

Traces of forgotten identity. On the role of sources in the biography of Janusz Korczak^{*}

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Od wierności w rzeczach małych zawsze zależy powodzenie filologa i biografu.

It is on the reliability of small things that the success of a philologist and biographer depends.

Wiesław Ratajczak¹

In my numerous, almost daily contacts with people interested in Korczak, who would like to learn as much as possible about him, I keep realising every step of the way (...) that common knowledge about [him – M. S.] is rather scant, fragmented and superficial,² wrote Aleksander Lewin in 1999. In his book entitled *Korczak znany i nieznan* [Korczak known and unknown], the researcher expressed his disquietude, grieving the fact that the legend that had emerged around the Doctor has covered the facts that marked the life's path of this complicated figure. This diagnosis is accurate, yet the state of matters has by no means been caused by a lack of biographical studies devoted to Korczak.

The first attempt to collect biographical data on the well-known Polish educator, doctor, and writer, published by Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa in 1949, triggered an entire series of works of a similar nature.³ Despite that, biographies of

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1 W. Ratajczak, “O potrzebie wierności drobiazgom” [On the necessity to remain faithful to bits and pieces], in: *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* [Poznań Polish Studies. Literary Series] no. 35 (55) (2019), p. 411.

2 A. Lewin, *Korczak znany i nieznan* [Korczak known and unknown] (Warsaw: 1999), p. 5.

3 See H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, *Janusz Korczak* (Warsaw: 1949) and later editions, i.e., editions 2 through 5 in 1957–1978, and, e.g.: I. Newerly, *Żywe wiązanie* [Live binding] (Warsaw: 1966), 2nd and 3rd editions in 1967, 1971, respectively; M. Jaworski, *Janusz Korczak* (Warsaw: 1973), 2nd and 3rd editions in 1977, 1978, respectively; A. Szlązakowa, *Janusz Korczak* (Warsaw: 1978); S. Wołoszyn, *Korczak* (Warsaw: 1978), 2nd edition 1982; K. Dębicki, *Korczak z bliska* [Korczak from up close] (Warsaw 1985); B.J. Lifton, *The king of children* (New York: 1988).

Janusz Korczak published approximately once a decade, both in Poland and abroad, added hardly anything new to the then-existing knowledge on this subject. Consecutive biographers basically copied the findings of those who wrote before them, sending the known facts through the filters of their sensitivities and, per the academic trends current at the moment, explored selected aspects of his biography. The already-mentioned Lewin rebuked those before him for their abuses and over-interpretations, and criticised their 'wyssane z palca' [made up] revelations commonly celebrated as some major supplements or discoveries.⁴ The only books he valued highly were those written by authors who knew Korczak personally, i.e., a collection of memories by Ida Merżan, and the first two biographical novels which synthesised the biography and the achievements of the Old Doctor: *Janusz Korczak* by Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, which received many reissues and translations, and *Żywe wiązanie* [Live binding] by Igor Newerly. Those were, in his own words, 'mother books that have spawned multiple offspring'.⁵ Being written by Korczak's close collaborators, and based on their personal recollections, according to Lewin, they 'have formed a canon, a foundation of very useful knowledge'.⁶

The problem is that the recollection-based literary vision of reality – offered in the positions that Lewin appreciated – was often treated indiscriminately as a source-founded basis, and it consolidated in the collective memory details which were unreliable, scant, and subjective. The author of *Korczak znany i nieznan*, who was aware of this, postulated for an 'academic biography based on thorough knowledge of all the available sources: both direct and indirect, including those lesser known or not known at all'.⁷ His book was an attempt at reliably recapitulating facts and indicating directions for further research, which should be undertaken to escape the cursed circle drawn in existing interpretations.

This publication did not, however, reach a broader audience. It was even ignored by Joanna Olczak-Ronikier,⁸ Korczak's most recent biographer. Her *Próba biografii* [An Attempt at a biography], published in 2011, constitutes the main compendium of knowledge on Janusz Korczak⁹ for the modern audience. This volume, re-issued

4 Like, for example, the stories related to Korczak's father's illness or the alleged marital infidelity in the family. See A. Lewin, *Korczak znany i nieznan*, pp. 65–66.

5 Ibidem, p. 411.

6 Ibidem, p. 407.

7 Ibidem, p. 412.

8 This is clear as she makes no references in her book to *Korczak znany i nieznan*, and because she remits 'information' which had already been debunked by Lewin, e.g., information on Goldszmit's family relations.

9 See J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii* [Korczak. An Attempt at a biography] (Warsaw: 2011, 2012 edition).

and translated, recognised with two prestigious awards (incl. Klio awarded by Porozumienie Wydawców Książki Historycznej [Association of Publishers of Historical Books]), has defined the image of the Old Doctor ever since. Its many reviews share the enthusiasm that someone has finally dealt with the legend and that the patina has been lifted off the statue. Such titles as *Korczak odczytany na nowo*¹⁰ [Korczak read anew] or *Biografia spełniona*¹¹ [Biography fulfilled] herald a breakthrough in the ossified image of the ‘king of children’. Indeed, the curriculum vitae proposed by Olczak-Ronikier differs from the previous depictions. This study, with an index and notes, appears to be a well-documented volume. Yet is it actually true that after reading it, one’s knowledge about Henryk Goldszmit is less ‘fragmented and superficial’ than it had been twenty years ago?

Based on my document-centred research of the last few years, focused on Korczak’s genealogy, I have come to the conclusion that there is still much to be discovered. Before I proceed to confront the initial fragment of *Próba biografii* with the available sources, allow me to indicate how archival research and a return to a philological consideration of texts may debunk seemingly iron-clad theses and extend the array of biographical research into this figure.

‘Olczak-Ronikier quotes sources abundantly – from official documents to literary texts. This is undeniably one of the major assets of the method she had chosen’, one of the reviews of *Próba biografii*¹² wrote. The author herself stated that her narration

próbuję dotrzeć do podziemnych źródeł, do korzeni. Może podróż w tamte odległe czasy, kiedy żyli jego przodkowie, kiedy się rodził, kiedy był chłopcem, kiedy dorastał do swojego powołania i kiedy je wypełniał, przywoła choćby cień Starego Doktora [...].

attempts to reach underground sources, the roots. Maybe the journey through those distant times when his ancestors lived, when he was born, when he was a boy, when he grew up to meet his calling, and when he fulfilled it, will bring about at least a shadow of the Old Doctor (...).¹³

These assumptions are further amplified by a fragment of Korczak’s ghetto *Pamiętnik* [Journal], which indicates his unfulfilled plan to write an autobiography based on his idea ‘to reach oneself while seeking the heritage received from consecutive generations’.¹⁴ I fully agree with the thesis that Korczak was deeply aware of how much he owed to his ancestors. He even argued that an autobiography or biography is not so much about learning about the person described there, but

10 A.M. Kola, “Korczak odczytany na nowo” [Korczak read anew], in: *Praca Socjalna* [Social Work] no. 2 (2012).

11 A. Witkowska, “Biografia spełniona” [Biography fulfilled], in: *Cwicz[ym]* no. 4 (2011).

12 E. Szybowicz, “Zapomnij o świętym Korczaku” [Forget about saint Korczak], <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/2321-zapomnij-o-swietym-korczaku.html> (accessed 29 September 2020).

13 J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii*, p. 12.

14 Ibidem.

their genealogy. His introduction to a brochure on Jędrzej Śniadecki features this passage:

Z autobiografii zasłużonych i wielkich poznajemy ich niejako, z życiorysów zgadujemy pracowicie, najczęściej zgadujemy błędnie. [...] Ile jednak ważniejsze [jest – M. S.] zagadnienie ich rodu! Herby i konie wyścigowe mają genealogie, nie mają jej uczeni [...]. Niechby wiadano, ile pokoleń zbiera mozołnie soki w ciszy i cieniu, zanim do słońca wychyli się – kwiat rodu.

From the autobiographies of those merited and great, we learn about them to some extent, and from biographies, we eagerly try to guess, usually guessing incorrectly. (...) How much more important the issue of their kin [is – M. S.]! Coats of arms and racehorses have genealogies, academics do not (...). It would be wonderful to know how many generations need to collect the juices in the quiet and shade before the sun may shine on the family's bloom.¹⁵

No previous biography of Korczak ventured into his genealogy. The belief expressed in one of the 'mother books' still endures: 'Birth and death certificates burnt in the archive'.¹⁶ When it comes to Korczak's ancestors, authors usually reference the same platitudinous information found in his journal entries: about his great-grandfather, the glazier, and his grandfather Hersz Goldszmit. Only in the final *Próba biografii*, per its author's commitment to 'reach the roots', can one find a few chapters devoted to the Old Doctor's family.

And so, the first contains a suggestive description of the history of a typical Jewish craftsman living in a small town in the late 18th century. Ronikier gave the previously mysterious great-grandfather the glazer the hypothetical name of Eliezer Chaim and a date of birth ('for the clarity of the story' she assumed that he was the same age as the Hrubieszów-based inventor Abraham Stern). Next, drawing from Korczak's short story entitled *Trzy wyprawy Herszka* [Herszko's three journeys], she suggested that 'he found a wife in the same community of small-town poor from which he came, and he had a son with her by the name of Lejb. (...) In 1805, another son was born – Hersz'.¹⁷ Further pages of the chapter are occupied by an abridged story of said Hersz... A four-year-old literary figure who decided to lead Jews from the small town to Palestine.¹⁸ 'Did Korczak talk about his grandfather?' Ronikier asks rhetorically. She eventually states, 'One cannot now recreate Hersz's path. One can only imagine it thanks to other accounts'.¹⁹

15 J. Korczak, "Słowo wstępne [Foreword] [to a dissertation by Jędrzej Śniadecki] *O fizycznym wychowaniu dzieci* [On the physical education of children]" (Warsaw: 1920), reprinted in: J. Korczak, *Dzieła* [Works], vol. 13 (Warsaw: 2016), p. 13.

16 H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, *Janusz Korczak*, p. 23.

17 J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii*, pp. 19–20.

18 See J. Korczak, *Trzy wyprawy Herszka* [Herszko's three journeys] (Warsaw: 1939), reprinted in: idem, *Dzieła*, vol. 12 (Warsaw: 1998). The work's well-documented origin story places it among the so-called Palestine stories, i.e., works created under the direct influence of Korczak's experiences from his two journeys to Palestine in 1934 and 1936.

19 J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii*, p. 26.

In order to help readers better understand the fortunes of Hersz Goldszmit, the author reflected actual events from the life of Zygmunt Bychowski, his grandmother's brother-in-law, and of the already-mentioned Abraham Stern, Antoni Słonimski's great-grandfather.²⁰ As no authentic sources regarding Korczak's ancestors exist, the author constructed their lives' stories using Korczak's literary works, actual accounts about other people, and her own imagination. The narratives are convincing enough that one review even states: 'Ronikier (...) reconstructs Korczak's entire life, starting with the story of his great-grandfather, the Hrubieszów-based glazier Eliezer Chaim Goldszmit (...)'.²¹ Such words as 'podobno' [apparently] or 'załóżmy' [let us assume], which the author used to protect herself, are downplayed in the readers' reception. The artistic creation of the life stories is treated as a reliable 'reconstruction' of their pasts. The question of whether they can learn anything new about Janusz Korczak's ancestors remains.

The fortunes of his paternal ancestors are an artistic construct, while those of his maternal ancestors are virtually absent from this biography. Considering the matrilinear system of kinship in Jewish culture, this omission can be surprising, particularly considering the fact that Ronikier, unlike authors before her who were certain of the deep assimilation of Korczak's family, often clearly states Korczak's mainly Jewish identity. In his *Pamiętnik*, which he wrote in the final months of his life, one will find the writer's own admission about his parents: 'I am both my mother and my father. I know that and I understand much because of that'.²² In another passage he wrote:

Matuś – Ojczulku. [...] ze wszystkich skamienia-
łych tęsknot i bólów Waszych i moich przodków
pragnę wznieść wysoką, strzelistą, samotną wieżę
dla ludzi. [...] Liczba tych pod ziemią szkieletów
[...] jest tylko za ostatnich lat trzysta – aż tysiąc –
i dwadzieścia – i cztery. Jak różne nosili imiona.

Mummy – dear Father. (...) from all the ossified
longings and pains of Yours and of my ancestors
I wish to erect a tall, pointed, solitary tower for
people. (...) The number of those skeletons beneath
the earth (...) only in the last three hundred years
is – even a thousand – and twenty – and four.
Imagine the different names they had.²³

Mojżesz, Sender, Izrael, Fogela, Natan, Zysla... These are just a few of them. Read from just one marriage act, drawn up in Polish in Kalisz in 1821, of Henryk's maternal great-grandparents: Szymon Dejczer and Cyrla Wolf (it was after her that Korczak's mother was named, but in a Polonised form of Cecylia). Many other personal acts survived in archives in Poznań, Lublin, and Warsaw. I posted

20 Ibidem.

21 A. Bikont, "Korczak", in: *Zeszyty Literackie* [Literary Notebooks] no. 3 (2011), p. 226.

22 J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik i inne pisma z getta* [Memoir and other writings from the ghetto] (Warsaw: 2012), p. 122.

23 J. Korczak, "Dedykacja" [Dedication], in: idem, *Sam na sam z Bogiem* [One-on-One with God] (Warsaw: 1922), pp. 69–70.

a recreated family tree with all the details I was able to find on the Nowa Panorama LiteratURY Polskiej [New Panorama of Polish Literature].²⁴ Contrary to the commonly perpetuated conviction of a lack of archival material, one can indeed try to reconstruct the histories of both families based on source material. There is much more than names and dates to be read from the acts of birth, death, and marriage of the members of the families. For example, from the already-mentioned certificate, one can also learn that Korczak's great-grandfather, the 'tailor from Kalisz', was the son of 'Izrael and Fogela née Moyzesz, the Deytschers, merchants living in Ostrów', while Cyrla, his great-grandmother, arrived at the wedding 'accompanied only by her father, Natan Wolf, butcher from Kalisz, since her mother (...) Zyska née Zander on the sixth day of October eighteen oh four departed this world'.²⁵ The same certificate indicates that Cyrla had a brother named Józef Wolf, a peddler, while both the bride and groom had familial ties with the Brokmans – the witnesses during their wedding included uncle Szymon, sixty-eight-year-old Mojżesz Brokman, a furrier, as well as Cyrla's cousin Abraham Brokman, a fisherman. Interestingly, the only signature (apart from the official's initials) in the document in Polish is the signature of: 'Simon Deiczer'. The rest of the guests required to sign the document did so in Yiddish, 'except for the bride who cannot write'.²⁶

The story of the illiterate great grandmother, the wife of the tailor who in 1821 wrote his surname more in Polish than his contemporary Polish officials (in various certificates, e.g.: Deutscher, Dajtscher, Daytzer), may inspire one to search for the first traces of the integration of this Jewish family with Polishness, particularly considering the fact that in Cyrla's death certificate from 1845 one will find the first instance of the Polonisation of the Jewish names of the orphaned daughters: Zuzanna (instead of Sisse from the birth certificate) and Ernestyna (instead of Estera).²⁷ The fact of calling children by Polish-sounding names can surely be read as an intentional assimilation-focused gesture. Emilia, Korczak's beloved grandma, is recorded in her birth certificate as Mina (not Mila as erroneously reported by Ronikier). Only after she married Józef Adolf Gębicki (son of Maurycy and Anna Rozalia) did the birth certificates of their children feature the Polonised (or Christian) form of her original name. Even a cursory review of the already-mentioned family tree clearly proves that the process of assimilation occurred

24 See <https://nplp.pl/artykul/drzewo-genealogiczne-osoby/> (accessed on 23 October 2020).

25 Zyska née Zander was most probably Zisl daughter of Sender, the form of her name was distorted at the registration by the official.

26 Act No. 11; original copy available at the State Archive in Poznań (microfilm 743142).

27 Act No. 56; original copy available at the State Archive in Poznań (microfilm 743144).

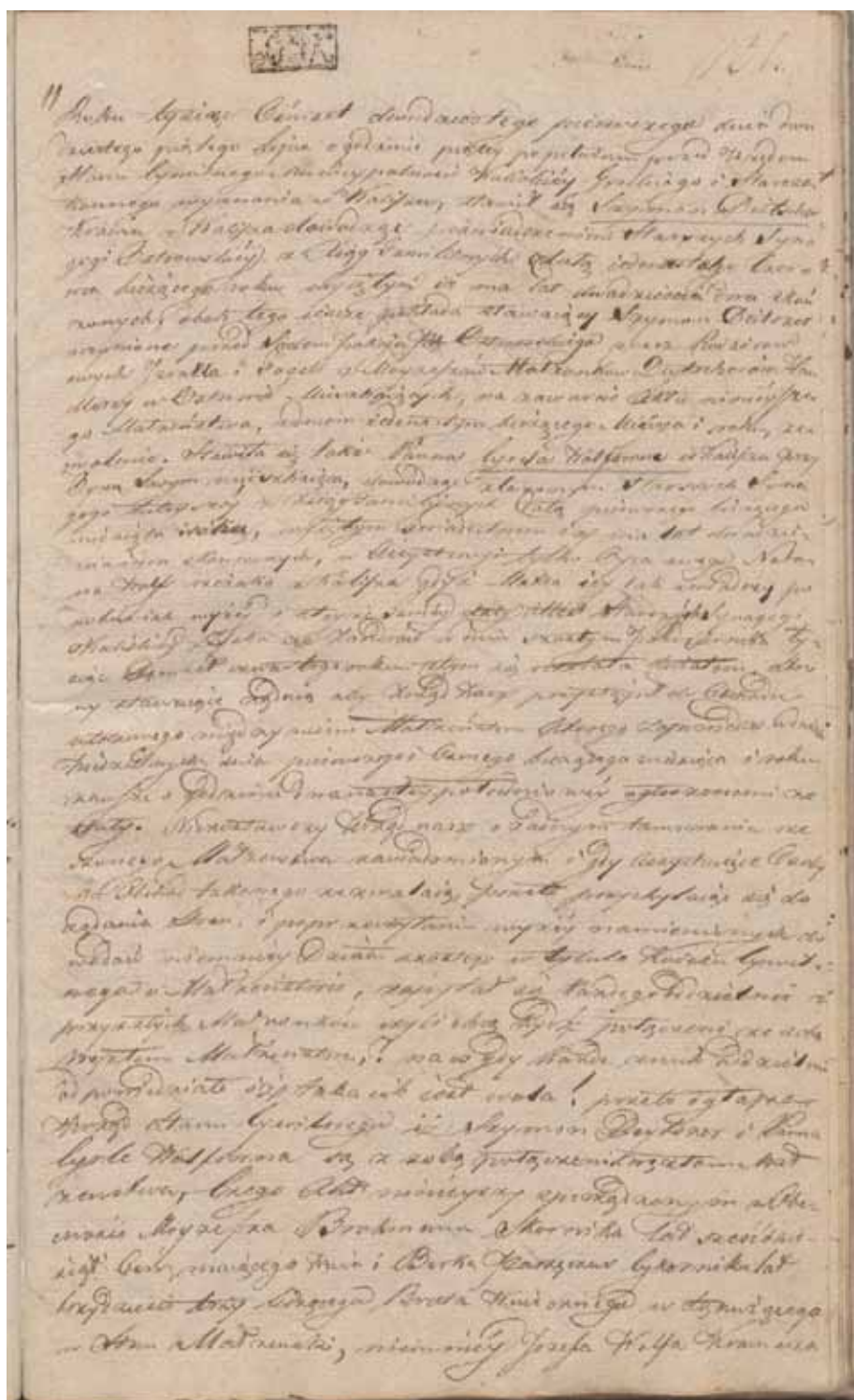


Fig. 1. Marriage certificate of Cyrła and Szymon Dejczers.

earlier in the Gębicki family than among the Goldszmits. A careful study of this matter could offer a new insight into the issue of Janusz Korczak's dual, Jewish-Polish identity.

Another matter worthy of an extensive study is a branch of the family tree started by the already-mentioned Estera (Ernestyna) Dejczer, Korczak's grandmother Emilia's older sister. A recently found letter from Henryk Goldszmit to her son, a renowned otorhinolaryngologist Ludwik Guranowski, sheds new light on the relationship between Korczak and his mother's family.²⁸ Its heading 'Kochany Wujaszku' [Dearest Uncle] and the closing phrase 'Pozdrowienia dla Domu' [Best wishes for the House] indicate the closeness of their contacts. Korczak's kinship with the relatively well-known writers of the period of Young Poland, Mieczysław and Jerzy Guranowskis, still remains an undiscovered land. Once studied, the findings would help verify the conviction perpetuated by various biographical publications that Henryk was closer to the Goldszmits. The fact that Korczak mentioned his great-grandfather the glazer, without using his name, twice does not lessen the fact that his other great-grandfather by the name of Maurycy Gębicki, born in 1780 in Piotrków Trybunalski, 'was a well-known for his integrity, as well as his extensive knowledge and experience, doctor',²⁹ a surgeon. Neither did he mention in his memoir his grandfather Józef, a merchant and social activist from Kalisz, yet sources discuss him extensively.³⁰ Despite that, the public shares an image outlined in the artistic depiction:

Widzimy pradziadka Korczaka, sierotę z Hrubieszowa, jak opuszczony przez wszystkich siedzi na progu zapadłej chaty. I ten chłopiec zdołał się wyrwać ze wsi i zostać lekarzem. Ta postać była niesłychanie ważna dla Korczaka. Wyznaczyła wręcz linię jego życia.

Korczak's great-grandfather, an orphan from Hrubieszów, is depicted sitting on the threshold of a godforsaken hut left by everyone. Yet this boy managed to escape the countryside and become a doctor. This figure was extremely important for Korczak. It basically defined his life's path.³¹

Herszek from Korczak's short story, a literary character, has shaped the public's imagination regarding the family relations of the Goldszmits.³² However, one can argue that the act of filling gaps in a biography with hypotheses makes sense only when those hypotheses consider all available pieces of information. If, however,

28 It was discovered by Anna Poczobut, Guranowski's great-granddaughter. The letter is contained within the materials to the *Słownik Lekarzy Polskich* [Dictionary of Polish Doctors] by Ludwik Guranowski, stored in the Manuscript Division of the Jagiellonian Library.

29 Z.P., "Wspomnienie pośmiertne" [Post-mortem recollection], in: *Izraelita* [Israelite] no. 23 (1877).

30 See ibidem: 'The general trust among fellow citizens, industrialists, rural citizens, and the representatives of national authorities made late Gębicki a figure so popular in Kalisz that it would not be much of an exaggeration to state that no major local matter was unknown to him and that no institution, regardless of the nature of its public operations, acted without Gębicki's active participation'.

31 J. Sobolewska, "Za murem" [Behind the wall], in: *Polityka* [Politics] no. 24 (2011).

32 The reviewer was probably referring to Hersz Goldszmit's grandfather, not great-grandfather.

they skip some sources, they do not help to define the line between legend and fact but instead add new elements to the legend.

Próba biografii contains one more quotation from Korczak's *Pamiętnik*, heavily exploited throughout the years, regarding his ancestors:

Nazywam się po dziadku, a imię dziadka Hersz (Hirsz). Ojciec miał prawo nazwać mnie Henrykiem, bo sam otrzymał imię Józef. Także pozostałym dzieciom nadał dziadek imiona chrześcijańskie: Maria, Magdalena, Ludwik, Jakub, Karol.

I was named after my grandfather, and his name was Hersz (Hirsz). My father had the right to call me Henryk, as he himself was given the name Józef. Grandfather gave Christian names to the rest of his children: Maria, Magdalena, Ludwik, Jakub, and Karol.³³

For clarity's sake, allow me to correct two inaccuracies. Karol was the brother of Korczak's mother, Cecylia, née Gębicki.³⁴ Grandfather Hersz was most likely to name his children per the traditional Jewish form.³⁵ Based on archival research, I was also able to confirm their personal details.³⁶ Korczak is mistaken in this instance. So maybe he also incorrectly assumed that he had received a Christian name? I believe this was the path Joanna Olczak-Ronikier followed.

Thus, *Próba biografii* contains a story related to a late official registration of the birth of a son by the respectable lawyer Józef Goldszmit. The author highlights the fact that the father failed to fulfill his duty on time and seeks a reason for such an omission. She eventually arrives at the conclusion that Józef Goldszmit, balancing between two worlds, i.e., Polish and Jewish, was for a long time not able to decide which identity to choose for his son.

W końcu podjął decyzję. Postąpił na przekór zdrowemu rozsądkowi, za to w zgodzie z własnymi przekonaniami. Jego syn otrzymał urzędowe imię Hirsz i został zarejestrowany w „kancellarii dla wyznań niechrześcijańskich”.

He eventually made up his mind. He acted against common sense but in line with his convictions. His son received the official name Hirsz and was registered in 'the chancellery for non-Christian beliefs'.³⁷

This fragment not only undermines the testimony of Korczak himself but also the opinions of earlier biographers and researchers of his output. It suggests a rev-

33 J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik i inne pisma z getta*, p. 122.

34 The most recent biographer wrote that 'nothing is known about him' (J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii*, s. 30) even though already in 1989 his details, based on an uncovered birth certificate, were published by Maria Falkowska, see eadem, *Kalendarz życia, działalności i twórczości Janusza Korczaka* [The Calendar of the life, activity and creative output of Janusz Korczak] (Warsaw: 1989), p. 34. My archival research has delivered many new details about this person. See: <http://nplp.pl/artykul/karol-gebicki/> (accessed 23 October 2020).

35 That is: Lejzor, Mindla, Mariem, Josef, Jacob (Jankiel in one document). Only his youngest son from his second marriage to Sura Estera Wajngarnt was recorded in the birth certificate as Aleksander Sender. See <http://nplp.pl/artykul/aleksander-sender-goldszmit/> (accessed 23 October 2020).

36 The source material I was able to gather contradicts Ronikier's thesis that 'the recording of girls in vital records seemed, in that time, an unnecessary waste of time' (J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii*, p. 30). Research shows that children were indeed registered regardless of their sex, even stillborn babies despite not being given names.

37 Ibidem, p. 47.

elatory discovery of a long-gone birth certificate of the Old Doctor. Readers would not expect the author of a biography to baselessly change the name of the main figure. This matter can only be settled based on the study of source material. One trace can be found in Korczak's journal:

Jutro kończę sześćdziesiąt trzy albo sześćdziesiąt cztery lata. Ojciec przez parę lat nie wyrabiał mi metryki. Przeżyłem z tego powodu kilka ciężkich chwil. – Mama nazywała to karygodnym niedbalstwem: jako adwokat powinien był ojciec sprawy metryki nie odwlekać (zapis z 21 lipca 1942).

Tomorrow I'll be sixty-three or sixty-four. It took a few years for my father to have my birth certificate issued. This was the cause of a few difficult moments in my life. – Mum called it reprehensible negligence: as a lawyer, he should not have postponed the matter of a birth certificate (entry from 21 July 1942).³⁸

Therefore, one should have searched for the missing certificate not per the presumed date of birth of the writer (1878 or 1879) but a few years later. Following the suggestion from the journal, I was able to find in the Warsaw State Archive a duplicate of the registration book in which the son of Józef Goldszmit was registered. Indeed, it lacks a page with the certificate in question. Still, based on the final index, one can clearly conclude that in July 1881, after the family relocated to the Krakowskie Przedmieście borough (circle I/XI), Henryk Goldszmit (Гольдшмитъ Генрикъ) was registered. The certificate number (88) and the name Henryk can also be confirmed based on personal documents related to Korczak's military service, which were analyzed by Kinga Sienkiewicz.³⁹

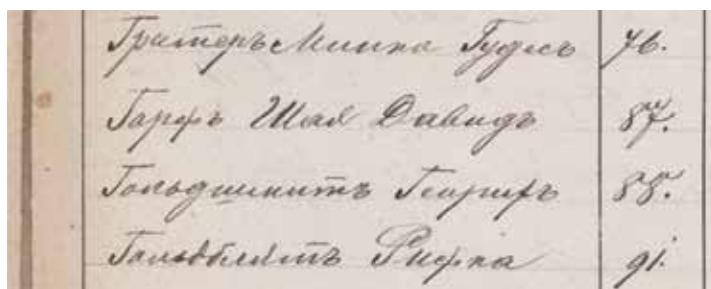


Fig. 2. Fragment of the index of the book of vital records from 1881.

Therefore, there is no doubt: he received a Christian name, though indeed, after his grandfather Hersz (according to Jewish tradition), just as his sister Anna was named after their grandmother, Chana Goldszmit.⁴⁰ This is significant. Henryk

38 J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik i inne pisma z getta*, p. 122.

39 I discussed this in more detail in "Uwolnić Korczaka? Zagadnienie praw autorskich do spuścizny autora *Króla Maciusia Pierwszego*" [Free Korczak? The issue of the copyright of the output of the author of *King Matt the First*], in: *Literatura w granicach prawa (XIX–XX w.)* [Literature within the limits of truth (19th–20th c.)], eds. K. Budrowska, E. Dąbrowicz, M. Lul (Warsaw: 2013).

40 I was able to find her certificate as well. See: <http://nplp.pl/artikul/anna-goldszmit/> (accessed 23 October 2020).

and Anna were the first generation of the Goldszmit family to have non-Jewish names in their birth certificates.

Apparently, the passage regarding the registration in the ‘chancellery’ is skillfully intertwined into the author’s own narration using a quotation from another document in order to authenticate the story. Yet it is merely a stylistic device. How convincing it has been proven by, e.g., a fragment of a celebratory article about the Old Doctor published twice in the *Rzeczpospolita* daily:

Joanna Olczak-Ronikier w książce *Korczak. Próba biografii* twierdzi, że ojciec nie był pewien, czy pójść za głosem serca czy rozsądku, w jaki los wpisać syna – Żyda czy Polaka. Ostatecznie jednak dziecko uznanego adwokata zostało zarejestrowane w „kancelarii dla wyznań niechrześcijańskich”. Otrzymało imię Hirsch.

Joanna Olczak-Ronikier in *Korczak. Próba biografii* argues that the father was not certain whether to follow his heart or common sense when choosing the future for his son: whether to be a Jew or a Pole. Eventually, the child of the recognised lawyer was registered in the ‘chancellery for non-Christian beliefs’. He was given the name Hirsch.⁴¹

In the most recent theatrical play based on Korczak’s⁴² biography, the following sentence is spoken: ‘My name is Hersz’, and this, too, is perpetuated in reviews: ‘To be precise, one would have to state that the protagonist in the play *Spowiedź motyla* [Confessions of a butterfly] staged at the Ateneum Theatre is the four-year-old Hersz Goldszmit’, one such review states.⁴³

The piece of ‘information’ provided by Ronikier has gained a life of its own in mass media and culture. A well-known culture.pl website features an article entitled *12 rzeczy o Korczaku, które warto wiedzieć* [12 Things worth knowing about Korczak] and the second one is as follows:

Człowiek, którego rok obchodziliśmy w 2012 roku w Polsce, naprawdę nazywał się Henryk Goldszmit, a w zasadzie Hersz Goldszmit, bo takie imię syn Cecylii z d. Gębickiej i Józefa Goldszmita otrzymał w urzędzie. Było to zgodne z żydowską tradycją nakazującą, żeby chłopiec otrzymał imię po dziadku. W następnych latach przyjęło się, że Hersz było imieniem odświętnym, a na co dzień używano imienia Henryk. Z perspektywy czasu wydaje się, że wybór imienia miał głębsze symboliczne znaczenie: Korczak poszedł w ślady dziadka, który w Hrubieszowie działał jako lekarz, założył tam też Szpital Starozakonnych. Przede wszystkim jednak

The man, who was named Man of the Year 2012 in Poland, was actually Henryk Goldszmit, also known as Hersz Goldszmit, as this was the name he received at the registration office, the son of Cecylia, née Gębicka, and Józef Goldszmit. This was in line with Jewish tradition, which required boys to receive their names after their grandfathers. In the following years, the name Hersz was reserved for special occasions, while Henryk was used on all other days. Today, it seems that the choice of the name had a deeper symbolic significance: Korczak followed in the footsteps of his grandfather. In Hrubieszów, he worked as a doctor and established the Jewish Hospital there.

41 K. Wołodźko, “Korczak. Życiorys niesentymentalny” [Korczak. Non-sentimental curriculum vitae], *Rzeczpospolita*, Plus Minus insert no. 29 (2014) and ibidem 2017, <https://www.rp.pl/Plus-Minus/307189987-Korczak-zyciorys-niesentymentalny.html> (accessed 23 October 2020).

42 See *Spowiedź motyla*, directed by J. Kijowska, W. Faruga. Première: Warsaw, the Ateneum Theatre, 5 October 2017.

43 See K. Łapicka, “O czym śni motyl?” [What does a butterfly dream about?], <http://zteatru.pl/2017/11/15/ateneum/> (accessed 23 October 2020).

wybór imienia i zarejestrowanie go w 'kancelarii dla wyznań niechrześcijańskich' równoznaczny był z wyborem narodowej tożsamości, z perspektywy historii miał się okazać wyborem tragicznym.

But most importantly, the choice of the name and the fact of registering it at 'the chancellery for non-Christian beliefs' was equivalent to choosing one's national identity, which, considering later events, proved tragic.⁴⁴

The suggestively drawn picture shapes the public's imagination as *Próba biografii* will be read also (or maybe especially) by those 'interested in Korczak who wish to learn as much as possible about him'. The story told by Ronikier seems coherent and convincing. The change of the protagonist's name from Henryk to Hersz is no coincidence, as it perfectly fits the author's assertion: 'Korczak's father was not to such an extent infected by the bug of Polishness as my great-grandmother'.⁴⁵ This is the hypothesis that drove the narration about the registration of the boy at the office. The lack of a birth certificate implies a space for speculation and subjective assumptions, yet a review of sources helps ground one back in facts.

In fact, the figure of Korczak's father requires a separate discussion. Ronikier's approach is based on previous suggestions expressed in 'mother books' quoted many times in her work. However, she went much further than her predecessors. She complemented the image of Józef Goldszmit based on his son's works of literature and her own imagination. Allow me to present what this does to our knowledge about the Old Doctor.

The reading of the first book-sized biography of Korczak, entitled *Janusz Korczak*, offers a multifaceted image of his father. The chapter "Rodowód" [Heritage] states: 'Józef Goldszmit was a well-known and appreciated lawyer in Warsaw, the author of a work on divorce law',⁴⁶ but already in the following one (entitled "Smutne dzieciństwo" [Sad childhood]) Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa added: 'he earned much, he enjoyed a lavish lifestyle and luxury, he was the embodiment of fantasy and élan'. Furthermore, there is mention of him being a 'wonderful father with much initiative', and 'unpredictable, beloved...' The more tragic in such circumstances were apparently later events: 'the catastrophe that came when Henio [little Henryk] was eleven. Illness, father's madness'. Further events supposedly included: 'the father selling all valuables, his bankruptcy, and later huge costs of his treatment. The loss of their house and furniture in an auction, all the typical grim circumstances of a material catastrophe that derailed the life they once had'.⁴⁷ This depiction was further amplified by Igor Newerly in *Żywe wiązanie*:

44 M. Gliński, "12 rzeczy o Korczaku, które warto wiedzieć" [12 Things worth knowing about Korczak], <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/12-rzeczy-o-korczaku-ktore-warto-wiedziec> (accessed 23 October 2020).

45 J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii*, p. 45.

46 H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, *Janusz Korczak*, p. 22.

47 Ibidem, pp. 27–28.

Józef Goldszmit, adwokat na pełnym nurcie powodzenia, nie bez aspiracji naukowych, autor cennej ponoć rozprawy o postępowaniu rodzinnym, konieser życia i dowcipu, jako ojciec nieco roztargniony, ale koleżeński, może nazbyt koleżeński; jako mąż pomimo całej miłości i czci, nie zawsze wzorowy.

Józef Goldszmit, a lawyer riding a wave of successes, not without academic aspirations, author of an apparently respected study on the divorce procedure, who enjoyed life and laughter, as a father was somewhat light-minded, yet friendly, maybe even too friendly; as a husband, despite all his love and respect, not always a role model.⁴⁸

Ronikier creatively expanded these suggestions in the most recent biography of the Old Doctor. The fact of intertwining her expressive narration with selected fragments of the novel *Dziecko salonu* [Child of the salon] and excerpts from *Pamiętnik* makes the vivid and emotive image of the father memorable. Józef Goldszmit, seen through the prism of *Próba biografii*, was 'A man of the world (...), affluent, elegant, well-educated, he enjoyed the pleasures of the world, good restaurants, beautiful women'. Together with his son, they snuck out to Saska Kępa where they met 'as if by accident – some woman. Then he would leave the boy under the care of the local baker and go for a walk with that woman, of which Mum was not to be informed'.⁴⁹

She continues:

Mecenas Goldszmit już wcześniej prowadził zbyt wystawny jak na jego możliwości tryb życia, robił nieprzemyślane inwestycje, zaciągał długi. [...] Stracił klientów, musiał zamknąć kancelarię, nie miał środków na przyjemności, do których przywykł, więc wynosił z domu i wyprzedawał za grosze cenne rzeczy. [...] Nasilały się jego dziwactwa, drażliwość, nieobliczalność. Z czasem ataki nieopanowanej furii stały się nie do zniesienia.

Even earlier, Goldszmit led an excessively lavish lifestyle, considering his means. He made ill-considered investments. He borrowed money. (...) He lost his clients and was forced to close his practice. He no longer had the means for the pleasures to which he had grown accustomed, so he took valuables from the house and sold them for insignificant sums. (...) His peculiarities, irritability, and unpredictability continued to grow. As time passed, his fits of uncontrolled fury became unbearable.⁵⁰

There are more such dramatised descriptions of the Goldszmit family life in the pages of *Próba biografii*. They feature a crying mother, grandmother wringing her hands, unhappy parents bringing up unhappy children: 'he [Henryk – M. S.] remembered his early years as an endless streak of worries', Ronikier states.⁵¹

Based on speculation and her personal intuition, the author arrives at the eventual ascertainment that 'the son, developing his own character, tried to become an antithesis to his father', a mercurial, egotistic hedonist.⁵²

48 I. Newerly, *Żywe wiązanie*, p. 32.

49 J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii*, pp. 61–62.

50 Ibidem, p. 64.

51 Ibidem, p. 49.

52 Ibidem, p. 74.

When constructing the figure of Józef, apart from *Spowiedź motyla*, Korczak's work of literature styled to resemble adolescent journals, she also often quoted *Dziecko salonu*, a novel in which the father of the protagonist (and narrator), owner of a soap factory, is an example of a typical Young Poland petty bourgeoisie figure. Ronikier continues to ascertain that this is an image of an 'opportunistic deceitful babbitt, with whom the rebellious idealistic son was not able to find any understanding'.⁵³ Ronikier interprets fragments that contain a deep distance of the narrator towards the father as a fiery polemic in which Korczak 'unloaded all his adolescent regrets, all his disappointments, possibly being unfair to the father, who from afar seems a tragic figure'.⁵⁴ From the point of view of historical research, what in this case seems unfair is rather the treatment of artistic fiction as a source of information about an actual person. An instrumental approach to literature as material for a writer's biography is nothing new. The most glaring example of such practices in recent years was Monika Piątkowska's book entitled *Prus. Śledztwo biograficzne*⁵⁵ [Prus. A Biographical investigation]. To understand how valuable such approaches are for the history of literature, consider the book's devastating reviews written by specialist researchers of Aleksander Głowacki's⁵⁶ life and works. Some researchers did, in fact, suggest the possibility of *Dziecko salonu* containing autobiographical details, yet the portrait of the father of the protagonist was not one of those.

One would find it challenging to defend Ronikier's arguments in this context, particularly when one compares them to an analysis of the journal entries of the Old Doctor. That is because the so-called *Pamiętnik* is Korczak's only strictly autobiographical text. The notes from the final four months of his life (May–August 1942) constitute an invaluable brief on the epoch and a kind of summary of the Old Doctor's life. In the few dozen pages, Korczak mentioned his father as many as seven times. No one, not his mother, not his beloved grandma Emilia, nor Ms. Stefa received that much attention.

A memory of the 'Papa' appears already in the first entry of the chronicle: May 1942, 5 a.m. The author begins with a detailed description of the house's structure, then describes a room, and finally moves to the details. An impression on his

53 Ibidem.

54 Ibidem.

55 M. Piątkowska, *Prus. Śledztwo biograficzne* [Prus. A Biographical investigation] (Cracow: 2017).

56 See, e.g.: A. Bąbel, "Przygwożdżenie wiewiórą" [Nailed down with a squirrel], in: *Tygodnik Powszechny* [The Common Weekly] no. 4 (2018); A. Martuszevska, "Prus zdegradowany" [Prus demoted], in: *Pamiętnik Literacki* [Literary Memoir] no. 3 (2018); W. Ratajczak, *O potrzebie wierności drobiazgom...*

finger from holding his pencil makes him realise that it would have been more convenient to write with a pen. Immediately, an association comes to him:

Nie darmo tatulo nazywał mnie w dzieciństwie gapą i cymbałem, a w burzliwych momentach nawet idiotą i osłem. Jedna tylko babcia wierzyła w moją gwiazdę. A tak to leń, beksa, mazgaj (mówilem już), idiota i do luftu.

Ale o tym potem.

Mieli słuszność. Po równo. Pół na pół. Babunia i papa.

Ale o tym potem.

No wonder daddy used to call me in my childhood scatterbrain and dummy, or even an idiot and an arse in more tumultuous moments. Only Grandma believed in my star. Otherwise, I was a sluggard, cry-baby, sniveller (I've already mentioned), idiot, and good-for-nothing.

I'll get back to this later.

They were right. Equally so. Half and half. Nanna and Papa.

I'll get back to this later.⁵⁷

The choice of words 'tatulo' and 'papa' suggests that it was a warm memory with a hint of Korczak's typical sense of humour. The repeated promise of family reminiscences was partly fulfilled in the pages of *Pamiętnik*.

The following recollection is an extensive account of a children's nativity play. It spans a few pages and provides a detailed description of exciting events, viewed through the eyes of a child. Christmas performances at the Goldszmit house once again evoke recollections of the father who ordered children to 'personally drop in grandpa's sack new silver ten-grosz coins'. 'It was delightful and terrible and educational',⁵⁸ Korczak concluded.

Then, a recollection of a nativity play at an orphanage, where little Henryk was again with his father. Korczak thus commented on a detailed several pages long description of the experiences of a child:

Słusznie mama niechętnie powierzała dzieci opiece ojca i słusznie dreszczem zachwyty i porywem radości witaliśmy i wspominaliśmy – siostra i ja – nawet najbardziej forsowne, męczące, nieudane i opłakane w skutkach 'przyjemności', jakie z przedziwną intuicją odnajdywał nie nazbyt zrównoważony pedagog – tatuś.

Mum was right to reluctantly entrust father with the care of the children and we, my sister and I, were right to feel a shiver of excitement and to joyfully welcome and recollect even the most forced, tiring, failed and miserably concluded 'pleasures' that were selected with peculiar intuition by the sparsely composed educator, daddy.⁵⁹

The consequences of the 'pleasures' ensured by the father were, indeed, disastrous, e.g., the ice cream or cold seltzer water with pineapple juice on the way back home from the nativity play 'to cool down after the hellish heat'. In yet another recollection, Korczak wrote:

Ja po jasełkach tylko dwa dni gorączkowałem. [...] Pamiętam, że zgubiłem szalik. I pamiętam, że kiedy leżałem jeszcze w łóżku dnia

My fever after the nativity play lasted only two days. (...)

I remember losing my scarf.

57 J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik i inne pisma z getta*, p. 12.

58 Ibidem, p. 39.

59 Ibidem, p. 43.

trzeciego, ojciec zbliżył się do mnie, mama go surowo skarciła:

– Masz zimne ręce. Nie podchodź.

Ojciec wychodząc z pokoju potulnie, rzucił mi porozumiewawcze spojrzenie.

Odpowiedziałem szyfrem filuternego spojrzenia coś w rodzaju:

– Dobra jest.

Sądzę, że oboje [*sic!*] czuliśmy, że ostatecznie nie one – mama, babcia, kucharka, siostra, służąca i panna Maria (do dzieci) – cały ten babiniec rządził, ale my, mężczyźni.

My panami domu. Ustępujemy dla świętego spokoju.

I also remember that when father moved close to me as I was lying in my bed on the third day, mum scolded him sternly:

‘Your hands are cold. Stay back.’

As he was obediently leaving the room, father winked at me.

I responded covertly in a roguish smile, trying to convey:

‘All’s good.’

I think we both felt that, eventually, it wasn’t them – mum, grandma, the cook, my sister, the maid, and Miss Maria (for the children) – the whole hen party who ruled. It was we, the men.

We were the masters of the house. We only conceded for the sake of peace.⁶⁰

Joanna Olczak-Ronikier interpreted this intense emotional recollection differently. This is how she understood the image of the father derived from the journal account: ‘What about the father? He is gruff. He is probably irritated by his son’s cowardice. Maybe he wants to force him to behave more manly?’⁶¹

The knowing wink, described so lovingly by Korczak, is thus interpreted by his biographer:

ta komitywa była chwiejna i nie budziła zaufania. Ojciec pobudliwy, zmienny w nastrojach, powodował ciągłe poczucie zagrożenia. Nigdy nie było wiadomo, jak zareaguje na jakieś wydarzenie czy wykroczenie. Czy jest przyjaznym kompanem, czy wybuchnie krzykiem o głupstwo? Mama coraz częściej płakała.

this rapport was unstable and not trustworthy. The tetchy, moody father caused a constant sense of threat. One could never be sure how he would react to a situation or infringement, whether he was a friendly companion or would burst into shouting over a silly mistake. Mum cried more and more often.⁶²

In an entry from late May 1942, the father is mentioned concerning notes from a sleepless, stuffy night at the ghetto. And again, a month later, when Korczak was recording his strange dream. Eventually, the father returns in the final fragment of the first part of *Pamiętnik* (first half of July 1942); the son confesses:

Bałem się panicznie szpitala wariatów, do którego ojciec mój parokrotnie był kierowany. A więc ja, syn obłąkanego. A więc dziedzicznie obarczony.

I was terrified of the mental asylum to which my father was referred several times.

So, there I was, the son of a madman. A burdened heritage.⁶³

When writing about Józef Goldszmit’s illness, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa concluded that he was, among others, hospitalised in the psychiatric hospital in Tworki near Warsaw. Today, it is difficult to verify this piece of information. From

60 Ibidem, p. 45.

61 J. Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii*, p. 63.

62 Ibidem, pp. 64–65.

63 J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik i inne pisma z getta*, p. 107.

what I was able to establish, the oldest surviving medical documentation retained by this facility dates back to the early 20th century (although Józef died in 1896); most of the documents were lost when the hospital was evacuated during World War II. Patient medication documentation of Warsaw-based hospitals was even less likely to have survived. Thus, we will never know the specific diagnosis of att. Goldszmit's illness. Nonetheless, the quoted fragment of Korczak's *Pamiętnik* could be used to defend his good name against Ronikier's elaborate insinuations. Joanna Olczak-Ronikier argues that Józef's madness was caused by syphilis, 'the result of the casual adventures', which, according to her, Henryk must have suspected. Yet if that had been the case, the son would not have feared a genetic burden. As a physician, he must have known that a son cannot inherit an illness caused by another illness contracted by his father in adult life! Józef could not have passed madness onto his son through genes if the madness was a side-effect of a venereal disease. Olczak-Ronikier goes on to suggest that att. Goldszmit might have committed suicide. Neither was this speculation supported by any specific arguments. Mental illnesses often lead to emaciation and, consequently, death. Józef might have been bipolar or schizophrenic (both conditions are hereditary). We will never know for sure. But the suggestions seemingly made without hesitation by the author of *Próba biografii* have been quickly absorbed by the general public. Readers trust her narration, with all the consequences that have for the interpretation of the central figure of the biography. In one of the already-quoted reviews, Justyna Sobolewska summarised the 'revelatory' fragments of *Próba biografii* regarding Henryk's relationship with his father; in a simplified summary:

Na jego dzieciństwie położyła się cieniem choroba ojca, adwokata i bon vivanta, który miał syfisy i oszalał. Korczak stał się jego przeciwieństwem – zrezygnował ze związków z kobietami i z dziećmi.

His childhood was marked by the disease of his father, a lawyer and a bon vivant, who contracted syphilis and went mad. Korczak became his opposite: he gave up having relationships with women or having children.⁶⁴

In this context, consider the final mention of the father in *Pamiętnik*. A dozen or so days before his death he wrote:

Winienem wiele miejsca poświęcić ojcu: realizuję w życiu to, do czego on dążył, do czego dziadek tak dręcząco dążył tyle lat. [...] Jestem i matką, i ojcem. Wiem i wiele dzięki temu rozumiem.

I should have devoted much space to my father: I am fulfilling in my life what he strived for, for what my grandfather strived so agonisingly for so many years. (...) I am both my mother and my father. I know and I understand much because of that.⁶⁵

Apparently, this fragment has never become the focus of any deeper reflection. To reiterate, the father received the most mentions in *Pamiętnik*. This peculiar

64 J. Sobolewska, "Za murem"...

65 J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik i inne pisma z getta*, p. 122.

autobiography of Korczak constitutes a mixture of recollections, reflections, and current-day notes. Is it justifiable to ignore the fact that both the first and the final recollection in the work are devoted to Józef Goldszmit? The first one promises extensive reminiscences. The final one is an expression of a sense of guilt that the son did not devote more space in his notes to his father. On the eve of his death, Korczak stated overtly that his life was basically a fulfilment of the pursuits and convictions of his father, and only then of his grandfather, and his mother.

It seems that a careful analysis of the influence of Józef Goldszmit on the choice of his son's life's path is inevitable. This figure may appear different if one were to base their judgments on 'philological evidence'. Att. Goldszmit left behind traces that contradict the unilateral, simplified image expanded based on imagination and not facts, as proposed by Ronikier. In fact, apart from Korczak's notes, researchers can also utilise texts written by Józef, which could be proof of his ambitions and views. A recently published book *O prawo do szacunku. Wybór pism* [On the right to respect. Selected works] by Józef and Jakub Goldszmit includes not only a factual bio but also a significant collection of press releases and brochures that Józef wrote while still studying law at the Imperial University of Warsaw (or the Main School of Warsaw before that).⁶⁶ Those include extensive biographies of Israelites whose charity work helped improve the quality of life of their fellow believers while not abandoning their civic duties towards the countries in which they lived (Sir Moses Montefiore – England; Achilles Fould and Albert Cohn – France). There is a story entitled *Córka handlarza* [Merchant's daughter], based on events experienced by Józef Goldszmit, a young student who participated in the works of rescue committees during a cholera epidemic in Warsaw in 1866. It was then that he saw the misery of the lives of the poorest in society. Next, there is a series of historical studies regarding the fortunes of Jews in Spain and in Italy. They are proof not only of how well-learned their author was, but also of his academic and research inclinations, which were eventually crowned by an excellent master's thesis on divorce in Jewish Talmudic law. The dissertation received a distinction from the Faculty of Law for its 'particular preparation based on sources and independent work',⁶⁷ published in 1871 at the Gebethner & Wolff Printing House with a slogan: 'National laws are for Jews just as applicable as their own'. It was also att. Goldszmit's final major publication.

66 Józef Goldszmit, Jakub Goldszmit, *O prawo do szacunku. Wybór pism* [On the right to respect. Selected works] (Warsaw: 2018).

67 Józef Goldszmit, *Wykład prawa rozwodowego podług ustaw mojżeszowo-talmudycznych z ogólnym poglądem na ich rozwój z uwzględnieniem przepisów obowiązujących* [Application of divorce law based on Jewish/Talmudic laws with a general discussion of their development with consideration of applicable laws] (Warsaw: 1871).

Uczony, pragnący posunąć naprzód gałąź wiedzy, która jest jego specjalnością, ustąpić musi przed ojcem nieustannie myślącym o dobru dzieci swoich.

Despite being willing to push forward the branch of knowledge that was his specialty, the scholar had to concede to his father, constantly thinking about the good of his children.⁶⁸

He wrote in one of his articles. And he chose his family. He got married shortly after graduating, and, being a man of exceptional intellect, he pursued a successful career as a lawyer. However, before choosing his own life's path, he left several hints for his son. This is how one can read today Józef Goldszmit's words:

Pomiędzy zawodami najwznioślejszymi, jakie otwarte dziś są dla młodzieży, niejednen zapewne obierze sobie powołanie przewodniczenia innym w kształtowaniu umysłu i serca, posłannictwo jedno z najpiękniejszych, jedno z najbardziej odpowiedzialnych celom i drogom ducha ludzkiego – nauczycielstwo.

Among the most prestigious professions available today for young people, many will surely choose the calling of leading others in shaping their minds and hearts, one of the most beautiful missions, one that fits the goals and paths of the human spirit best: being a teacher.⁶⁹

In Józef's other article, this time devoted to an orphanage for Jewish girls, he wrote:

Ekonomia polityczna dowiodła, że do najpotężniejszych czynników dobrobytu należy podniesienie moralności i krzewienie nauki, a jako środki pomocnicze do tych celów wiodące wskazała zakłady opiekuńcze dla dzieci i naukowo-elementarne. Przyczynianie się więc do rozwoju takich zakładów jest obowiązkiem obywatelskim ciężącym zarówno na wszystkich w miarę sił i możliwości każdego.

Political economics has proven that one should consider morality and propagation of knowledge as the mightiest factors driving prosperity, and nurseries and elementary science centres as their leading support means. Therefore, it is the civic duty of all, as much as they are able to, to help develop such facilities.⁷⁰

His son engaged in the matter of nurseries/orphanages for Jewish children with such an impetus that could have exceeded his wildest expectations. Att. Goldszmit died too early to see for himself the fruit of the arduous labours of the family throughout the generations. And as he was writing Montefiore's biography, he could not have known that many of its fragments would, years later, align with the biography of his son: Henryk Goldszmit, or Janusz Korczak:

Przyjaciół ludzkości w całym słowa tego znaczeniu, zawsze śpieszy z pomocą uciśnionym i będącym w potrzebie. [...] Zamyśłów jego i działalności nie trzeba ozdabiać aureolą chwały, w samej ich naturze i sposobie wykonania leży niewysłowiony urok i szczytność. Najpiękniej brzmiące biografie, najświetniejsze zaszczyty niczym są wobec otar-

Humanity's friend through and through, always rushing to help those oppressed and in need. (...) His intentions and actions need no embellishments – it is in their very nature and performance that one will find their ineffable beauty and nobility. The most beautiful of biographies or the highest of honours are nothing when compared to tears wiped off

68 Idem, "Łukasz Koncewicz", in: *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* [Illustrated Weekly] no. 5 (1868). The text was referenced in the issue's table of contents under Goldszmit's name; in *Wybór pism* its authorship was incorrectly ascribed to Jakub Goldszmit.

69 Ibidem.

70 Józef Goldszmit, [In the *Korespondencja* [Letters] section:] "Lublin, dnia 6 września 1866 roku" [6 September 1866], in: *Izraelita* no. 24 (1866).

tych łez mnóstwa, wobec cichych dziękczynień za odebrane dobrodziejstwa, które jak woń kadzidła unoszą się ku niebu, wobec własnego przekonania wreszcie, o sumiennie dopełnionej podróży żywota, o pracowitym spełnieniu podjętej misji. [...] Prosty duchem, szczerzy dla potrzebujących jego pomocy, pełen poświęcenia dla nieszczęśliwych, skromny, mimo położonych zasług, stoi on przed nami jako wzór godny naśladowania.

from the faces of so many, to the quiet thanks for all the acts of kindness received flowing as the scent of frankincense towards the sky, to, finally, one's conviction of one's dutifully completed life's path and a tireless fulfilment of one's mission. (...) With his plain spirit, ingenious towards those who needed his help, ready to sacrifice himself for others, modest despite his merits, he stands before us as a role model for all.⁷¹

Even before being a student of a high school in Lublin, Józef Goldszmit publicly expressed his 'gratitude and admiration for (...) fellow countrymen Christians who risked their lives to rescue the Jewish fire victims' during a fire in Lublin in 1862.⁷² Indeed, the amicable coexistence of both nations, Jews and Poles, having equal rights, was a postulate of the members of the Haskalah, e.g., Korczak's grandfather, and later his father and his uncle Jakub, whose all works were devoted to this single goal:

Chęć służenia pocziwiej sprawie wzajemnego zbliżenia oraz bliższego poznania się jednej ziemi mieszkańców; [...] przyczynienia się o ile możliwości do usunięcia istniejących jeszcze po dziś dzień pomiędzy Izraelitami odrębności; utrwalenia wreszcie harmonii, jaka niezakłócenie od wieków całych szeregu na ojczystej naszej panuje ziemiacy.

The intention to serve the decent cause of mutual approximation and closer familiarisation between the inhabitants of one land; (...) to help, within the realms of possibility, lift the still existing distinction between Israelites; to, finally, consolidate the harmony that has existed for ages in our land.⁷³

Korczak was Jewish. And Polish, too. As per his father's intention: 'the model citizen of his country'.⁷⁴ He was a Jewish Pole or a Polish Jew. Maybe it was in this dual identity that he fulfilled the deepest intention of his father. Towards which his grandfather Hersz Goldszmit 'strived so agonisingly for so many years'.⁷⁵ It is certain that a careful analysis of the early works of Józef Goldszmit will uncover to a large extent the spiritual and ideological roots of the later achievements of his son, the author of these telling words: 'Childhood years are the mountains from

71 Idem, *Wizerunki wsławionych Żydów XIX wieku. I. Sir Moses Montefiore* [Biographies of famous Jews of the 19th century. I. Sir Moses Montefiore] (Warsaw: 1867), p. 5.

72 Idem, [In the *Korespondencje* section:] "Lublin, dnia 16 listopada 1862 roku" [16 October 1862], in: *Jutrzenka* [Dawn] no. 48 (1862).

73 Idem, *Kalendarz dla Izraelitów na Rok Religijny (Zwyczajny) od Stworzenia Świata 5642, czyli od Narodzenia Chrystusa 1881–1882* [Calendar for Israelites for the Religious (Common) Year 5642 Since the Creation of the World, or 1881–1882 since the Birth of Christ] (Warsaw: 1881).

74 Idem, *Wizerunki wsławionych Żydów...*, as quoted in: J. Goldszmit, J. Goldszmit, *O prawo do szacunku...*, p. 349.

75 The experience of the dual identity of the author of *King Matt The First* is analysed in Bożena Wojnowska's article "Dlaczego 'Janusz Korczak'? Rodowód pseudonimu, tradycja rodzinna" [Why "Janusz Korczak"? The origin of the nom de plume, family traditions], in: *Pamiętnik Literacki* no. 2 (2019).

which the river of one's life flows, gaining its momentum and direction: who are we to disregard them?"⁷⁶

To reliably reconstruct the atmosphere in which Henryk grew up is no simple task, yet if based on sources, it could be invaluable. In my study of source documentation in recent years, I have made several surprising discoveries, which can be used as a hard foundation for posing hypotheses. If, for example, one were to search for dramatic experiences that could have impacted the atmosphere in Korczak's home, one could indicate not only his father's illness, of which we know little, but also the death of Henryk and Anna's little sister. According to my research, Korczak's mother, Cecylia Goldszmit, on 12 February 1882, gave birth to a third child. The girl was stillborn at 6 p.m. in the Goldszmit's Warsaw apartment. According to a birth certificate drawn up the following day, the birth was reported by Józef Goldszmit, a sworn lawyer.⁷⁷ Little Henryk was 3 or 4 years old then. He got registered by his father six months earlier. It is possible that it was his wife's new pregnancy that forced Józef to satisfy this delayed obligation.

How could this event have impacted the family? Naturally, infant mortality and child mortality in general were much higher in the late 19th century than it is today, so it is possible that the adults experienced the event differently. Regardless, little Henryk first saw everyone expecting a new baby and later, probably, everyone in mourning after its loss.⁷⁸

Letters from Jakub Goldszmit, Korczak's uncle, to Józef Kraszewski and Eliza Orzeszkowa, which I discovered a few years ago, contain proof of a deep trauma that was experienced by the family after the death of yet another child. A few months after the death of Korczak's sister, who was never given a name, Henryk's ten-year-old cousin Anna, the only child of Korczak's uncle Jakub, died. This tragedy caused the breakdown of his marriage; from the letters we know that he fell ill for several months afterwards, and a few years later, he was on the other side of the ocean, having emigrated to North America.⁷⁹ I cannot state with certainty what impact the death of Korczak's little sister could have been, yet the fact that the event occurred, as indicated by the birth certificate, broadens the perspective on

76 J. Korczak, "Słowo wstępne [to a dissertation by Jędrzej Śniadecki] *O fizycznym wychowaniu dzieci*"..., p. 13.

77 See act 15, <https://szukajwarchiwach.pl/72/200/0/-/17/str/0/81/1#tabSkany> (accessed 23 October 2020).

78 His beloved grandma Emilia (from his mother's side), whom Korczak mentioned affectionately in his journal and who lived with the Goldszmits at that time, had experienced similar loss. My studies enabled me to uncover other child deaths in the family. Korczak's mother also had a little sister who died during her birth, one brother of grandma Emilia lived only nine months, and the brother of grandpa Adolf (Józef's father) died at the age of eight.

79 Letters as researched by Bożena Wojnowska see *Pamiętnik Literacki* no. 4 (2013) and no. 3 (2015).

his childhood, i.e., a formative period of the later major educator and thinker who thus later wrote about a child's right to... die.

Readers of *Próba biografii* will never learn about the little sister, and the book contains only a short note on Jakub Goldszmit, even though this particularly proactive author of articles and social activist, and Józef's brother, was certainly a part of Henryk's childhood. In 1880–1887, he lived in Warsaw. He visited his brother's home several times. He knew his in-laws, a fact that is proven by, e.g., a posthumous recollection in the *Warszawianin* calendar on Adolf Józef Gębicki written by Jakub Goldszmit.⁸⁰ The introduction to the already-mentioned selection of texts by Józef and Jakub Goldszmit, summarising the contents, reads:

Natykamy się tu na problem pogranicza kultury polskiej i żydowskiej, proces osadzania się, wymiany i dialogu konkretnych elementów tych kultur w zachowaniach ludzi z najbliższego otoczenia Henryka Goldszmita [...]. Lektura tych wypowiedzi, łącznie z ich macierzystym kontekstem, umożliwia poznanie środowiska życiowego rodziny Goldszmitów. Przybliża atmosferę, w jakiej wzrastał od dzieciństwa przyszły pisarz i pedagog. Umożliwia uchwycenie owych subtelnych, nieokreślonych momentów, które kształtują człowieka od lat najmłodszych. Korczak określał je jako niepowtarzalny 'teren wychowawczy', 'duszę rodziny, która panuje'.

We find here the problem of the intersection of Polish and Jewish cultures, the process of settling, exchange, and dialogue of certain elements of those cultures in the behaviours of people from Henryk Goldszmit's closest circle (...). If read, together with their original context, these texts enable one to learn about the life's environment of the Goldszmit family. Thus, one can discover the atmosphere in which the future writer and educator grew up since his childhood, as well as grasp the subtle, undefined moments that shape every person from their earliest years. Korczak termed them the unique 'educational terrain', 'the spirit of the family'.⁸¹

Therefore, a careful analysis of these materials as well may offer a stepping stone for the study of the intellectual and, more broadly, cultural sources from which Korczak's literary works and activities grew. If left unresearched, the image remains incomplete.

In her attempt to reach the 'roots,' Ronikier skipped the stage of archival research and source critique. The image of Korczak's family's situation presented in her book is subjective, undocumented, unilateral, and not grounded in facts. Yet it is difficult to treat these criticisms as methodological errors because *Próba biografii* is not an academic monograph. Neither is *Prus. Śledztwo biograficzne* by Monika Piątkowska or Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa's *O Stefanie Żeromskim. Ze wspomnień i dokumentów*⁸² [On Stefan Żeromski. From recollections and documents]. These books only emulate the style of academic publications as they include various strategies intended to prove their reliability, but any reader who trusts them blindly makes

80 Jakub Goldszmit, "Z Lublina do Ciechocinka. Kartki z podróży" [From Lublin to Ciechocinek. Travel notes], *Gazeta Lubelska* [Lublin Gazette] no. 100 (1877).

81 B. Wojnowska, "Wstęp" [Introduction], in: Józef Goldszmit, Jakub Goldszmit, *O prawo do szacunku...*, p. 5.

82 H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, *O Stefanie Żeromskim. Ze wspomnień i dokumentów* (Warsaw: 1965).

a mistake, especially if the reader is also a professional researcher, historian, or literary critic.⁸³ Anyone who builds interpretations based on unverified data has little chance of uncovering the truth about anything.

I stand by my argument that it is difficult or impossible even to expand and deepen knowledge about Korczak without reliable source-based research, a review of assumptions generally considered as obvious, and a return to the philological process of analysing his major works. No new interpretations of the life of the Old Doctor, however attractive they would be for the mass audience, could replace actual facts. Allow me to use an analogy. An editor preparing to publish a novel (even if just a popular one) should apply fundamental procedures that lead to establishing the correct text. If the editor chooses as the basis a version contaminated with errors or, even worse, develops an amalgam of several versions and fills the gaps with their own creative content, they will release into circulation a hybrid which, from that moment on, will compete with the original variant of the work. Similarly, a reality created in a literary or quasi-academic biography gets stored in readers' memory and obscures historical facts. When hypotheses mixed with one's fantasy, however attractive for the mass imagination, are considered as facts, any attempt to explain the meanders of one's biography can lead one astray.

*Translated by Jakub Wosik,
verified by Jerzy Giebułtowski*

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83 This happened to, e.g., Zdzisław Jerzy Adamczyk. This renowned researcher of Żeromski's output and worthy editor of his works has confessed that when he was starting work on the writer's letters his knowledge about the writer's life was mostly shaped by Mortkowicz-Olczakowa's book and the recollections of Monika Żeromska, the writer's daughter. It was only as he scoured archives and libraries seeking information necessary to discuss the writer's letters that he realised just how detached from facts the image of the final years of Żeromski's life in the public's mind was. Adamczyk's book *Manipulacje i tajemnice. Zagadki późnej biografii Stefana Żeromskiego* [Manipulations and secrets. The Mysteries of the latter part of Stefan Żeromski's biography] (Warsaw: 2017) is an attempt to correct the existing convictions and reinstate facts.

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ABSTRACT

The figure of Henryk Goldszmit (Janusz Korczak) is the topic of many bibliographical publications. In the face of a lack of strictly scholarly works in this field, texts, in which the boundary between fact and author's interpretation is very fluid, seem to gain more importance. The aim of the article is to point out the issues stemming from this, and to highlight the importance of bibliographical works based on archival research and reliable criticism of sources. Juxtaposing the first chapters of *Korczak. Próba biografii* [Korczak. An Attempt at a biography] by Joanna Olczak-Ronikier with a documentary take on the genealogy of the Old Doctor allows one to state that even those narratives, which are the most suggestive and attractive to the reader, cannot fill the gaps in historical knowledge. Without referring to the archives, verifying arguments regarded as obvious, or without a philological reflection on the texts by Korczak, the chances to correct the errors which build up and shape the contemporary reception of the legacy of Henryk Goldszmit, diminish.

KEYWORDS: Janusz Korczak (1878–1942), biography, genealogy, archival research