her silent or inactive. Instead, Hera had a peculiar gift of being able to put words into the mouths of mortals and gods, just like her creator, Caroline. Although Hera might sometimes appear to be little more than a vindictive harpy, she would actually use her wisdom and talents to accomplish the salvation of the human race. After all, as Hermes observed at the end of the novel, 'heroes have ever been her particular concern'."

Nancylee Novell Jonza  
*The Underground Stream: The Life and Art of Caroline Gordon*  
(U Georgia 1995) 359, 366, 368-69, 373-74

"Zeus and Heracles, despite the extraordinary power of Hera, dominate her last mythic novel, *The Glory of Hera*... Gordon, as female artist, writes stories in which *she mutes the powerful potential of women* so that *she* can rescue her wayward and frustrated modern men.... [This is Feminist baloney. Often the women characters rescue the men, most notably Catherine Chapman in *The Women on the Porch*, Sarah Lewis in *The Strange Children*, and Vera Claiborne in *The Malefactors*. These are the novels containing "modern men." This is the worst critic of Gordon. She has no excuse for her errors: She is such a poor scholar she did not bother to read her accurate predecessors and she is such an arrogant Feminist she does not care what the facts are when they contradict her. Italics added.] *The Glory of Hera*...chronicles the battle of the sexes on Olympus and the consequences of these wars in the life and trials of Heracles. Although she referred to this book as one she would 'hardly mention' and omitted it from 'the lists she made of her fiction,' *The Glory of Hera* offers readers a fascinating study of the trials engendered by compliance to and subversion of *arbitrary* patriarchal structures. [Feminists think Gaia the goddess of Nature is the "primary force" in the universe, not Zeus, and certainly not a male God. Italics added.]

Zeus, of course, won his dominance in the heavens through war and trickery; he was not the primary force in the universe--Gaia predates him, as did Hera. Nevertheless, his indiscreet, compulsive, and often juvenile sexual forays are matched by his wife's cunning and jealousy and by her displaced revenge. 'Slow-witted' Heracles, a product of Zeus's extramarital activities, incurs the wrath of Hera by his very existence and because he killed the serpents she sent to murder him in his cradle. His great sufferings, enforced labors, and painful, fiery death are caused by these self-absorbed and capricious Olympians--particularly by Hera. The novel ends in Heracles's excruciating pain; tired from his sufferings and labors, he returns home and is given by his son the fiery shirt that finally consumes him--another trick of the gods. In the last scene, on Olympus, Zeus discovers him, having been reborn from the body of Hera, his new and triumphant mother. The hope that informs this retelling of ancient myth stems from a prophecy that a son of the

faithless Zeus will end his arbitrary rule--and that son will be born of Hera, his true wife, and he shall be the glory of Hera."

Anne M. Boyle  
*Strange and Lurid Bloom: A Study of the Fiction of Caroline Gordon*  
(Fairleigh Dickinson U 2002) 168, 181-82

*The Glory of Hera* (1972) is one of the most significant intellectual achievements in American literary history, a multiple allegory with a cosmic scope larger than the vision of Melville--extending from the archetypal conscious human mind expressed in ancient Greek mythology to the plan of God as implied by the history of western civilization: (1) The ancient Greek deities and myths correspond to archetypal characteristics of human beings; (2) the story of the self-sacrificial pagan hero Heracles as rendered by Gordon in many ways corresponds to and prefigures the story of Jesus Christ; (3) the progression of Hercules corresponds in general to the progression from pagan barbarism to Christianity implied by the prefiguration of Christ; (4) the psychological changes in Heracles correspond to both the stages of the individuation process in an individual defined by Carl Jung and to the collective spiritual development of western civilization.

As explained by Rose Ann C. Fraistat, "The mythic action parallels the growth of the individual towards wholeness, the goal of such modern protagonists as Jim Chapman, Stephen Lewis, and Tom Claiborne" in Gordon's previous novels. John Wheelock described *The Glory of Hera* as "miraculous and thrilling." Howard Baker called it "the novel which I think is the best that has been written in something like the past half-century." Gordon's former husband Allen Tate said it is "one of the great books of the twentieth century, a much greater work than Joyce's *Ulysses*." Yet *The New York Times* did not even review the book--an example of their liberal bigotry.

On the surface, *The Glory of Hera* appears to be ancient Greek mythology in the form of an adventure novel written in a style that blends classicism with modern Realism, creating the illusion that the immortal deities are just as real as the mortals. This enhances the satirical exposure of human nature: Since no one today believes these deities are real, they must be understood as collective projections of the human psyche, a revelation of what humans are by nature, collectively--vain, selfish, acquisitive, lustful, promiscuous, jealous, vindictive, whimsical, violent and murderous. The Greek myths are like fantasies in which the gods behave as most mortal men would behave if they had the power and men who get such power do behave. In fact the gods are so much like men they can get sent to Hades. But whereas men go to Hell for rejecting God, some ancient Greek gods were sent to Hades only because they were less powerful than the gods who sent them there. God is just, the gods were mostly amoral. The only significant crime among them appears to be murder that is not "justified," as determined subjectively, causing "bloodguilt" for which the guilty one must do penance, though he may also be subjected to death in revenge. Heracles must labor in penance even when he is innocent, having been temporarily driven mad by Hera.

Gordon is a great Modernist who in her last four novels evolved beyond the Modernist vision of modern life as a spiritual wasteland compared to the past. In her last novel she affirms implicitly the spiritual progress in western civilization during the past two thousand years from pagan barbarism to Christianity. From this transcendent religious perspective, the past was not superior to the present. In this fallen world, most people always will be pagan barbarians. In *The Waste Land* (1922), one of the two defining works in the Modernist movement and the most influential poem in the 20th century, T. S. Eliot uses the traditional quest myth to suggest that it does not matter what your religion might be--he affirms Buddhism as well as Christianity--so long as you revive and sustain your soul. Gordon believes it *does* matter. From the beginning of her career she made heroic self-sacrifice her supreme virtue, well before her conversion to Catholicism in 1947. Christianity exalts that virtue in Jesus on the cross.

Early in the book Gordon acknowledges the literal unreality of the Greek deities with satire--parody that is subtle so as not to subvert too much the illusion of reality that brings her characters to life. Her tone is droll when Zeus turns himself into a cuckoo: "Hera had allowed him to perch, for warmth, in her bosom. It had been an easy matter, after that, to ravish her. The proceeding, on the whole, had been undignified." Indeed, undignified sexual intercourse with animals is common among the pagan deities, producing many creatures part human and part serpent or bull or horse or goat or whatever. "Hera claimed to have produced

Hephaestus...as the result of intercourse with a lettuce leaf." The spectacles of sexual intercourse suggested by these unions are difficult to imagine. As are the numerous one-night stand impregnations of women by Hercules since he is three times the size of a normal man.

The gods most obviously lack morals when it comes to sex. The human King Creon worries, "There was always the possibility that in his absence some god had visited his bed." In Greek mythology the usual form of courtship by the gods is deceit that enables rape. This archetypal pattern of male behavior inspired and became the main plotline of the early popular novel, beginning with Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). But as a rule in relations between gods and servile mortals, a woman ravished by a god is not considered raped. She is honored by the divine visitation. Her family is elevated in status by the chosen daughter. Niobe has "the kind of pride that so often overtook women who had lain with a god." Other mortals, however, "sometimes paid with a lifetime of woe for a single encounter with divinity." The claim of divine visitation must have been a popular solution to the problem of unwed girls who got pregnant, but also must have produced a lot of teenagers who felt entitled to be treated like gods and goddesses.

Immortal deities in a timeless spiritual dimension have a sense of proportion so different from that of modern humans that much of their behavior is comical to us: "Their wedding night had not been spent in Hera's Garden of the Hesperides, but on the island of Samos.... It had lasted three hundred years." At the same time, abortion is expedient among the gods, as it often is among humans today: "When it became evident that Metis was pregnant, he had acted with his customary decisiveness (and in accordance with an old family tradition), swallowing her in the first stages of her pregnancy. He had regretted the necessity--as, doubtless, his own father had regretted the necessity of swallowing his children." Some lines in the novel resound with irony: "Zeus replied, with a sigh, that mortals were mortals and could not be expected to conduct themselves like gods."

At one point Athene (Athena), the daughter of Zeus, is gently satirized as an archetypal feminist: "There was something warlike in the very tilt of her head, in the flash of her eye. He reminded himself of how valiant she was in battle, how wise in counsel, and yet, he thought, it would be pleasant if, at times, she presented a less warlike appearance. That helmet which she wore almost continually! And her breastplate, which bore the Gorgon's head! Perhaps if he went about the matter tactfully he might persuade her to lay her war gear aside occasionally and adopt a gentler mien." Athene seems to read his thoughts: "Would you have me stay always by the hearth like your sister Hestia?" Zeus acknowledges her prowess in battle. "But we are not always at war, my child," he said, and then, in his anxiety to make himself understood, explained that all he was asking for was a little more womanliness in her bearing--at times when she was not embattled. She might, indeed, take her stepmother, Hera, as her model. Hera is vain, capricious, overbearing, too fond of her own way, but there is no goddess who is more beautiful in her person or more stately in her bearing'."

Humor in *The Glory of Hera* contributes to its implicit monotheistic case against polytheism. Zeus is so much less than God he is partly a comic figure, an insecure god among many who has to keep reassuring himself by declaring repeatedly, "I am the Father of Gods and Men!" His insecure repetitions are a running joke throughout the novel. Zeus is not the Creator, he seized his position by force, casting his father into Hades. He is not almighty. He shares power with his two brothers, Poseidon and Hades--and with his formidable queen Hera, who tricks him repeatedly and is "continually thwarting" his plans. When Hades leads a rebellion against Zeus and throws a net over him, Zeus is unable to untie it and must be rescued by others. Nor is Zeus all-knowing. He must be informed by others about what is going on and is advised by an impudent eagle, whose mate he killed by accident when he was inexperienced at casting his thunderbolts. Morinthos the eagle says that "the Father of Gods and Men did not seem to learn wisdom from experience." Zeus and Hera prefigure the recurrent television sit-com couple, he the bumbling husband and she the wiser wife.

The virgin daughter Athene, the archetypal feminist, is wiser than her father Zeus, the philandering patriarch. He praises her for combining "the masculine and feminine virtues in a degree not found in any other of the Olympians." The archetypal male prejudice of Zeus against women is obviously foolish, especially when he provokes rather than heeding his jealous wife Queen Hera. "Athene was wiser than all the rest, but she was, after all, a woman, and liable to be swayed by her passions." In the ancient world

where the status of both gods and mortals was determined mainly by gender, birth and war, like his father Hercules repeatedly defines himself accordingly: "I am of Zeus." But *his* repetitions express not weakness, but steadfast loyalty, pride and strength. It is ironic that, all the while, Hera-cles is also of Hera, who orchestrates his life from behind the scenes as his foster mother, subjecting him to trials and fostering his development of intuition, spiritual connection, and judgment.

Zeus has a scheme for redeeming the human race, though he sometimes doubts that they are redeemable, and plans to procreate a son "who would redeem mankind from its wretched plight!" This initiates the series of parallels between Hercules and Jesus. Zeus declares that his son will become "The greatest hero mankind has ever produced! I intend that he shall live forever." At first Hera is so jealous of his adultery and the biological mother she tries to kill Hercules in his cradle with the two serpents he strangles, evoking Jesus overcoming Satan the serpent. Later, however, she declares that "I shall be to him a foster mother such as hero never had before!" Unaware of her guidance, Hercules tells King Thespius "you must give me leave to go about my father's business," which is exactly what Jesus tells his parents. When a stableman "knelt before him to wash his feet," the image corresponds to scenes in the Bible of a woman doing the same for Jesus and of Him doing the same for His disciples. In his youth Hercules "dressed like a shepherd" and tends cattle, evoking Jesus's metaphor of Himself as the good shepherd. Hercules declares that he belongs to "the Kingdom of Light!" while Jesus declared that "I am the Light." Macaria has seen a halo about the head of Hercules, "rays of light...playing about your head."

The Twelve Labors that King Eurystheus of Mycenae imposes on Hercules are analogous to the various challenges faced by Jesus, who is likewise in constant danger of death. "Eurystheus means to bring about your death," Hercules is told. Hercules performs the Labors to cleanse himself of "bloodguilt" though he is innocent, whereas Jesus dies to cleanse the guilt of the human race though He is innocent. The monsters he faces in the wilderness, and his descent into Hades, are analogous to Jesus facing Satan in the wilderness. When Hercules slays the monsters "he is promising his fellow mortals deliverance from that which formerly threatened death." The King "is known as 'the Wide-Ruling,' although a sniveling coward." He is such a weakling, in contrast to Hercules, that he spends most of his time hiding underground. He is petty and unjust in his judgments of the hero, like the socially powerful but spiritually weak Jewish religious authorities who pass judgments on Jesus, hide from his truths and finally crucify Him. The King refuses to give Hercules credit for cleansing the Augean stables, just as the Jewish authorities refuse to give Jesus credit for cleansing bodies and souls. For their heroic service to humanity, both Hercules and Jesus are accused of "corrupting the people."

Hercules refrains from killing the King, just as Jesus refrains from using his divine power to destroy his adversaries and save Himself. On his death bed, "He had destroyed himself," Hercules said, "purging the seas and lands of monsters so that men might live in peace. And he called the Hellenes ungrateful." Jesus likewise found most of those He came to save to be ungrateful. When he finally dies, Hercules is reborn through Hera. As the mother of the demigod, she becomes a parallel to the Virgin Mary, ironic because she is so much her opposite. Hercules rises from man to demigod, from earth to heaven; Jesus, already divine, descends from heaven to earth and then rises again. Hercules ascends alone, to be worshipped as a hero, whereas Jesus raises his followers after him and is worshipped as Savior. When the chariot transports Heracles to heaven on Olympus, the gods look up into the clouds and see "a dove was circling." A dove is the form taken by the Holy Spirit, as when Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist.

The parallels between Hercules and Jesus glorify Hercules; the differences between Jesus and Hercules glorify Jesus. Both are archetypal heroes, but Jesus is the only Savior of souls. At the time of Jesus most Jews, including His apostles, wanted a savior who would lead a military revolution and expel the Romans. They wanted a Hercules. Many of them rejected Jesus because He was not a Hercules. Hercules became a legend for benefiting mortals by killing monsters and performing other feats that only he could accomplish. Jesus became a legend for benefiting mortals by teaching them how to become immortal and by driving out their demons and performing other miracles that only He could accomplish. Hercules is elevated by his deeds and his two births above all mortals, whereas Jesus is the son of God and at the same time is "the least of these," both above all mortals and one with the lowliest of them. The most important parallel between the two heroes is their capacity for self-sacrifice, the supreme virtue in Gordon's fiction.

Michael Hollister (2020)