Janusz Korczak: A Multigenre Look at a Multifaceted Man
ABSTRACT

JANUSZ KORCZAK: A MULTIGENRE LOOK AT A MULTIFACETED MAN

By Ashley Louise White

This thesis uses a multigenre format to analyze the life and contributions of Janusz Korczak, 20th century Polish educational theorist. The pieces contained within the thesis are created with research gained from writings of Korczak, as well as work from scholars in the field. A complete list of references can be found at the end of the thesis. In order to preserve the aesthetic flow of the pieces, references are not cited within the text. More specific information can be found in the notes pages at the end of the body of text.

Much of the dialog, scenery, and plot in this thesis is fabricated in order to appropriately frame the historical information. All major events, general theories, and players are based in research. Nothing is included within these pages without careful research. The creative framework is carefully tailored in order to make sure that it does not detract from the factual information that is portrayed.
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Student Information:

Ashley White WHITEAL2@muohio.edu
Name E-mail Address

Janusz Korczak
Honors Thesis Title

McGuffey Hall
March 24, 2007 4:00pm
March 24, 2007 3:30pm
Location of Final Meeting Date and Time

Thesis Approval:

Advisor:

Tom Romano
Signature 4/26/07

Readers:

Michael Todd Edwards
Signature 4/26/07

Karin Daley, Teacher Ed
Signature 4/26/07

Margaret J. Scocco, Teacher Ed
Signature 4/26/07

Please print name and department

Date

Date

Date

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May 2006 - A Walk With Him (A Writer’s Introduction)

The road I walked to Dachau was wet, rocky, and cold, even in the heat of May. Dachau was supposed to be the first stop on my self-created tour of European concentration camps: Dachau, Auschwitz, Treblinka. I never made it past Dachau. The experience was supposed to bring me closer to the people who lived and died under Hitler’s reign of terror. In particular, it was supposed to bring me closer to the one person I had chosen, out of the 11 million people murdered in the name of ethnic cleansing, to focus a two-year obsession: Janusz Korczak. I wanted to go to Treblinka and stand where he died, feel his sacrifice. I believed that standing there would give me insight to which books had failed to lead me. I also believed that I was strong enough. I wasn’t.

Dachau was enough. More than enough. Painfully, consumingly enough. From the moment I saw the iron gate, its bars wound cruelly into the phrase “arbeit macht frei”, a lie that gave so many who came false hope, I felt as if the magnitude of what happened here laid on my chest. It was a place where people lived, suffered, and died because they were born in a form and held beliefs that one man despised. Its soil hides the memories of the dead. When I reached the gas chambers, I knew that I would never make it to Treblinka. While the chambers at Dachau were never used, their brothers and sisters at Treblinka were used relentlessly, sparing no man, woman, or child who stepped from the trains, fed from the Warsaw Ghetto.

After my visit, I sat down, far away from the tragedy, half ashamed of my own cowardice, wondering if I was fit to write about a man that transformed the lives of so
many. I decided that I could not be detached from this, that to be detached would be to belittle their memory. So instead I turned to multigenre, a way to place myself into this history while maintaining the dignity of my subjects. I wanted to look at Korczak’s life from all sides. I ask you to read this with the same respect.

This is not a story with a surprise ending. Korczak spent most of his life transforming the way we think about children, studying, raising, and molding them in his Polish orphanages. He researched, he wrote, and he trained teachers in a tradition unmatched by his contemporaries. In the end, he and his last group of children were put to death at Treblinka. This is the fact that makes his story, in the eyes of the public, worth telling. It is not that part of his life on which I choose to focus.

Korczak wrote, shortly before he died, that “to describe someone else’s pain is like stealing.” I will not attempt to describe his pain, nor that of his children. I will not try to steal his story. Instead I will write because his story begs for reverence not in the manner of his death, but in the manner of his life. The fact that he was willing to die was only a product of the life he led.

This is the story of Korczak’s life, with just a taste of his death on the end. It is just a taste, because in the writing of this work, I have been consumed with a respect for his man and his life that does not allow me to use his death for my own dramatic purpose. Within these pages, you will find Korczak, constructed as he touches my life. I hope that you are as captivated by him as I am.

Respectfully,
Ashley White
1884- In the Drawing Room

Dark eyes and curls pushed against the plate glass window over looking the alley, crushed between the towering homes of the Polish elite. A stark contrast to the plush interior of the drawing room where Henryk spent his days, the street was perpetually dark and rodent infested, the place where all things deemed too grotesque for the drawing room world to stomach.

The five year old pressed his forehead to the window and looked down, watching the small people below maneuvering the trash piles abandoned by any kind of sanitation. They were children, he could tell, probably not much older than himself, touching things his hands would never be allowed to be near.

“Grannie?” Henryk spoke into the glass, letting his forehead slide down the flat surface until he was sitting on the hard wood floor, leaning forward to keep his eyes trained on the ground below. It was his favorite position, sitting on the floor, staring out the window, especially in the winter when the glass was cold and his breath formed a cloud just below his nose.

His grandmother left her eyes on her sewing, rocking her needle back and forth as she did all day, everyday, as she listened to her little charge talk. Within this room, she could be young again, letting his youth flow through her while he became an old man, banished to the drawing room with its relatively resilient furnishings.

“What are they doing down there?” He had watched the children below everyday for as long as his young memory stretched, but for some reason, on this day, he realized
that the figures looked as if they were looking for something, not playing as he had assumed for so many days of intense watching.

“Looking for food, I suppose.” His grandmother shifted in her chair to rest her needle arm at a new angle. The thread was flowing slower now as the sunlight dwindled.

“Why?” Food, for Henryk, came from the dining room table, or the kitchen, or the lunch he carried to the Russian elementary school he attended everyday and hid deep in the back of his desk.

His grandmother shook her head and tied a neat knot in her thread. “Not all children are as lucky as you are, Henryk.”

Henryk rocked back and forth, contemplating the scene below. “When I grow up, I’m going to fix it.”

“And how are you going to do that, my little philosopher?”

“Take away all the money. Give everyone food.” Henryk pressed his fingertips to the glass, counting the children below.

“What then?” His grandmother laid aside her sewing and pulled a peppermint from the bowl on the table beside her chair and offered it to Henryk.

Henryk looked at the peppermint and shook his head.

“I don’t know.”
March 1898 - A Career Begun

University of Warsaw Office of Admissions

Dear Henryk Goldzmit,

I am delighted to inform you that the Committee on Admissions has voted to offer you a place in the University of Warsaw Medical School for the upcoming academic year. Please accept my personal congratulations for your outstanding achievements.

This year, several hundred students applied for admission to the entering class. However, due to the resource constraints that we are experiencing, we could only accept a few of the talented students. The Admissions Committee was careful to select individuals that will someday stand to change our world. The Committee is sure that you will make such a change.

Among the enclosed materials you will find a medical form to be completed by a health care professional, clearing you to attend school. The Medical School reserves the right to withdraw acceptance if you possess a medical condition that would make medical practice impossible or impractical.

I hope that you will decide that you belong at the Medical School. We have enclosed materials that will assist you in finding housing and making other arrangements while in school. No matter your decision, please accept my hopes for success in the future.

Sincerely,

Jozef Walenowski
1900- The Night Writer

The last line, trekking across the page, is furnished with a period. A bit anticlimactic after the pages of text that lay on the desk beside the typewriter as the writer lays his head on the table beside the machine to close his eyes for just a few minutes. The night air is heavy around his shoulders as it pushes him towards the wooden surface, lulling him into thinking that he could stay awake that way; that he would be able to wake up in time to go to his real job. It is just a few hours before he would wake and need to rejoin the human race. Long days of biology labs and medical practicum have not ceased the incessant need for midnight writing. Weary days are crowned with evenings and nights full of composition, revealing the need for the doctor by day to shed his scrubs and commit to the constant, calming clicking of the typewriter. Words spin out on his fingers onto the page, shoving the clinical doctor down underneath his skin, giving rise to something more guttural.

To cover, to hide behind another name is essential. To move from Dr. Goldzmit to another name, one that would embody the writer that is emerging from within, without marring the surface. A name that only appears in the written word. A name pulled from the pages of literature, and pulled over his persona as if it were a cloak that would allow him cover as he writes. Korczak. The pages pile up beside the typewriter until, as the sun brushes the horizon with a golden watercolor, the final page falls into place, and the manuscript is completed. The first submission of many to come, suddenly starting a career that will flow beneath the surface for the rest of his life, no matter what his official title might say. His heart will always be here. At the typewriter.
1905- Selected Service of the Empire

Order to Report for Armed Forces Physical Examination

To: Henryk Goldzmit

You are hereby directed to present yourself at the nearest Armed Forces Department for a physical examination in order to determine your eligibility to fight for the Empire against the Japanese. If you are found to be able to fight, you will have the honor of fighting to preserve the Czar’s rightful place.

***

February 22, 1905- A Dirty Business, War

Journal

I have seen three months of war, and already I have had enough. It is a dirty business, this war, especially now that we’ve all lost track of what we are fighting for. Russia is seeking, if I may say so without being shunned by our great Czar, to remind people that it exists in the world. It is fighting a war to prove a point, when there are so many other ways to say to the world “We are Russia, and we will not be ignored on the world stage.” They have taken Poland, making us into a soldier-farm for their power struggles abroad. The Poles have no issue with Japan, nor do we have any desire to fight. But here, at this very moment, I am surrounded by men who were given a few days of training and then sent out to fight with 250,000 other people who are equally as ill-prepared. And then we wonder why the world it startled. Russia, like a child who has fallen and hurt, more his pride than himself, is acting out. The Czar is at home, nursing the wounds caused by his
super-power army being crushed by, to add insult to injury, a tiny Asian country to the East.

We have lost 120,000 men, so we not only fight, we grieve for the loss of a generation of men that could have done so much more than attempt to wipe out a population. As we sleep at night, we mourn for them and for the 80,000 that we have killed, so large a number and yet not enough for anyone to decide that this war is finished, that someone has won.

Tomorrow, we go off to fight a new battle, one that we hope with end the suffering of both sides, if only by creating an intense, short term suffering of loss. We outnumber them by 60,000. But I fear that it is not enough to bring us a victory. If anything in this war could be considered a victory. Tsushima will be stained with blood in the morning. All I can think about is Poland and how the Russians have destroyed my country yet again. The smell of their interference in our lives is all over the food we eat, the uniforms we wear and the bullets we bury in the hearts of an enemy that is theirs. We have no issue with the Japanese. Poland does not wish to be a part of this war. But yet, we are here, watching each other die in the name of someone else’s pride and fury.
Summer 1907- Missing the Forest for the Trees

The young man, ready for his first day of work with children, the light of the world, the keepers of innocence, tucks away instruments that, in his mind, amuse the children and transform them into happy, healthy, productive young adults. Dominoes, checkers, and games ready to make the summer fun and interesting. He imagined playing among the trees with the children, having delightful times that would stay with them forever, changing their outlook on life.

***

Summer 2006- Lost in a Forest of Possibility

I leaned back against the headboard of my cabin bunk, dreaming of the next day when the children would fly through the door, excited to be at camp, and ready to learn everything there was to know about the outdoors. The plastic bin at the end of the bed over flowed with beads, pipe-cleaners, lanyard lace, and paint. I pictured children creating leaf rubbings, writing letters home, creating lanyards in the common room of the cabin on rainy days. I was going to change these children, making their lives better with love and nature. I was doing good, taking them out of the city and bringing them out into a place of peace. I was following Korczak in his early years. In two weeks, I was going to conquer the problems that urban life had inflicted upon these children. I was following Korczak, and I was about to learn about children just the way he did.
I stood outside the train car, watching the children unravel before me. A dark haired boy, one that had come on the train alone, like so many of the other boys, stole another boy’s cap and tossed it to yet another as the owner leapt after it, dropping his suitcase into the dirt beside the platform. Unfortunately, the roll in the dirt did not seem to have an effect on the already filthy overnight bag in which the child was obviously carrying all his worldly possessions. I fingered the tokens in my pockets, the checkers that were supposed to entertain these wild children for the next month, and began to wonder if I had underestimated the magnitude of this undertaking.

It was here I wished to discover everything there was to know about children, how they think and feel, look and act. My visions, however, of rows of children trailing after me, hanging on my every word as I taught them all they needed to know about self sufficient living and the glory of their native country, began to fade as I watched them pound each other for fun beside the platform.

I watched as the horse-drawn carts came to carry them down to the camp, and realized that the time to establish order had passed. The children hurled themselves into the carts, pushing each other out of the way, nearly breaking a boy’s arm in the process as he was shoved to the feet of one of the horses. It was, I can tell you, one of the most grotesque displays of human behavior I had witnessed in my nearly 30 years.
It was not that I was unaware that children were, at times, unruly. But my experience with them was in an exam room, with their parents close at hand, on an individual basis when they were slowed by disease or injury. These children, while I doubted that none of them were diseased, seemed to find sport in being as poorly behaved as they could manage. I tossed the checkers out of my pocket and onto the platform, perhaps for a child traveling on the train to find, and tried to think of another plan.

***
Present Day- A Reflective Profession

It was that day, watching the children at the train platform, that Korczak developed a theory that changed the way teachers have been educated all over the world. He realized that he had made an incorrect pedagogical choice in his planning for these children and, upon meeting them, reflected on the process. It was a practice that he used and perfected for the rest of his life.

In that way, reflection was born and passed through the theories of other theorists until teacher education programs all over the world focus almost daily on the need for reflection in the classroom. Currently, reflection is the cornerstone of teacher education programs. Reflecting is so important that pre-service teachers spend four years reflecting on every aspect of the teacher training, even to the point where they reflect on the reflection process. One quarter of the Praxis III exam is dedicated to reflection, making the practice just as important as planning, maintaining student rapport, or actually teaching the class.
April 3, 1912- A Midlife Change

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to notify the concerned parties that I will be leaving my current employment in two weeks. I would like to thank everyone for supporting me in the past, but it is time for me to move on to a new chapter in my life. At the age of 33, I have been blessed to have had success in my chosen profession, but I must now begin what I believe is a nobler work. While I love the medical profession, I feel that it has been rendered powerless against the woes of our world. As more and more children are left alone in the city, they need more than medical attention.

To this end, I have accepted the position of director of the Children’s Home for Jewish Children and its Christian counterpart, Our Home. I hope that this will allow me to help preserve autonomy in the coming generation, even as our world falls into destruction.

Sincerely,

Dr. Goldzmit
Jewish Orphanage Opens on Krochmalna

Dr. Henryk Goldszmit, formerly of the Children’s Hospital in Warsaw, has left his practice, much to the dismay of his many supporters to join forces with Stefania Wilczynska, formerly of the Jewish Orphans Aid Center, to create an orphanage for Jewish children at 92 Krochmalna Street.

It has seemed a strange move for many, as Goldszmit has showed very little alliegence to his Jewish heritage in the past. He speaks very little Yiddish, and has been quoted admitting his little knowledge of religious particulars.

It will take a year for the orphanage to be completed. During this time, Goldszmit plans to visit Paris, working in several orphanages and hospitals in that area.
A Child

I am a voice unheard. I am small, walking below the vision line, forgotten. I am the future, a mirror of the past, yet uncultivated. I am ignored. I am forced quiet, obedience, assumed idiocy. I am learning, ready to some day inherit the world, but you are rejecting me. I am deemed unimportant, but I am the most important. I am your future, yet you want me to stay in the past. I am the world changing, but I am held still. I am ideas, dreams, visions. I am understanding that the world can be a better place. I am a child.

***

Selected Service of the Empire

Order to Reinstate for Armed Forces Physical Examination

To: Henryk Goldszmit

You are hereby directed to present yourself at the nearest Armed Forces Department for a physical examination in order to determine your eligibility to be reinstated in the Imperial Army and take part in the rapidly expanding world war. If you are found to be able to fight, you will have the honor of fighting to preserve the Czar’s rightful place by fighting with the Allied Powers against the Central Powers that are trying to take over our great nation. We have been driven out of Prussia by the German army, and we must recover what is lost. You will be part of this quest.
March 5, 1915- Still a Dirty Business

In a world gone mad, it seems the only thing to do is to lay down one’s priorities and pick up munitions. At least that is what the Czar seems to believe. In my second tour of duty, I have discovered that war, from a Russian perspective has not changed. Still reeling from the slap in the face that Japan gave her 10 years ago, Russia seems just as ill prepared to fight this war. Our only hope is that our esteemed leader has chosen the right side with which to ally himself.

The Imperial navy is severely lacking in anything that would help a war progress in our favor. Our four ships are barely a contribution to the 39 that France and Britain bring to the alliance. Together, we total 43 ships, more than double the navy of the Central Powers. Perhaps we will come out, in the eyes of history if not in the eyes of our own people, victors.
March 15, 1917- Bolsheviks

International Radio

“It seems that the Russian Czar has finally met his match in Vladimir Lenin, a radical dissenter of the Russian involvement in the current war. His party, the Bolsheviks, has risen up to challenge the Czar and remove their country from military action. This may be the development Poland has been waiting for. Lenin’s belief in change bodes well for Poland’s ability to finally stand alone, without the Russian forces that have been impacting the lives of Poland’s families for the last several years.”
There was no parade
No dancing in the streets
Only silence, mourning
A loss-stained victory

A dusted off flag
Reborn from what once was
Independence tasted again
On the tongues of new children

Returning home to freedom
Soldiers from the edges
Of an Earth torn in two
Jagged cracks of fate

So long under rule
Of someone else’s dreams
Casting their own
Under the dead

Years of war
Leaving rubble of their lives
Restored again by a token
Independence

The Polish flag now flies
Alone without preemption
As her sons come trailing back
Returning home to Freedom
**From the Korczak Dictionary**

**Orphan:** Any person under the age of 21 who has lost his or her parents due to death, warfare, or other causes including neglect. A parent is considered neglectful who does not feed, clothe, and or teach the child the ways of the world around them. A parent is also neglectful if he or she abandons the child’s need for spiritual understanding or respect.

***

**Prayer**

Thank you, Lord, for allowing me this place, this time, these children. Thank you for giving me the chance to mold their independence, to create their life in the image of success. Thank you all the blessings that you have given to me in the form of these children and continue to give me to power to raise them in a way that will make them see that they are the future and the love that this world has to provide.
Lost and Found Contents

Blue jacket with a torn pocket, possibly belonging to a 10 or 11 year old boy, was found in the inner garden area. Its owner would do well to remember that if the weather is not cold enough to need a coat outside, then one should not be brought.

Grey cap with a blue ink stain on the inside was found in the dining room. Perhaps next time the owner chooses to take a pen to his belongings, he will use it to write his name so that the object can be returned to him.

Black button-up shoe, belonging to one of the older boys, judging by the size, was found in the infirmary. When the owner claims the shoe, he may want to explain to the old doctor how one walks around with one shoe, not noticing that its twin is missing.
Title: Seating habits by economic background

Objective: To discover self-sorting methods students use in the dining room as they relate to economic background.

Hypothesis: Students will arrange themselves based on their past status (before arriving at Our Home) due to a common background of material goods and lifestyle.

Procedure: Students will be observed at each meal over a period of one week. A seating chart will be taken at each meal, analyzed using known data of student backgrounds. After collecting this information, students will be interviewed about their attractions to other students and their chosen subjects.

Findings: Students who have lived at the Home for a period of less than one year participate in social stratification that includes not only past economic status, but past geographical location and family structure. Students who have lived at the Home for a period of more than one year participate in a lesser form of segregation, focusing mostly on their past economic patterns.

Opinions: Students evolve into using only economic stratification because nothing defines a child’s value system like the economic opportunities presented to them. Students look for friends with values that match their own, therefore looking for children that spent their formative years in similar economic situations.
1927- A Popular Destination

Queen to Tour Korczak’s Orphanages in Warsaw

London Chronicle November 22, 1927

Her Majesty will travel to Warsaw on Monday to tour Janusz Korczak’s orphanages. Founded on organization and democratic principles, Korczak’s two orphanages (Our Home and Children’s Home for Jewish Children) are becoming attractions for world leaders. The Queen will spend three days touring the facilities, along with some of Britain’s leading school officials. Korczak will spend time with the Queen during her visit, advising her on future developments in British education.

Korczak, a veteran of the Great War, is working as a guest professor at two institutions of higher learning in the area while editing his publication “The Little Review”, which publishes articles written exclusively by children. He also serves as an expert in juvenile crime for the Warsaw courts and publishes at least one written work per year, in addition to running both orphanages.

***

1928- Another Feather

You’re Invited!!!

What: A ribbon cutting ceremony at the new Polish Worker’s Children Institution

Why: Janusz Korczak, renowned child expert is opening his new institution to support the children of Polish workers in education and development. It will be the crowning glory of a man who has devoted his life to the children of this country.

When: December 2, 1928
1929- An Environment for Learning- An Unfinished Korczak Essay

It is my belief that children cannot be expected to learn in an environment that is stressful and temporary. The classroom is a place for the transference of information, not the learning of any thing useful for life. The real learning takes place out of the classroom and in the world while the students are living their lives. It is important that an educational institution create this authentic learning in order to provide the environment for meaningful learning of concepts. Unfortunately, the current education system is completely fabricated and unwilling to create any kind of experience learning that might help their students learn more easily and with more engagement than they currently do.

To that end, I have decided to create a place where real learning can take place. The children, orphans of the war, will live their lives within the confines of the home I will provide for them and, through their daily activities, learn the skills they need to become productive for the rest of their lives. I will employ the various means of facilitating this learning including a focus on personal responsibility and rights of children.

I am, more than ever, concerned with the way children are viewed in the education system today. It seems that teachers view children as either tiny adults, with no separate needs, or as irresponsible, weak, slightly mentally ill humans that just need a place to exist until they grow into something more useful. I believe in something different. I believe that children are at a developmental stage that requires careful handling. They must have structure, as children cannot thrive without a framework in which to do so, but the structure must be created by children. It is important that the
accountability for success be placed squarely with the child by the peer community in which they live.

This structure must be tempered with flexibility, room for children to try options and decide where they exist in the world. General education in this country does little to allow children to define themselves. Instead, we spend most of our time trying to define children in a way we want them to be. The problem with this approach, aside from the fact that it so rarely turns out the way we want, is that it slows change in our society, something that we need so desperately as we try to put our world back together.

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1930- Competitive Market

Korczak stretched his legs out under his desk and looked at the young woman who sat in the chair before him. “Anna, you seem like a wonderful woman, and I truly believe that you will be a credit to our profession. But as I said, I cannot offer you a position at this time. We only have so many openings, and we are completely full.”

Anna slid forward to edge of her chair, pulling nervously on her skirt. “If it is a matter of funding, I could work for less money than everyone else. I could work for room and board!” She brushed off the man’s shake of the head and plowed forward into her monologue. “I need this job, and it would be such an honor to work with you! This job would give me experience and training that five years in a Russian school couldn’t give me!”
“I’m sorry, my dear.” Korczak stood up, hoping the woman would take the hint that this meeting was over. “We will file your application and let you know if we have an opening.”

Anna refused to get up. “Sir, I want to work here. I know that I could do a wonderful job here. I am not going to take no for an answer.”

“Unfortunately, you must. I understand that you feel like this is the best option for you. I am flattered that you have so much faith in the place I am running here. But it is a simple matter of space. We do not need any new teachers right now. Nor,” he interrupted her as she tried to speak again, “do we have room for cooks, teacher’s aides, or any other employment opportunity we offer here.” He opened the door. “Now I must ask that you go.”

The woman’s shoulders sagged and she rose, slumping out of the room. Korczak watched her go and then turned to the filing cabinet beside the door where he filed the 123rd application he had received so far that month.
Joseph Pisudski- Obituary

Joseph Pisudski, Poland’s president, acclaimed for his efforts to establish independence, died today, at the age of 68. Pisudski was renown not only for his political efforts to establish Poland as a credible force in Europe, but in his success in uniting the Polish people, regardless of religion. He afforded Jews rights that they could only dream of in Russia during his presidency. His successors are already changing policies, stripping the Jewish population of their rights after Poland signed a friendship treaty with Germany. His death could very well be the end of our peaceful existence.

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1935- Friends

Is it a friend that waits
Until you are low and mourning
   To take advantage
      Of your pain?

Is it a friend that sees
Your tears as an excuse
To enter into dark deals
   That change history?
Three signatures unravel a land
To be friends with the devil
To open our borders
To those who wish to do us harm

The flag still waves
With a different message
One of oppression
Instead of one of freedom

Returning home to occupation
To see your country
Fallen to its knees
Having trusted too deeply

A people being slowly strangled
The air being pulled out
Leaving them to die
In a land they called their own

From such prosperity
Such a rapid fall from grace
A spiral down
Returning home to occupation
1939- Children’s Radio with Janusz Korczak

Today I come to you with a heavy heart and a disbelief in how our world has changed over the few years. The death of our great president has opened the door for evil to infiltrate our country. I despair that our children will grow up in a world that we thought we had rid ourselves of with revolution. I despair that some will not grow up at all. We are being polluted by an outside force with ideas of how Poland should be. Their ideas go against everything we have stood for in these years of independence.

This will be my last broadcast. Our new friends have begun the process of closing down the Jewish enterprises in the city. It seems that this radio program is one of their first targets. I want to take this moment, before we fall into this darkness created by an unwelcome treaty, to ask you to take care of your children. Do not allow them to fall victim to these people. It is only a matter of time before they remove us from our lands entirely. May God help us all.
1939- Another Day of Paradise Being Lost

Korczak left the orphanage that morning, just like he left the orphanage every morning, ready to wander the streets in search of the answer to the slow starvation of his children and staff.

Hours later, having gathered barely enough to let them survive one more day, he walked back towards his home, his eyes trained on the ground. As he raised his hand to the doorknob he looked up and saw, scrawled across the side of his building in red and black paint, words that made his head feel as if someone had disconnected it from his body.

The red paint was slashed across the windows, dripping down the sills to pool on the steps of the building. *Die Jews.*

The words stretched along the front of the building, thrown there in the night by artists of obscenity. *Go to Hell.*

His stomach heaved, and he vomited what little was in his stomach onto the stairs, where it mixed with the paint, adding a putrid smell to the scene. *Kill the baby Jews.*

He eased himself down onto the steps, looking up at the words, not able to understand why this was happening. His mind failed to register that the vomit and paint were seeping into his pants, branding him with the squalor of the situation. His mind stretched, trying to encompass the scene around him. Why his world was falling apart. Why nothing will ever be the same again. Why someone hated him so much. Why someone hated his children so much. Why God was so silent.
1939- Notice of Termination

This is to certify that Janusz Korczak has been relieved of his duty to the Warsaw Circuit court in compliance with current legislation that prohibits those of the Jewish race from participating in governmental matters. It has come to the attention of the Warsaw government that a Jew is not the best choice to deal with our youth criminals. It is important that we rally around these children and do what is best for them, including representation by a morally sound citizen.

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1939- Contents of Janusz Korczak’s Desk

Our Home until 1939

Paper
Double pointed pencil
Black bread
Water
Vodka (On a good day)
Straight Alcohol and Water (On a not-so-good day)
1939- Another Set of Walls

“It’s time.” Korczak looked across the table at Stefa.

“They’ve ordered it?” Stefa looked back, more pain in her eyes than surprise.

“We have 24 hours.”

“We’ll never make it.”

“We have to.”

“The children can’t pack that fast, let alone walk that distance.”

“We have to.”

“The medication, the food, the beds… We can’t do it.”

His fist slammed the table, a gesture of violence so rarely seen from this man.

“WE HAVE TO!”

Stefa stared at him as he rose, pacing back and forth beside the table.

“Do you think I want to do this? The order said move! They want us on the other side of that fence, Stefa, as far from their new Warsaw as we can be.”

“Since when have you ever done anything they told you to do?” She was angry too, suddenly, that he was giving them up to these people. That he was complying with this ridiculous order to move their children.

“We can’t be taken away, Stefa. There would be no one to care for the children.”

His voice was softer now, the way other people spoke to small children who were having trouble understanding.

Stefa bristled at his tone. “And you think they are better off in that hole they want to put us in? They want to cut us off, to starve us to death.”
Korczak pressed his forehead to the glass, counting his children below in the courtyard. He pulled peppermint from his pocket.

“What are we going to do?” Stefa stared at her partner as he lost himself in the children below.

There was silence for a few minutes.

“We’re going to move. We’re going to stay alive.”

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1939- A Pleasant Delivery

**Delivery 1939:** Janusz Korczak

**Contents:** One armband with gold star

**Directions:** Please wear on the outer layer of clothing at all times. Failure to wear the enclosed armband will result in arrest and prosecution.
1940- A World Turned Dark

Creed

I believe in God
Creator of all life

I believe in faith
Creator of peace

I believe in the future
Creator of hope

I believe in the child
Creator of the future

I believe in humanity
Creator of all sorrow

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Spiral into Hell

A calm, organized zone of complete peace and understanding is surrounded by a world that is collapsing, bending in around the pearl of a center and threatening it with a sudden implosion that cannot be reversed, no matter how sorry the world will be after it happens.
1940- Arrest Record

Name: Goldzmit, Henryk

Alias: Korczak, Janusz

Crime: Failing to comply with national policy to designate Jews by armband

Sentence: Imprisonment and alternative techniques to secure information about resistance groups that may be appearing in Poland.

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1940- Fall From Someone’s Grace

Close Every Door

Every door is closed to me
   Every door has locked
   I can only watch now
Watch as the pain inflicted upon me
   Pales next to the pain
   Of my people

Let them beat my body
   Take my dignity
Relieve me of my mortal soul
   It is in the hands of God now
   He must forsake me
   His attention needed
   With my children

Deliver me to the almighty
   Let this evil triumph
Over the body I have used
   It is time for me
   I want only to assure
   The safety of humanity
1940- Civil Disobedience

“We’ve been beaten! Branded! And now we are entombed here, forced to live each day without really living. If you aren’t ready to fight now, when will you be?” Korczak paced the cell, pausing only to toss looks of distain at the prisoners slumped on the floor. “We have been corralled, restricted, but before God, I swear that I will have no more of it.” He pulled at the armband, forced upon him after the last session of excruciating pain, that cut into his skin. The figures on the floor seemed to hold their breath, knowing what happened every time he managed to remove the constraint. “This thing is cutting off the lifeblood from my hands so that I will not fight. This star has turned from a symbol of our devotion to God to a symbol of hate our people have endured.” He managed to pull it free, and tossed it to the floor, pausing a moment, looking at it. “I have cast off that shackle, and if I am killed, I will go to my death knowing that I will be welcomed to the kingdom of heaven as a traveler who has reached the promised land.” He gazed at the band again, the star staring back through the darkness. Something within him wanted to take his heel of his boot and grind the symbol into the ground. But the watching eyes of the devoted held him back.
**Official Order of the Nazi Party**

This order is to assert that the Warsaw Ghetto shall be sealed. All shipments of food and all public services are to cease immediately. Prisoners currently being held in the jails should be released to the Ghetto. Thank you for your cooperation.

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**1940- Not-So-Routine Maintenance**

Please board up the front windows and door. Any opening to the orphanage should be sealed to outside intruders. Do not let the children leave the building until further notice.

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**Plan Thwarted by Divinity**

The lawyer’s office tried to pretend that everything was the way it had always been. The large desk faced the door, oblivious to the fact that the windows behind it were broken and winter was coming. The desk blotter and fountain pen set were situated just as they had been after graduation, when they were new and optimistic. The large leather chair had been slashed, but it held its structure as if it were uninjured. The office was avoiding the truth.

The lawyer was not.
“I don’t know that I can do that for you, Janusz.” The last lawyer in the ghetto leaned back in his chair and looked at the man across the table from him. “It’s not that I disagree with the sentiment, I understand your wish to get them out, but there is no way out.” He flipped his pen over in his hands, looking at it as if the polished wood would tell him the answer.

“We can find a way. There has to be a way. But they have to be trained first. They need to speak Hebrew. They need to learn to act more Jewish and less Polish.” Korczak worried the material of the chair’s arm.

“These children are Polish, Janusz. You can’t change that. You can’t talk them out of it.”

“They can’t be Polish anymore. Poland has excised them from their country. Palestine is their only hope now, the only Jewish safe place.”

“The Nazis will be there soon. And then there will be no where to run.”

“So you won’t help.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to. Believe me. But it is a useless plan. You should focus on keeping them alive here; move them at the end of the war.”

“We might not see the end of the war.”
Night in the Orphanage

I sit in the middle of the boys’ room, listening to the rhythm of their breathing. The clear, gentle sound of the healthy ones, interspersed with the halting breath of the sick as the air sticks in their lungs and throat.

There are footsteps in the girls’ corridor. I can hear movement, the small cries of one of the smallest girls, afraid of the dark.

It is not a peaceful night, but this is not surprising. I cannot remember the last peaceful night. I cannot sleep, and therefore am forced to sit in silence, trying to work out the day’s problems in the dark. The dark holds few answers. Anyone who believes that quiet helps him think should have a complete mental workup performed. I need the children around me, unable to be silenced, in order to really understand what I am thinking. I could sit here for hours in the unbalanced silence and arrive at the morning with nothing. That is why this manuscript will most likely never be finished. It is too busy during the day to write and at night, not busy enough.
The Briefest of Fairy Tales

A long time ago, as the world was tearing itself apart, there lived, on the outskirts of town, a group of children, living together under the care of an old doctor and a bustling nurse, existing in a realm of peace and safety as a war raged beyond the rolling hills, not touching the children who lay sleeping in their rows of beds, sheltered from the pain going on elsewhere, and blissfully unaware that they were an unwanted commodity, a dying breed, an endangered group who would soon be forced, without moral cause or practical barbarous metal and heavy chains, to be starved of peace and light and someday be herded, without complaint, green flag waving, onto a one way train heading East.

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Dark

It’s dark, where the Jews go
Says the old man at the bottom of the stairs

It’s dark, not quite Hell
Far from Heaven

It’s dark, wrapping around a child
Who already fears when there is no light
Another Door

Every morning he walked, the sun still low on the horizon, down the once new cobblestone street. The stones, worn now into a smooth pattern resembling wind-whipped sand, formed a dull drum for his battered shoes upon which to play. His trousers hung from his hips, coupling with the rumpled, ill fitting jacket to tell the world “once, another man lived here,” He kept his hat low over his forehead and his tie high on his neck projecting a strange image of destitute professionalism. The buildings rose on either side, glass mostly missing, doors barely holding their hinges.

The doors were his concern this morning, just as they were every morning, over and over since the beginning of his living nightmare. Behind those doors, people might be persuaded, by his sunken eyes and persistence if not by his suit and tie, to hand him a half loaf of bread, a coin, or a lump of coal. He stooped, along his journey, bending to the ground to search for spare bits of coal, showing the lumps deep into his pockets because knocking on the next door, another door.

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Wings

I will not allow them to crush my colorful wings
I will not allow them to slow my flight

The world is spinning away from our control
It is time to return to our original path

There is a force larger than what we can conceive
But we can only expect to do so much

The problems of corruption are overcoming us
Burying our good intentions under ashes
August 6, 1942- Green Flag March

The air was still that morning, until the trains rolled in, destroying the silence as they did every morning. The tension was evident in the tightly closed doors along the streets, the blankets stretched over children, pinning them to the beds, the boards nailed over the windows, shutting out evil in the world.

The train ground to a halt just inside the fence, ready to free the inhabitants from this world. Gravel crunched as tall boots hit the ground, dropping out of the death train. The legs attached marched down the street toward the huge house where the children live. Pounding up the steps, past the boarded windows to the front door. The boots kicked the door, summoning the hiding people from within.

Words uttered, angry against the quiet morning. Not a sound from the other houses, children quieted lest they draw attention to their door. Clouds passing overhead, casting shadows along the street and sending rays of light dancing against the buildings.

There was no outward struggle, the old man who answered the door was beyond the point of struggle. A quiet nod, an ear-splitting rip of his heart, and the door closed to do the boot’s bidding.

Suitcases packed as if a trip was to be taken, the children lined up, one behind the other in a procession of hope gone sour. The old man hoisted the green flag, leading his children on a fairytale march along the street, as the door of their home banged in the wind, no longer tightly shut.

The boots followed, surrounding the procession, shielding them in a strange attempt to keep the children safe until they were to die.
At the train, the children piled in, some too small, having to be lifted into the box cars where they were stuffed, foot to stomach to hip. Two hundred loaded like a commodity into the cars to be shuttled to their death. Suitcases jostled, spilling out of the car and onto the ground beside the tracks. A doll laying, head under the train, covered in clothing.

The old man attempted to climb in, unable to make the step on his own. One of the boots offered a hand, not in assistance, but in an attempt to stay his action all together. An offer of freedom, granted to a famous face, rejected by the old man who tried again to climb in.

An angry voice, low now, demanding that the old man step away, ignored again as the old man finally made it into the train. An answer left until the door was closing. “Who would I be if I let them go alone?”

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After Word

The work of Janusz Korczak is generally omitted from educational studies in the United States. However, his legacy is still alive in Europe, especially his native Poland. In 1979, Poland introduced a resolution to the United Nations aiming to make his work the official educational theory of Europe. Today, universities all over the world use reflection as a core belief in teacher education programs. His orphanage in Warsaw can still be seen by tourists, as can the stone, etched with his name, lying among the others at the Treblinka memorial.
Notes Page

In the Drawing Room

Korczak spent most of his childhood in the drawing room of his affluent house in Poland with his grandmother. His parents were influential people in the community, and so Korczak lived in a way that protected him from the growing anti-Semitism in the country. Korczak would watch the street children play below, his first knowledge that not every child lived the way he did.

Medical School Acceptance

Korczak wanted to be a doctor to follow in his grandfather’s footsteps. After the death of his beloved grandmother, his desire became more intense, and he left home even though his mother was dealing with the recent loss of Korczak’s father.

The Typewriter

Korczak gradually changed his focus from medicine to writing soon after he completed medical school and became a pediatrician. The children fascinated him, and he began to write a series of works about education, child development, and stories for children.
The War

Korczak was drafted into the Russo-Japanese war, where he served as not only a soldier, but a doctor. Generally a peaceful man, he was appalled by war, blaming the entirety of the conflict of the Russian government. Having attended what he termed a tyrannical Russian elementary school, and having grown up under Russia’s thumb, Korczak was not one to give the Russians any quarter.

Camp Agreement

Korczak’s first contact with teaching was a summer camp, where he learned that dealing with children was not as easy as he thought it was.

Desk

Korczak’s desk always contained writing instruments and vodka. He often noted that vodka may be the only Russian thing he liked.

Train Scene

Korczak realized, on the train ride to the camp, that the tricks he had packed to amuse the children with would not only be inadequate, but would not make him a good teacher. It was then that he understood the difference between keeping a child busy and teaching a child. It was the beginning of Korczak’s reflection theory.
Letter

Korczak chose to leave his medical practice to head an orphanage in Warsaw. The job allowed him to continue to study children in a controlled environment.

Newspaper Article

Korczak left his practice to create his Jewish orphanage, the orphanage that made him most famous, in alliance with Stefania Wilczynska. Together, they maintained the orphanage. She was largely in charge of the female orphans. Their relationship seemed to be purely professional.

Diagram

Korczak’s vision of education was a focus on children and their needs to learn. His classrooms were setup with the child at the center and the teacher as a facilitator. The students were influenced not only by the teacher, but by the entire community.

War

Korczak joined the Russian forces to be a doctor in WWI.

News Brief

While Korczak was away at war, the Bolshevik Revolution occurred in Russia. In the end, Poland was liberated as independent country.
Lab report

Korczak used his orphanage to study the social interactions of children who came to him from different walks of life. He used this information to develop theories on how adults should interact with children.

Interview Scene

Korczak’s orphanage quickly became a popular place for teachers to come to train with the best child development expert in Poland at the time. The orphanage was so popular, in fact, that Korczak turned away all but the very best teachers to work with him.

Returning Home to Freedom

Korczak returned from Palestine to find the Nazi army occupying Poland.

Conversation

Korczak was forced, after the Nazis took Poland, to move his orphanage inside the confines of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Arrest Record

Korczak was arrested by the Nazi regime for failing to wear his armband that designated him as a Jew. While in jail, he was tortured to make sure that he would cooperate when released.
Lawyer scene

Korczak constructed a plan to get his children out of Poland and to Palestine where they would be safe from the growing problem. He brought in speakers from the community, hoping to prepare his children to speak the language and to understand the traditions that they would need in order to move out of the country. Unfortunately, the plan was never realized, because the Nazi army moved into Poland too quickly.

The Green Flag

Korczak wrote a book entitled “King Matt” about a child king who changed the world by eliminating all that Korczak saw was wrong with the world. King Matt’s flag was green on one side, with the Zionist flag (the current flag of Israel) on the back. As the children marched to the trains, Korczak held up King Matt’s flag, a symbol to his children of safety and peace.
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