Tikva Schein, "Entry on: The Twelve Labors of Hercules by Sarah Coghill", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/541. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Sarah Coghill

The Twelve Labors of Hercules

(2011)

TAGS: Abderos Aegeus Amazons Athena Atlas Cerberus Demeter Diomedes (of Thrace) Diomedes' Mares Eryx Eurystheus Geryon Greece Hades Hera Heracles Hercules Hippolyta Hydra Iolaus Ladon Minos Pasiphae Persephone Pholus Poseidon Prometheus Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Twelve Labors of Hercules
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, United States, Canada
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	Sarah Coghill, *The Twelve Labors of Hercules*. Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2011, 11 pp.
Genre	Instructional and educational works, Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (Possibly young adults, although there doesn't seem to be a particular target group in mind. It is however retailed in the children's category on Amazon.)
Author of the Entry	Tikva Schein, Bar-Ilan University, tikva.blaukopf@gmail.com
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Creators



Sarah Coghill (Author)

Sarah Coghill is author of *The Twelve Labors of Hercules*. She has also written another internet available book called *The Story of Cupid and Psyche*.

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Additional information

Summary

Sarah Coghill relates the twelve tasks of Hercules in a simple, unembellished format. She takes the twelve labors and, in twelve chapters, details the challenges which Hercules faces in accomplishing his tasks. Without stinting on detail, Coghill methodically works through the tasks, providing information on relevant details of Hercules adventures as she goes.

Analysis

This account of Hercules' twelve labours is written in a matter of fact manner, without emotional identification with Hercules or any other characters. There are perhaps a dozen adjectives employed in the whole narrative: the tone is laconic and pared down. For example, the book ends with the detail "Cerberus was returned safely to Hades, where he resumed guarding the gateway to the Underworld."

The subject material itself is interesting enough such that the reader is encouraged to read but there is no extra effort to engage the reader by means of any literary techniques. This book seems to be an informative resource of the steps that Hercules took to succeed in his labours but there is no effort made by the author to attempt any interpretation in this reception.

Coghill seems to have relied heavily on Thomas Bulfinch's (1796–1867) *Age of Fable: Vols. I & II: Stories of Gods and Heroes* for her sources, with little embellishment beyond that.

What she does offer in terms of descriptive power that goes beyond Bulfinch is the description of the tasks themselves. E.g., "The Erymanthian boar was a huge, wild boar with a quick temper and enormous tusks." This description, limited to the difficulty of the task itself is what enables Hercules to be seen as a commendable man, even a hero.

The nature of the tasks without much description enables the reader to engage in reflection on the nature of a hero. What level of difficulty makes someone a hero for achieving the task? How do we need to imagine Hercules performing this for us to view him as a hero?

The structure of the description of each labour is identical. First, the naming of the labour; secondly, the peculiar nature of the task that

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makes it seem impossible; thirdly, a variant of "Hercules set out on his journey" and a one to three paragraph description of the fulfillment of the task.

The terse nature of this mythological rendition seems to be designed for those looking for short summarised presentation of the "facts". While not ideal for reading out loud, it would make a good teacher's resource for students seeking to use their own imagination in padding out the details of the myth. The economical text gives space for others to fill in the lacuna. For example, location 29–35 (the publication is only available on Kindle so there are no page numbers), "Hercules hunted the deer [the Hind of Ceryneia] for an entire year and when she finally became tired, she found a mountain called Artemisius to rest upon, and then made her way to the River Ladon." One is left to picture the beauty of this deer, which were told has "golden antlers and bronze hoofs" (sic).

This text presupposes some knowledge of the Classical world in that names of places and people are not given background meaning. E.g. Ladon, Lerna, Eleus are not explained topographically. One imagines that perhaps Coghill intends for her story to be referred to alongside a map or merely that the geographical locations are incidental to the focus, which is the labors themselves.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Abderos Aegeus Amazons Athena Atlas Cerberus Demeter Diomedes (of Thrace) Diomedes' Mares Eryx Eurystheus Geryon Greece Hades Hera Heracles Hercules Hippolyta Hydra Iolaus Ladon Minos Pasiphae Persephone Pholus Poseidon Prometheus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Adversity Appearances Character traits Journeys
Further Reading	Bulfinch, Thomas, *Age of Fable: Vols. I & II: Stories of Gods and Heroes*, New York: Doubleday, 1948 (ed. pr. 1855).

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Jennings, Ken, *Greek Mythology*, New York: Little Simon, 2014.

McCaughrean, Geraldine, *Hercules*, Chicago: Cricket Books, 2005.

Van Lente, Fred, *Hercules*, Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2013.

Addenda

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