Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Hercules by Diana Noonan , Margaret Power ", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/882. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

Diana Noonan , Margaret Power

Hercules

New Zealand (1996)

TAGS: Hercules





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

General information	
Title of the work	Hercules
Country of the First Edition	New Zealand
Country/countries of popularity	New Zealand
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1996
First Edition Details	Diana Noonan, Margaret Power, *Hercules.* Norwood, South Australia: Omnibus Books, 1996, 32 pp.
ISBN	9781862911840
Genre	Picture books
Target Audience	Children (aged 5–8)
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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Creators



Diana Noonan , b. 1960
(Author)

Diana Noonan (b. 1960) is a New Zealand author. She studied English at the University of Otago, was a teacher for many years, and edited the New Zealand School Journal for older readers. She has written over 100 titles for children and young adults, including non-fiction, picture books, novels, and chapter books for early readers. She has also written for radio, television and film and works as a freelance journalist, with interests in horticultural practices. She has won several national awards, and lives in the beautiful Catlins region of the southern South Island.

Sources:

encyclopedia.com (accessed: August 19, 2019).

otago.ac.nz (accessed: August 19, 2019).

bookcouncil.org.nz (accessed: August 19, 2019).

storylines.org.nz (accessed: August 19, 2019).

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Margaret Power , 1953 - 2019
(Illustrator)

Margaret Power was an Australian illustrator. She studied at Melbourne Institute of Technology. She worked in advertising in Australia, before travelling overseas to work in London and Amsterdam as a fashion and product designer. She returned to Australia in 1976, where she worked in advertising and magazine and textbook illustration before becoming known as a picture book illustrator. Her style is meticulously realistic, and she spent many hours researching the animals who featured in her illustrations.

Sources:

austlit.edu.au (accessed: August 19, 2019).

booksillustrated.com.au (accessed: August 19, 2019).

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Additional information

Summary

Nine-year old Sam lives with his parents in a small seaside community. His mother is expecting a baby boy, and there is much talk in the house about what to name him. Sam suggests Hercules as a name, explaining "He's a character from Greek mythology.Our teacher's reading us a book about him. He was clever and strong and he could take care of himself in all sorts of situations." His parents are not interested, but Sam thinks "I thought Hercules was a good name for someone small who you wanted to grow up strong and able to look after himself." (p. 12). While his parents are at work, Sam spends time with Mabel, their elderly next door neighbour, who is the only other person on their street who lives full time in their town. They like to walk on the beach and collect seaweed for her garden. They notice a pair of local oystercatchers (NZ coastal birds) is broody, as if they too will be having a baby soon. They work together to protect the nest. The narrative of preparation for Sam's brother's arrival is interwoven with Sam's time on the beach with Mabel.

While Sam's mum goes to hospital to give birth, he goes to stay with Mabel. In the morning, they check on the oystercatchers' nest, and discover two eggs have hatched. But to Sam's distress, one of the two birds is dead, abandoned on the sand. When they find the parents and their surviving chick, Mabel explains "sometimes the birds only wait for the first egg to hatch and they leave the second." (p. 28). She tells the birds "you clever things, you've hatched a magic egg." (p. 28). After watching the birds for a while, they turn to go home. They hear Sam's name being called – his father is running towards them, telling them joyfully that Sam has a brother, a boy named Michael. "And Dad," says Sam, "when I'd given him a big hug back and told him how great that was. "Dad, we've got a little oystercatcher chick too, and his name is Hercules." (p. 32).

Analysis

A common topic in children's picture books is the birth of a new sibling. *Hercules* uses the parallels between the birth of a new boy in Sam's family with birth of baby birds, to reflect on the meaning of a new baby's arrival – for the family as a whole, and for the child who must adjust to share their parents. Another common trope is the presence of an elderly friend or confidant, in this case Mabel, with whom Sam can discuss his feelings about the changes in his family.

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	Sam's choice of Hercules as the name for a little brother is unusual for a young New Zealand boy. His wish that his brother will be strong and self-reliant perhaps indicates a conflict in Sam's mind about his new sibling. The mythical or classical elements of the story are not developed in this carefully realistic work, though the idea of strength and resilience is important thematically. Moments like this, in which reference to classical figures is made casually and not developed, show that mythical matters can be present in background roles, rather than having greater significance or intentionality.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Hercules
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Friendship Siblings

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