Anna Mik, "Entry on: Michalina's Eyes [Oczy Michaliny] by Marcin Szczygielski", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1318. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Marcin Szczygielski

Michalina's Eyes [Oczy Michaliny]

Poland (2020)

TAGS: Keres Morpheus Pandora Pandora's Box Phobetor



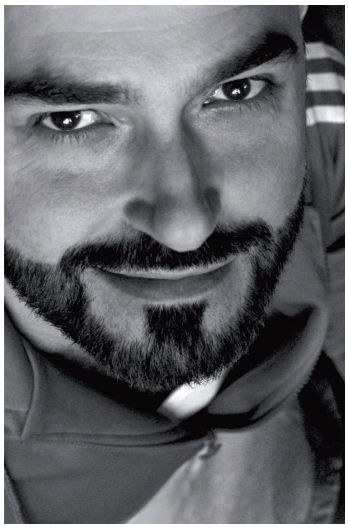


We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Michalina's Eyes [Oczy Michaliny]
Country of the First Edition	Poland
Country/countries of popularity	Poland
Original Language	Polish
First Edition Date	2020
First Edition Details	Marcin Szczygielski, *Oczy Michaliny*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza "As", Instytut Wydawniczy "Latarnik", 2020, 312 pp.
ISBN	9788363841492
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Fantasy fiction
Target Audience	Children (10–12 years)
Author of the Entry	Anna Mik, University of Warsaw, anna.m.mik@gmail.com
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Creators



Portrait, courtesy of the Author.

Marcin Szczygielski , b. 1972
(Author)

Writer, journalist, graphic and interior designer. Formerly artistic director of the Polish edition of *Playboy* magazine, creative director of Ahoj.pl, Gruner+Jahr Polska publishing house and Latarnik publishing house, Editor-in-Chief of *Moje Mieszkanie* (interior design magazine). A member of the Polish Writers Association. He debuted in 2003 with an adult novel *PL–BOY. Dziewięć i pół tygodnia z życia pewnej redakcji* [PL–BOY: Nine and a Half Weeks in the Life of a Certain Newsroom]. His career as an author for children and young adults begun in 2009 with *Omega*. Since the success of this book, he focused on writing for the juvenile audience. His later works for children and young adults are: *Za niebieskimi drzwiami* [Behind the Blue Door] (2010), *Czarny młyn* [The Black Mill] (2011), *Arka czasu* [Rafe and the Ark of Time] (2013), *Teatr Niewidzialnych Dzieci* [The Theatre of Invisible Children] (2016), *Serce Neftydy* [The Heart of Nephthys] (2017), and a fantasy novel cycle about Maja, which – by now – consists of: *Czarownica piętro niżej* [The Witch One Floor Down] (2013), *Tuczarnia motyli* [Butterfly Feedlot] (2014), *Klątwa dziewiątych urodzin* [The Curse of the Ninth Birthday] (2016), and *Bez piątej klepki* [With One Loose Screw] (2018). He is one of the most popular and critically acclaimed contemporary Polish children's authors. He received an outstanding number of awards in various literary competitions, such as: Halina Skrobiszewska Children's Literature Contest, Astrid Lindgren Literary Contest, the Polish Section of IBBY's Book of the Year competition, or Warsaw Literary Prize in Poland, and Jury of Young Readers contest in Germany. He was also longlisted for the Hans Christian Andersen Award 2018, one of the most prominent international prizes for children's authors.

Sources:

"Marcin Szczygielski: Author – Poland", *Bookbird* 55.4 (2017): 31.

"Marcin Szczygielski" [biography], in Marcin Szczygielski, *Omega,* Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Latarnik im. Zygmunta

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Kałużynskiego, 2009, 3.

Marcin Szczygielski, available online at latarnik.com (accessed: February 23, 2018).

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Additional information

Summary

Michalina has a special gift – she sees things that no other human can see. Her power is treated by her parents, other adults, and pupils as a disease or oddity, but no doctor nor psychiatrist had the ability to "cure" her. With time, she has learned not to tell anybody about her visions or rapidly react to things she sees every day, like for instance: giant flying whales, white lions, or trains running through the air. Michalina calls these phenomena Special Things [Rzeczy Specjalne] and organizes them into categories, depending on how dangerous they seem to be. Even though Special Things do not critically affect her life, When the visions become odder than usual, Michalina starts looking for the reason of her unusual gift. She begins with a visit to a museum.

There, Michalina discovers that her gift of seeing was inherited from ancient gods. The City was founded on the grounds of ancient ruins. When the builders (working for the corporation Kratos) fractured the temple of Phobetor, Michalina, still being in her mother's womb, "soaked in" the ancient powers and gained mythical abilities. The girl has to face her destiny and meet the ancient gods, to save the City from a possible doom, brought on by Kratos and the evil scientist, Fryda.

Michalina's Eyes takes place in the same City as *Leo and the Red Machine* (the previous book by Szczygielski). However, Michalina comes from a different district than Leo and they meet only once by accident – this book should not be considered a sequel of the series, but a separate story, taking place in the same literary universe. Szczygielski expands his idea of a complex city of the future, built on various traditions.

Analysis

Just like in the previous book set in the City, in *Michalina's Eyes*, classical mythology plays a vital role. Michalina has the power of Phobetor, Morpheus' brother, unsurprisingly connected to sleep and dreams. Phobetor is shown in the story as a mysterious, apparently harmless god, represented only by a statue in the museum. However, when Michalina visits the exhibition, her powers seem to connect with those enchanted in Phobetor's statue. Being more powerful than before, Michalina poses a threat to corporation Kratos, the capitalist

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company specialising in new technologies. In Szczygielski's book, classical mythology meets a futuristic vision of humanity and demonstrates that even though the science can become very advanced, myths still are a vital element of the human world. When fractured or forgotten, the human kind might not stand a chance without them.

As it turns out further in the story, thanks to the mythical powers, Michalina does not only see Special Things, but also can see and control other people's dreams. The motif of dream and dreaming is also very much present in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, whose influence is also obvious in Szczygielski's novel (sometimes Michalina cannot distinguish dream from the real life, she seems lost, just like Alice, encountering bizarre creatures, etc.). The author was likewise inspired by Shaun Tan's illustrations, since Special Things resembles those from books by the Australian artist (*Lost Thing* especially is a clear reference). *Michalina's Eyes* proves to be highly intertextual and the reader can look for well-known motifs from other books for children.

In the end, the girl also confronts Morpheus, the god of dreams, who takes the form of a white lion. As it turns out, the main villain, Fryda, working in the Kratos corporation, wants to open the Pandora's box and free the Keres (cruel goddesses of death). Michalina enters Fryda's dream, which is one of her memories, and modifies it, so the women can abandon the plan of destroying the City. Such a move might not be seen as most ethical, but ultimately, the ancient gods were not known for their high moral standards. Maybe this way, Szczygielski not only proves his knowledge of classical mythology, but also accurately deconstructs ancient motifs.

The reader becomes familiar with the myth of Hypnos and his sons alongside Michalina, as Szczygielski explains the ancient stories. The museum is the source of knowledge for both, the fictional character and the potential reader of *Michalina's Eyes*, it may encourage children to explore the classical world on their own. Szczygielski shows that even if the technology is getting more advanced, the classical mythology is still an accurate reference in terms of power, imagination, and magic. In this book, the rational fails, the irrational – or mythological – wins.

Keres Morpheus Pandora Pandora’s Box Phobetor

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Childhood Coming of age Heroism Humanity Rejection Society
Further Reading	Hunt, Peter, *Understanding Children's Literature*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005. Killen, Melanie and Adam Rutland, *Children and Social Exclusion. Morality, Prejudice, and Group Identity*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013. Parandowski, Jan, *Mitologia. Wierzenia i podania Greków i Rzymian* [Mythology. Beliefs and Legends of Greeks and Romans], Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1989 (ed. pr. 1924).

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