Marcin Szczygielski

The Heart of Nephthys [Serce Neftydy]

Poland (2017)

TAGS: Centaur(s) Cerberus Egyptian Mythology Faun Hermaphroditus Isis



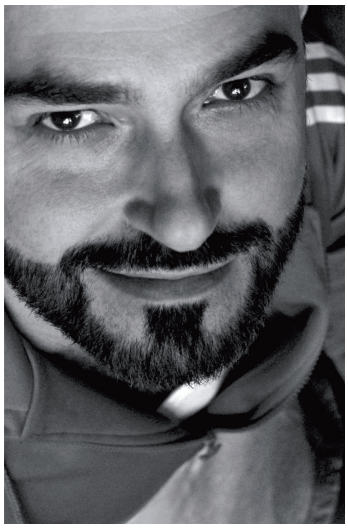


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General information	
Title of the work	The Heart of Nephthys [Serce Neftydy]
Country of the First Edition	Poland
Country/countries of popularity	Poland
Original Language	Polish
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Marcin Szczygielski, *Serce Neftydy*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Latarnik im. Zygmunta Kałużyńskiego, 2017, 447 pp.
ISBN	9788363841423
Awards	2017 – main literary award and the title of the "Book of the Year" for young adults awarded by the Polish Section of IBBY.
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Novels, Science fiction, Space operas
Target Audience	Young adults (according to the Polish Section of IBBY: 15+)
Author of the Entry	Maciej Skowera, University of Warsaw, mgskowera@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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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

In the distant future, people cannot live on Earth any longer as it has supposedly been transformed into a dead planet. It is called “Duat” – which was the name of the realm of the dead in ancient Egyptian mythology (ancient Egypt is highly in fashion in the future human culture described in the book). The protagonist, seventeen-year-old Effi, and his mother live on a spaceship, as the boy’s genetic material does not match the so-called “federation pattern.” Effi also has a special application installed in his mind, Wtyczka [the Plug], which can communicate with him and provide him with information found in the so-called “trojsieć” [trinet], an advanced version of the Internet. After the spaceship is destroyed and his mother dies, Effi preserves her heart in a special portable fridge and decides to go to Earth. He wants to find Nowe Heliopolis [New Heliopolis] and clone his mother’s genetic material in one of its laboratories (called “genlaby” [genlabs]).

It turns out that Duat is not a dead planet anymore. There are strange plants and animals, and creatures resembling humans – all of them are hybrids, created with the use of living beings’ genetic material. However, they do not know about their true nature, and create more or less primitive cultures – “the children of Neith,” “the children of Geb,” etc. – based on certain aspects of ancient Egyptian mythology. Effi meets a person able to change sex – Narmer/Narme, a representive of what is probably the most primal civilisation – Miedzianka (a name derived from the word “miedź” – “copper”), and a centaur-like creature named Haro. They together wander through Duat, seeking for the genlabs and consequently discovering what happened on Earth during hundreds of years after the planet, destroyed in the Genetic Wars, was declared to be uninhabitable. In a surprising and highly ambiguous end of the novel, we read that everything – from the restoration of life on Duat to Effi’s existence – was part of a complicated plan, in which the main roles were played by the boy’s mother, Neftyda [Nephthys], and his aunt, Izyda [Isis] – who managed to get immortal bodies, but not immortal selves.

Analysis

Although the book is mostly based on ancient Egyptian mythology, there are also some allusions to classical mythology. For example, when Effi calls Wtyczka “CERBEROniańka” [Cerberus-like nanny]

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instead of "cerebroniańka" [cerebronanny], the Plug informs him that "stocking such irrelevant details as the name of the guardian of the gate to the land of the dead in Greek mythology is simply wasting the resources of the capacity of the brain."* However, as it turns out later in the book, these words serve as an ironic preview of the episodes in which Effi would use such "irrelevant" information. It is interesting that while the Egyptian allusions are obviously the most important ones in the book, the elements derived from Greek mythology, appearing in the novel several times, show that this other tradition should not be seen as an "irrelevant" one at all.

We also read about various creatures who are the results of genetic experiments. Some of these hybrids are animal-like monsters, while others have human or semi-human form. Among them is Narmer/Narme, a character who can change sex – and does it after falling in love with Effi, which brings to mind Greek Hermaphroditus/Hermaphroditos. However, the more direct link to classical myths is the protagonist's other companion, Haro. She is initially described by Effi as a "gigantic, grey-haired centauride."** Wtyczka, however, says that "the association with centaurs doesn't seem to be accurate. I found a record of an image of another mythical creature in your memory. It was called a faun and was believed to be the god of fertility, and the patron of forests and agriculture. In the project of this hybrid there is more of the conception of a faun rather that of a centaur. However, fauns weren't moving on all fours and they were always males."*** In this context, it is particularly interesting that Haro and her kind were designed to restore water areas by – as we read in the book – "cultivating the sea."****

Although all these beings are not "real" humans, it should be stated that, as Katarzyna Slany writes in her note justifying the main literary award and the title of the "Book of the Year" for young adults awarded by the Polish Section of IBBY to *The Heart of Nephthys*, "the novel utilizes contemporary trend of portraying hybrids and AI as more humanitarian than people who destroy Earth since the dawn of time, rarely using the experiences of previous generations."*****

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* Marcin Szczygielski, *Serce Neftydy*, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Latarnik im. Zygmunta Kałużyńskiego, 2017, 10. All quotations from the book translated by Maciej Skowera.

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	** Szczygielski, 2017, 201. *** Szczygielski, 2017, 205. **** Szczygielski, 2017, 237. ***** Katarzyna Slany, *Serce Neftydy* [a note about the book], available at www.ibby.pl (accessed: September 26, 2018).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Centaur(s) Cerberus Egyptian Mythology Faun Hermaphroditus Isis
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Family Future Identity Intellect Invention Knowledge Learning Love Nature Science Utopia and dystopia Values Violence
Further Reading	"Marcin Szczygielski: Author – Poland", *Bookbird* 55.4 (2017): 31. Slany, Katarzyna, *Serce Neftydy* [a note about the book], available online at www.ibby.pl (accessed: September 26, 2018).

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