

KorczaK's character as emerging
from the 'The last journey' myth:

FATHERHOOD

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KorczaK's character as a father emerges from many texts. However, in the various texts there are different shades of the perception of Korczak as a devoted father. Some of them emphasize this ideal.

source	Paulina Appenschlach The doctor stays A biographical novel about Janusz Korczak Translation: H.S. Ben-Abram Published by Kiryat Safar Ltd., Jerusalem, 556, 1946 pp. 289-308	Vladislav Spielman The pianist p. 96
perception	fatherhood	altruism
highlighted value	unconditional love	fatherhood

Vladislav Spielman was born in Poland. He learned to play the piano in Warsaw and Berlin. In 1933, After Hitler came to power in Germany, Spielman returned to Warsaw. He has composed many classical works and several popular songs and film soundtracks. In 1935, Spielman started working as a pianist in the Polish Radio, where he was employed until the fall of 1939, when the German occupation forces in Poland arrived in Warsaw, and Polish radio broadcasts were ordered to stop. Spielman continued working as a pianist in the ghetto restaurants. He managed to escape from the Umschlagplatz, and joined the Polish underground. A German captain, Willem Hosenfeld, who was ashamed of his country's Nazi policy, and used his position and rank in the Nazi army to save Jews, contributed to Spielman's rescue. Hosenfeld saw Spielman when he was searching for food. He provided Spielman with food and military uniforms, so he wouldn't freeze to death.

Spielman was released by soldiers of the First Polish Brigade, which was part of the Red Army. He went out to greet his rescuers, but as they saw him wearing a German officer's coat they shot at his direction and almost killed him. Spielman called out to them: "I'm Polish!" And to their question why he was wearing a German officer's coat, he replied "I'm cold." Spielman wrote his memoirs in 1945, but the Polish authorities prevented its publication. In 1987, his son, Andrzej, initiated republishing of the book. The book was translated into more than 30



Languages. Roman Polanski directed the movie "The Pianist", based on the book. The movie won many awards.

Spielman says that "one day, around the fifth of August, when I took a short break from work and was walking on Gasia Street, I happened to see Janusz Korczak and his orphans leaving the ghetto... the children were to be sent alone. He had a chance to save himself, and only with difficulty did he convince the Germans to take him too. He had spent many years of his life with children and now, on this last journey he could not leave them alone. He wanted to ease them. He told the orphans they were going out to the countryside, so they should be cheerful ... and so they went out to the yard, two by two, nicely dressed and in a happy mood."

Spielman sharply and cynically criticizes the Germans' attitude towards their victims, which stands in complete contrast to the innocence of the children, who obey and sing along. Korczak understands the situation well, and cooperates with the "show" to calm the children: "The short row was led by an SS man who loved children, as Germans do, even children whom he was escorting on their way to the afterlife. He especially liked a twelve-year-old violinist who held his instrument under his arm. The SS man told him to head the children's procession and play - and so they set off. When I met them on Gasia Street, the smiling children were singing in a choir, the young violinist was playing for them, and Korczak was carrying two of the youngest, who were also beaming as he was telling them some amusing story. I'm sure even in the gas chamber ... the Old Doctor must have whispered in one last effort, 'It's okay, children, it'll be okay.' So that he could at least spare his little orphans the fear of the transition from life to death."

Korczak is portrayed as a father striving to protect the children at any cost: at the cost of his life, and also at the cost of truth. Korczak does not abandon the children - staying true to the children and to his way. It can be said that in these moments when Korczak waives everything for the children's sake - the child becomes a value. He tries to reduce fear, to continue giving the children a feeling of safety, to be a shoulder and a rock for them as he has given them all his life and their lives.

The ideal - Spielman presents the readers with **altruism** as an ideal.

The value from which the perception of altruism stems is **fatherhood**.



Paulina Appenschlak had known Korczak for about thirty years. She met him when she was about 8 years old. Following a meeting with Yulia Wilczynska, her

geography teacher, and Yulia's sister Stefania, she started coming to play with the babies at the orphanage, putting on plays and helping the children with their homework. Appenschlak later met Korczak at the Polish newspaper 'Nasz Przegląd' editorial board, and at the newspaper's print. With the outbreak of World War II, she fled to Israel. When letters from Poland stopped arriving, she made an effort to meet with refugees coming from Poland, some of whom were with her in the ghetto, to hear what happened. Appenschlak recorded the testimonies. At that time, a film director approached her, with the intention of making a film about Janusz Korczak. To that end, she looked for certificates and documents, and met with people who knew him. Appenschlak was able to locate most of his books. From all this information she compiled a book called "The Doctor Stays", about Janusz Korczak. Appenschlak writes that there is almost nothing imaginary in her book, and adds that she trusts the good intentions of the people who provided the information.

Paulina Appenschlach's description of 'The Last Journey' begins early in the morning, even before the deportation began. Korczak left early in the morning and slipped out of the ghetto to collect donations for the orphanage. On his way back – accumulating signs increasingly indicated that something was not right, that something terrible had happened. When he arrived, he found the orphanage gate open, chaos in every corner - and no one there. **"His gaze fell on Stefa's black wallet tossed on the ground... on the floor were scattered more photographs, an ID card, a thread ball, a handkerchief... A moment later he picked up a small empty morphine tube."**

This description is unique in that Korczak is looking for signs of what had happened and for the whereabouts of the children. He finds clues to what happened to Stefa. This is one of the few texts in which Stefa did not go with the children and Korczak, and it seems that when the deportation began - she committed suicide.

In the yard he was told that a truck had arrived and taken the children. Stefa was nowhere to be seen. Korczak wondered where the children could be. He remembered that everyone was being taken to the train station, so he ran there. When he arrived, he saw the children from a distance, but they could not hear him. Korczak struggled to reach them. When Poiget tries to drive him away and send him back home, he replies: **"I am their educator... They can't go without me."**



KorczaK is described as resourceful - looking for donations, collecting clues, compiling bits of information to plan his next step, arriving to find the children, understanding what can and cannot be done in the given situation at the train station – making a decision and acting on it.

After Korczak hands his documents to Poiget and is sent through the checkpoint towards the train, "he was no longer Doctor Henrik Goldschmidt, he was no longer Janusz Korczak, but a plain Jew, with no name and no surname. A Jew with a ribbon on his arm like any other Jew ... he was seen when he appeared on the train platform, and while jumping on the iron tracks of the third rail, a call was already carried across the train cars - The doctor, the doctor is coming!".

"A heavy burden was lifted from the heart. Up until now they were alone. Early in the morning they were uprooted from their beds. The doctor was gone, Stefa had also disappeared. They were tossed like bags, one by one, into the car and raced along the streets... The Doctor will join them ... and he is not alone; In one hand he holds young Salusia, who was left on the tracks, and in the other hand a small baby, who couldn't reach the high train car."

"And before he rose from the last step of the ramp to the door of the train car, before he saw that white lime was spilled on the floor and before he thought in his heart: "quicklime" - he stood up and called to the children: Well, we're going.... Do you remember the summer camp song? We're going, we're going happy".

KorczaK remains an educator, even when it is clear that he can no longer educate. This is the only description so far, in which Korczak did not march with the children from the orphanage to the Umschlagplatz; the children - driven by a truck - were on their own almost the entire way, until Korczak found them. The author emphasizes Korczak' attention to children, including a foreign baby, even before he noticed the quicklime on the floor of the trailer.

The white lie - is not a lie here, but a reference to what is most important to him - the children, who had been alone until he arrived. He didn't really pay attention to anything else, didn't plan what to say, just wanted to calm them and be with them.

The character depicted is that of an ultimate father, who cares for everyone, and under no circumstances abandons his watch. His role was meant for him, and he was meant for the role – always. That won't change now.

The ideal - Appenschlach sets before the readers is **fatherhood** as an ideal.



The value from which the perception of devotion to the path stems is **unconditional love**.

Conclusion:

Spielman shows how until the very last moment, and even at the cost of cooperating with the Nazi lie, Korczak makes every effort to ease the children's final journey, to reduce their fear, to give them a few more moments of grace, to sweeten every moment for them as much as possible - As long as they are alive.

Appenschlak tells how Korczak reconnects with the children after they were separated from him. She describes the efforts Korczak makes to reach them, and the immense relief they feel once he succeeds.

Both authors describe Korczak's view of the living children. As long as they are alive - he will do everything within his power for them. In his mind - he is like their father, and they are his children. He will not abandon them in the most difficult moments - theirs and his. He had never done it before, and will not do it now. For Korczak - every moment of life is worth living.