

## **Poland – Home of Mediums**

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**Abstract:** The paper discusses Polish psychics and psychical researchers of the first half of the 20th century. It sketches in the background against which psychical research developed in Poland, and goes on to discuss in some detail the professional medium Jan Guzik, and the two outstanding psychics of the period, Franek Kluski and Stefan Ossowiecki.

### **Historical Background**

Harry Price, who referred to Poland as "home of mediums" (Price, 1939) in a chapter describing his visit there in August 1923, was not exaggerating unduly. Some truly remarkable reports of psychic phenomena came out of Poland in the first half of the 20th century, in the period preceding the Second World War. At the time they attracted a great deal of interest from Western psychical researchers but, by now, for a variety of reasons, they have been largely forgotten. Tales of days gone by, featuring spectacular psychokinetic, materialising and clairvoyant feats such as never seem to happen these days, may quite naturally be regarded by many as part of parapsychology's folklore, rather than as evidence to be taken seriously. Yet, re-examined within their cultural context, with due regard to the methods, beliefs and personalities of both the investigators and the subjects, they are not quite so easy to dismiss. This paper attempts to provide a wider background to what might be called the golden age of Polish psychics.

Tracing the history of psychical research in Poland is complicated by the fact that most of its records have been destroyed or fragmented, mainly during the destruction of Warsaw towards the end of the Second World War. Many private archives, as well as the archives of the Polish equivalent of the British Society for Psychical Research, were lost, and even the National Library in Warsaw does not possess a full set of extant copies of its journal. Primary sources are thus often difficult to find, but fortunately information about the most interesting Polish psychics and their investigators, scattered and fragmented though it is, can be gleaned from a variety of other sources.

The interest in matters psychical in Poland followed a pattern similar to that of the rest of Europe, and developed on a number of levels. D.D. Home's performances in Paris were the subject of close interest to a number of members of the Polish émigré community<sup>2</sup>. The "table-turning mania" of the second half of 19th century spread to

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<sup>2</sup> The reaction, however, was on the whole one of disappointment in the undignified antics of the "spirits", with at least one émigré, a famous poet, suspecting Home of having dealings with the devil (Kraśiński, 1931).

Warsaw and other major centres of Polish culture<sup>3</sup>; at a more intellectual level there was interest in the philosophical issues raised by the challenge science posed for religion and the rising status of the scientific approach in shaping the prevalent world view.

### The Researchers

Psychical research in Poland, as elsewhere, was not a recognised "scientific" subject, and its development depended very much on the dedication and drive of a small number of individuals, who shaped to a significant degree the direction it took. In Poland's case, the two individuals who had the greatest influence in this area were Julian Ochorowicz (1850-1917) and Piotr Lebedziński (1860-1934). Julian Ochorowicz was a man of exceptional genius, with degrees and higher degrees in philology, physics and mathematics, natural sciences, philosophy and psychology, as well as being a highly successful inventor. He pursued his interest in hypnosis working with Charcot and Janet during the 1880s. He worked with, and knew, most of the psychical researchers of the day, such as Myers, Lodge and Richet. Many of the results of his research with mediums have been published in the *Annales des Sciences Psychiques*. His hypothesis of "ideoplasty" (i.e., that images created by suggestion can be realised by the body, rather the way a blister can form when a person believes s/he had been burned), first put forward in two papers presented to the Biological Society in Paris in 1884, was influential among many researchers of the day (Ochorowicz, 1916/1996). Although today he is regarded as one of the founding fathers of Polish psychology, during his life his interest in psychic phenomena damaged his academic career and his scientific reputation. The tragic irony is that he was very much a "hard" scientist (with a good knowledge of conjuring), insisting on experimenting in good light, in well-controlled conditions; he was also uncompromisingly against spiritualism and anything occult, rejecting any "supernatural" interpretation of the mediumistic phenomena. His descriptions of the sittings he attended with fake mediums and enthusiastic circles make hilarious reading; they also demonstrate that informed scepticism as a useful research tool is not a modern invention (Ochorowicz, 1913-1915).

Piotr Lebedziński was a chemist by education and a great inventor of apparatus, particularly relating to psychical research. He worked with Ochorowicz and was also of the same "hard" scientist school. He was the founder of the Polish Society for Psychical Research, established in 1914 in Warsaw, and one of its most active members (Szczepański, 1936, p.48).

He had vast experience of investigating physical mediums. Neither he nor Ochorowicz took the attitude "once a cheat, always a cheat" to mediums who were exposed in fraud, which some of the SPR members adopted at the time<sup>4</sup>. However,

<sup>3</sup> Poland was partitioned between Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1792 and reunified only in 1918.

<sup>4</sup> Ochorowicz had sittings with Palladino, apparently very successful, in Warsaw in 1893-4, where she produced phenomena in good light. He regarded attempts to cheat (which did take place in the Warsaw sittings) as part of the mediumistic process, and would put a stop to them immediately. He disagreed with the approach taken by some of the SPR investigators, which allowed cheating to go unchecked and then condemning the medium as a fake (Ochorowicz, 1913-15).

some of Lebedziński's pronouncements on the standards one should demand in researching such mediums clearly point to an uncompromising attitude: **never** agree to conduct experiments in which visual control is not possible; **never** allow the relaxation of controls already established; if possible, **catch** your mediums before they know what they can do and get a chance to be corrupted by spiritualist circles (Lebedziński, 1924-25).

In fact, the spiritualist movement was very weak in Poland, and that is the other important feature of psychical research there. The chattering classes in Warsaw may have flocked to séances in order to experience the thrill of seeing and being touched by the not-too-closely-defined "phantoms", but that is not the same as seeking to communicate with the dead through the mediumship of living persons. This was, and still is, explicitly forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church whose influence in Poland, not just on the social level, but also on personal and emotional level, was (and is) very strong.

For a variety of historical and cultural reasons, the issue of proving "survival", so prominent in psychical research in Britain, just does not arise in a situation where survival at a level unreachable by science is taken for granted by the majority. This does not, of course, preclude individuals from making attempts at communication sittings, and some members of the Polish SPR did make them, but the most prominent investigators took the view that they were dealing with human powers not as yet understood. In so far as a belief influenced them, it seems to have been the belief that they were on the brink of discovering a new branch of science; thus they set up experimental conditions as conscientiously and described them as thoroughly as they could.

This scientific spirit is represented by some of the most active members of the Polish SPR. There was dr Tadeusz Sokołowski, a medical man, later professor, who was chief hospital administrator for Warsaw hospitals in the period between the wars; there was Stefan Rzewuski, whose background I have not been able to trace but who was ruthless in exposing fraudulent physical mediums<sup>5</sup>, there was the meticulous Prosper Szmurło, a Treasury inspector and Honorary Editor of the Journal of the Polish SPR. Ludwik Szczepański, who was the editor of one of the main national dailies during the 1930s, did a great deal to popularise a scientific rather than sensationalist approach to the subject. They, and people like them, did not have the facilities of a special laboratory, such as the International Metapsychical Institute (IMI) in Paris where Geley experimented, or the National Laboratory established in London by Harry Price; everything they did was in their spare time and with limited resources, but they did have the necessary qualities of insatiable curiosity, lack of presuppositions and an awareness of scientific methodology – in fact, all the essential attributes which go to make a sound researcher.

This does not mean of course that they were proof against being fooled by a sophisticated fraudster, or misplaced trust in a particular psychic, type of control or line of interpretation. Their experimental work and reporting also varies in quality. However, even though they may not have lived up to their own standards at all times,

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<sup>5</sup>In a sitting with the medium Janusz Fronczek, exposed as fraudulent, a photograph taken unexpectedly regardless of the possible threat to the medium revealed that he was manipulating objects with his teeth (Rzewuski, 1924).

it would hardly be fair to accuse them of naïvely seeking props for waning religious beliefs, or lacking awareness of the possibility of their own bias.

### **The Early Psychics**

The psychics investigated by the researchers mentioned above included some remarkable mediums. One of these was Stanisława Tomczyk, the subject of many reports by Julian Ochorowicz (Szczepański undated, Ochorowicz, 1910-1912). In the years 1909-12 she produced some spectacular telekinetic feats, as well as a number of secondary personalities, and apparently demonstrated her gifts in front of a scientific commission. She was not a professional medium, but a girl who acquired her strange powers after undergoing the trauma of imprisonment (Szczepański, 1936, pp.34-35). She went on to marry Everard Feilding, one of the researchers involved in investigating her case, and a member of the British SPR. It has proved impossible so far to find out whether she produced further phenomena after this.

Another Stanisława, Stanisława Popielska, was the subject of research by Schrenck-Notzing and by Piotr Lebedziński. As a young, simple, barely literate nineteen-year-old, she produced some impressive sittings for Schrenck-Notzing during 1912-13, involving the production of ectoplasm (although he regarded her phenomena as less evidential than Eva C.'s, Schrenck-Notzing, 1923, p.252). According to Szczepański (1936, p.48), she was the medium from whom Lebedziński obtained in 1916 a piece of ectoplasm for the first time. She went on to become a professional medium but, according to her obituary in 1938 (*Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* [Illustrated Daily Courier], 29/03/1938), her credibility was damaged after being caught cheating by Osty in 1931. The psychic career of these ladies certainly deserves re-examination but new material about them is difficult to obtain, and one can only hope that further evidence might come to light even after all these years. They share with many mediums a degree of anonymity, their only claim to our interest being the phenomena they supposedly produced. Another medium who shares this characteristic but belongs to a later period is Jan Guzik. He was investigated in detail by, among others, Gustave Geley (Geley, 1924, pp.304-375), and his case history seems to follow a pattern fairly typical of many physical mediums of the day.

#### **Jan Guzik**

Jan Guzik (1876-1928) was a professional materialising medium. He came from a poor working class background. In his childhood he was allegedly the source of strange phenomena, with knocks, raps and movement of objects (effects often described in poltergeist cases) following him about. He was taken up by enthusiastic and naïve followers of the paranormal, even going to St Petersburg to be studied by Aksakov. He tried to make an honest living as a tanner, setting up a workshop in a partnership outside Warsaw. This enterprise failed, so he returned to Warsaw and set himself up as a professional medium (Szczepański, 1936, pp.95-100). In his séances (for which he had a professional manager) he produced raps, lights, apparitions, apports, voices and automatic writing. Although he was frequently exposed for fraud

by both Polish and foreign investigators, and even ordinary visitors, he was a great commercial success. Going to see Guzik was regarded by many as a fashionable form of entertainment which he exploited. In the early 1920s he was giving two to three séances a day, but would not submit to systematic studies or proper controls. According to Szczepański, Guzik seemed slow mentally and uninterested in anything but money and his family (he was an excellent husband and father), but in fact he had great powers of observation and self-control if one watched him carefully.

Ochorowicz refused to investigate Guzik, because he would not submit to the required controls. Lebedziński did work with Guzik, and while he does not directly accuse Guzik of cheating, he does say that the early Guzik was much better, and produced phenomena in a light strong enough to watch the faces and hands of the medium and the participants (Lebedziński, 1924-1925). In December 1923 a committee of Sorbonne professors declared him fraudulent. According to Wilhelm Neumann, "From the fact that the actions at a distance produced by Guzik could have been imitated by means of a leg movement and the fact that there were no phenomena during four sittings when the controls were particularly severe, the professors have drawn the remarkable conclusion that the medium had produced the phenomena fraudulently." (Neumann, 1924/2002). Although in this case Guzik seems to have been condemned on the basis of inference rather than evidence, Harry Price, who had a sitting with Guzik in Warsaw in 1923, makes very specific accusations and describes the medium as "one of the cleverest fakers I have ever met" (especially clever with his feet). All the phenomena at the Harry Price séance were fraudulent, with the "animal" apparition being produced with the help of a stocking with luminous spots painted on for eyes, and the appropriate noises. It is thus hardly surprising that Guzik refused to be tested in Harry Price's laboratory (Price, 1933, p.275).

It seems clear that, whatever gifts Guzik possessed early on, they were not available to him on demand, and hardly at all in later life. Yet Gustave Geley describes experiments with Guzik, both those at IMI and other locations in France, and in Warsaw, as highly successful. He quotes a report signed by a number of distinguished persons testifying that they were convinced by the reality of what they experienced. Unfortunately, I have been unable to trace any accounts of sittings with Guzik by Polish investigators. Such sittings undoubtedly took place (there are passing references to them in other contexts) and reports would have been produced, but presumably no records of them have survived. It is interesting to note that the available account of sittings in a red light, with sitters controlling the medium's hands and legs, does not report Guzik's usual phenomena, such as materialised animals or apparitions (Neumann 1924/2002).

The fact that Guzik's phenomena made such an impression on Geley can be interpreted in a number of ways. Although one tends to suspect defective experimental conditions as the most likely cause, Geley himself is adamant that fraud was impossible at the IMI séances, and indeed it is difficult to see how some of the phenomena could have been produced under the prevailing conditions (Geley, 1924, pp. 304-375), even taking into account the fact that the séances took place in total darkness. It may indeed thus be the case that, when controls were imposed, Guzik produced genuine phenomena; or that Geley was the kind of experimenter who brings out the best in his subjects. It is difficult to ascertain from Geley's writing the

sequence of events at particular séances, and the exact state of controls at each stage, since he tends to summarize effects rather than give point-by-point detailed accounts of sittings. More importantly, Geley's style of reporting makes it difficult for a reader without background knowledge to make a significant enough distinction between the story of Jan Guzik and that of Teofil Modrzejewski, better known to psychical researchers as Franek Kluski.

### **Franek Kluski**

Franek Kluski was never caught in any fraudulent action, although he was investigated by numerous researchers, and willingly submitted to the conditions they demanded. The principal foreign investigators of Kluski were Gustave Geley and Charles Richet, and most of the information available in the West comes from Gustave Geley's reports. However, there also exists a large number of reports from Polish researchers and independent witnesses, published contemporaneously in Poland by an eager researcher and a friend of Kluski, Norbert Okołowicz (Okołowicz, 1926<sup>6</sup> - not to be confused with Julian Ochorowicz!). When one comes to discuss Kluski, there is also another factor so often missing from discussions of mediums – a rounded, multi-faceted personality of the medium, whose background and functioning within society is reasonably well documented. Particularly in the case of professional mediums, the "mediumship dimension" is often the main aspect of their life. In the case of Kluski, whose real name was Teofil Modrzejewski, the "mediumship episode" was short-lived and had no profound influence on his life or career.

Franek Kluski's name is usually mentioned in connection with the subject of paraffin moulds, and whether they were produced fraudulently (Barrington, 1994; Coleman, 1994a, 1994b; Fontana, 1998; Geley, 1924; Polidoro and Garlaschelli 1997; Weaver 1992). It is a pity that this has become the only aspect of the whole phenomenon which attracts attention these days. Paraffin moulds were Geley's "holy grail", the permanent paranormal object, and he set great store by them. However, if one looks at the mediumship of Teofil Modrzejewski as a whole, there are many more amazing phenomena in need of explanation before one starts worrying about the authenticity of the moulds.

Although the phenomena produced by Kluski fall into the usual categories of physical mediumship (noises, breezes, smells, lights, apports, apparitions) their scale and intensity seems to be in a category all on its own. The standard explanations of physical mediums' tricks (Carrington, 1920; Dawes, 1979; Gaskill, 2001; Price & Dingwall, 1922) do not provide satisfactory answers. Some of the more elaborate tricks might fit some of the phenomena on some occasions, but not many. For example, the use of accomplices could account for life-like interactive apparitions, but this explanation becomes less likely when the apparitions are observed to pass across the table and the legs of the participants as if they had no lower body – this in a room which was searched and locked prior to the sitting (Okołowicz, p.168). Another

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<sup>6</sup> Okołowicz's book is of particular value as it reproduces reports from more than one source and quotes statements from witnesses, some of them prominent public figures of that time. This does not of course preclude errors of observation in the statements themselves, but makes it more likely that they were reported accurately.

problem in discussing Kluski is that it is difficult to find a motive for faking the phenomena. People's motivations can, of course, be complex, surprising and hidden from themselves. However, the episode of physical mediumship seems entirely separate from Kluski's interests, ambitions and ideals. Why should a man who had a happy family life, high social standing, high principles and a successful career as a journalist, suddenly decide to play an elaborate and expensive hoax on his friends? (All his sittings were private, just with friends and researchers and, of course, no money was involved.) And why should he give it up just at the time it became a spectacular success, which could have brought him fame and fortune?<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the "official" reasons for his participation in sittings – trying to understand his own condition and to help science – might have been the real ones. As Andrew Lang said of Stainton Moses, the famous English clergyman and medium, the choice of beliefs is between "the moral and the physical miracle" (Carrington, 1920, p.15).

Let us then look first of all at the "moral miracle" that the Franek Kluski persona of Teofil Modrzejewski (1873-1943) represents. A well-educated man from an upper class family, by the time "Franek Kluski" appeared Teofil Modrzejewski was in his forties. Harry Price refers to him as a "banker" (Price 1939, pp. 89-90), but that creates the wrong image; Modrzejewski did work in a number of Warsaw banks but, by the time of interest to us, journalism was a significant aspect of his career (*Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, 1977). It is impossible to go into details, but it seems clear from Modrzejewski's own writing, and from the comments of those who knew him, that his achievement as a man of letters was very important to him. His writing was very much in the public domain; he was an enlightened, patriotic, liberal social commentator and reformer. His poetry always had a social purpose and was usually satirical. His output is quite extensive, since he also did translation work and had an interest in linguistic research. However, one cannot find in it even a trace of a reference to his mediumistic feats. In fact, he was a very private person generally, and particularly so on the subject of psychical research, on which he refused to comment. Friends did try to persuade him to write about his experiences. It would have been very easy for him to do so, thus achieving popularity and financial success – yet he always refused. His grounds for doing so were twofold: he wanted literary appreciation, not notoriety; and he was very doubtful about the value of popularising such phenomena, claiming that it might do more harm than good. His feelings about the phenomena are reflected in his choice of contemptuous pseudonym under which he produced them – "kluski" in Polish refers to a very dull type of pasta, and conveys an image of someone clumsy and dull.

Modrzejewski's foray into the world of mediumship came about by accident when he was in his forties, and did not last long, from 1918 to 1925 (with a break in 1920, when he volunteered for army service to fight the Soviet invasion). According to Okołowicz, he attended a séance for the first time in the winter of 1918, but while

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<sup>7</sup> Kluski appears to have retained his ability to produce physical phenomena after he gave up sittings. The 1928 (No.19-20) issue of *Zagadnienia Metapsychiczne* quotes a letter from Osty, who mentions being totally convinced by a short séance with Kluski during which two paraffin gloves were formed very quickly in the bright light of a luminous screen, and expresses regret at Kluski's unwillingness to participate in mediumship. It should also be noted that Kluski himself was more interested in automatic writing, which he found much easier to produce.

the official medium produced nothing and went home, phenomena, initially in the form of knocks and raps, developed around Modrzejewski. At the beginning, he was very enthusiastic and eager to have his abilities investigated, but gradually his enthusiasm waned. Physical mediumship affected his health very badly: after a séance he would often suffer from internal and external bleeding, fainting fits, vomiting and other unpleasant effects. He gave up sittings in 1925.

The list of phenomena produced by Kluski during séances includes the usual range of physical mediumship claims. We thus have: raps, knocks, the smell of ozone, cold breezes, apports, changes in temperature, various smells, lights, apparitions (materialisations) and, of course, the paraffin moulds.

Many investigators remarked that the phenomena produced seemed to shape themselves to the desires of the participants – *even as the séance took place!* However, certain things would happen regularly during the mature phase of Kluski's mediumship<sup>8</sup>: a usual séance would start with cool breezes, appearing in waves, emanating from the medium, always with the smell of ozone. The next materialisation phase was the appearance of luminous nebulae. Usually they would separate from the medium and constantly change shape and location. Most of the séances were controlled through hand and foot control, with participants being assigned particular tasks (one watching the medium, another observing the sequence of events etc., the information being discussed and pooled immediately after the séance). As a rule the séances did not take place in total darkness. A red light would usually be placed opposite or to the side of the medium. This would often turn itself off about 10-15 minutes into the séance, only coming on towards the end. Another, more reliable source of light, was provided in the form of phosphorescent screens which could be used to illuminate the apparitions. Most of the time they were of the shape and size of hand-held mirrors, but on occasion large standing screens would be used. During the final phase of Kluski's mediumship the participants would also sometimes sit with the curtains only partially drawn.

The light phenomena were variously shaped, predominantly pale blue with a maximum intensity of a 25 watt lamp. These would lead to the materialisation of human (and other) apparitions. Apart from a variety of shapes, the lights would also be of different size and consistency; they would disappear as suddenly as they appeared, and they would also increase and decrease in size. There were very many of them in different places at the same time. They would move away from the medium so far that he could not reach them with his hand, because he never left the chair in which he sat. They seemed to have a purpose, and at times seemed to behave like living beings.

The main methods of achieving fraudulent lights at the time were phosphorus, brimstone, matches or fluid obtained from matches, flares or ferro-cerium, more familiar as flints in lighters – and, of course, torches and electrical equipment. Skilled conjurors might, and did, produce quite impressive effects with them, but the scope of the Kluski effects places them on an altogether different level because of the variety, scale, and the distances involved, and the fact that they happened simultaneously.

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<sup>8</sup> According to Okołowicz, Kluski's mediumship developed from chaotic activity with violent movements of objects resembling poltergeist outbreaks, to almost fully controlled final stage of spectacular apparitions.

However, assuming that the controls were defective enough for these effects to be faked, it would still be quite difficult to produce such apparitions as those which supposedly appeared at the later Kluski séances:



**Figure 1 “The Assyrian Priest”**

Figure 1 shows an artist's impression (reproduced from Okołowicz, 1926) of the kind of apparition one might expect – the most sophisticated phenomenon being the apparition that would be completely luminous. It would appear as a column of light, so strong that it would illuminate the sitters and the room. The one illustrated was one of the "regulars", known as the Assyrian priest. The apparitions also moved and spoke. Apart from the light, they also produced an enormous quantity of ozone, so that the room was full of it long after the séance.

It seems that the only possible fraudulent explanation for such a phenomenon would be the involvement of an accomplice – or rather, a large number of accomplices, since in Kluski's séances such materialisations would often appear in groups (including men and women, young and old, as well as children). Partial materialisations, of which there were many, could be explained by judicious application of luminous paint. The fact that the participants claimed to observe apparitions moving through the medium and across the table, or floating in the air, or starting with just the head forming above the medium, could be put down to the psychology of deception, which relies on people inferring a lot more than they actually see, especially if the right expectations have been set up.

Obviously, if accomplices were involved, there must have been a way for them to gain access to the room. It is impossible to rule out such a possibility regarding Modrzejewski's apartment in Warsaw<sup>9</sup>. However, if we are to interpret the phenomena

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<sup>9</sup> The apartment block where Modrzejewski lived was destroyed during the Second World War. However, it was possible to locate the plans, which show that there was no space for secret passages to have been built above or below his apartment. There was a door leading to the outside corridor from the room used for séances, but according to the reports this was kept locked and chained, curtained off and partially blocked by furniture.

as the work of accomplices, we must also take account of the fact that over a quarter of Kluski's séances, some 92, took place in other locations, 34 of them abroad and 13 out of those in Geley's special room at the IMI. Geley's reports of the experiments in Paris claim that the séance room was examined and locked on every occasion, thus excluding the possibility of entry of accomplices – yet apparitions are described, forming from lights into human faces and busts; this seems difficult to produce fraudulently without help (Geley, 1924). The same effects were also obtained when Kluski was on holiday in Italy, away from his usual sitters, in a hotel room, and also at the Polish Consulate. Okołowicz quotes letters describing in detail the kinds of apparitions which formed there, and they seem to have the same characteristics as those produced at home.

Are we today any nearer to understanding what happened in the Kluski séances? Carrington (1920, p.367) suggests that in genuine cases the sensible course is to look for the pathological condition of the medium: "It is quite *conceivable*, at least, that the nervous force which actuates the body might, under certain exceptional circumstances, extend beyond the periphery of the bodily frame, and exert an influence over the external, material world".

These are some of the phenomena confirmed independently by Modrzejewski's friends and work colleagues which took place outside séances (Boy-Zeleński, 1938, Józefowicz, Legiewicz, Dalborowa, 1973; Okołowicz 1926):

- Raps and knocks came from furniture when he was around;
- The smell of ozone would be emitted spontaneously, for quite long periods;
- Electrical equipment would become erratic in his presence; e.g co- workers in the editorial office noticed that lights failed only on the days when Kluski came to work;
- Electrical discharges were observed to emanate from his fingers during storms, which had the appearance of blue flames. Kluski was frightened of storms, and refused to have a séance if a storm was threatening;
- Smells – according to colleagues, a walk through a lime-tree avenue, an alcoholic drink, any strong smell would "soak" through Kluski and last for hours;
- Lights were seen in his mouth, around him, and sometimes light patches appeared on his body when he was emotionally moved;
- Apparitions were supposedly seen around him when he was resting;
- He was reported to have been seen in friends' apartments when he was at home.

Obviously not all of the above anecdotal evidence is of equal value. However, some of the phenomena, such as interaction with electrical equipment, as well as the physical ailments suffered by Kluski, are listed by medical researchers among the symptoms displayed by patients suffering from electromagnetic hypersensitivity (Budden, 1998). It has also been suggested (Budden, personal communication) that the bullet lodged in Kluski's chest after he fought a duel at the age of 27 may be of great significance, possibly acting as a source of endogenous magnetism. Perhaps then the anomalies in Kluski's physical make-up provided the conditions which

enabled the highly intelligent, imaginative and powerful personalities of the medium and the participants to create a unique shared experience. This seems far-fetched, but since plausible explanations that do not involve fraud are scarce, it might be worthwhile to look for clues in the modern story of "Philip", an entity invented by a group of researchers. A number of impressive physical phenomena were produced by "Philip" and guided by the participants with the full awareness that "he" was the creation of their own minds (Owen 1975, Owen and Sparrow, 1976). The Kluski sitters were not consciously setting out to do this, but the phenomena, particularly in the later phase of his mediumship, seemed to respond to the wishes and instructions of the participants. Okołowicz describes a situation when the apparition kept changing from an elderly man to a young woman in accordance with the particular sitter's wishes (Okołowicz 1926, p.272).

In spite of pressure from researchers, Kluski refused to devote any more time to mediumship after 1925. Apart from the physical suffering and exhaustion caused by the séances, Kluski may have been influenced by his religious beliefs. According to Okołowicz (p.582) Kluski, as a deeply committed Catholic, tried to limit the séances out of concern that the phenomena should not become associated with some religious doctrine.

### **Stefan Ossowiecki**

At the same time as Kluski was producing amazing physical phenomena, another psychic, Stefan Ossowiecki (1877-1944), provided challenging material for investigation with his feats of clairvoyance. Although his gifts were mainly mental by the time Ossowiecki became the subject of research, his autobiography (Ossowiecki, 1933/1990) refers to a period of intense psychokinetic activity in his youth.

It is surprising that so little mention is made of Ossowiecki these days, especially as in his day he was regarded as the ultimate, living proof that the paranormal exists, that it can be tapped on demand, and tested under the most rigorous conditions.

He came from a wealthy upper-class Polish family who had been settled in Russia, in Moscow, for some generations. The Russian revolution of 1917 swept away their stability, and after a number of traumatic experiences, including a narrow escape from a death sentence, Ossowiecki settled in Warsaw in 1919. He was active in numerous business ventures, as well as leading a lively social life which suited his jovial, expansive personality (Polski Słownik Biograficzny, 1977, Boruń and Boruń-Jagodzińska 1990).

It goes without saying that, as a gentleman, he did not accept money for the use of his psychic abilities. He regarded his strange gift as a form of "trust", a link to higher consciousness, only to be used for the benefit of mankind, and to be put at the disposal of science. Fortunately he himself was a member of the Polish SPR and was aware of the need to obtain written and signed statements, and most of the witnesses were intelligent people also aware of such need.

Stefan Ossowiecki truly was a legend in his own time. Many stories endowing him with superhuman powers beyond belief circulated during his lifetime, and after his death the legends multiplied and took on a life of their own. It therefore takes some effort to disentangle fact from fiction when considering the non-experimental

evidence. However, even after discarding everything that is not first-hand and not corroborated, there is enough striking material to provide food for thought.

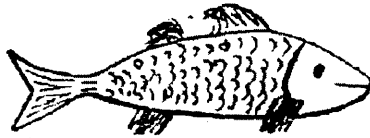
The range of the well-documented phenomena produced by Ossowiecki falls within a fairly narrow area of mental mediumship, involving clairvoyance and psychometry. "Real life" examples of this ability involved, in the main, finding missing objects and missing people. He would always ask for something that had been in physical contact with the object or the person he was seeking. For instance, in the case of missing jewellery, Ossowiecki would handle the box which had contained it, and then make a mental journey to the place where it was usually kept. He would often describe the inside of the house, the people he saw in it, and then come out with a solution. This happened in one well-documented case (Ossowiecki, 1990, pp.122-124), where Ossowiecki "saw" the missing bracelet being swept onto the rug, which the servant shook out of the window. The bracelet fell out onto some bushes and it was found hanging there. The obvious rational explanation, that he may have had accomplices who removed objects and placed them in an agreed location, becomes absurd when one is aware of the number and variety of such situations. In any case, in the other category of "real life" situations, that of finding the missing people, the necessary knowledge was not available to anybody until after Ossowiecki had made his statements.

There are a number of confirmed cases before the Second World War, where Ossowiecki gives correct information about the condition and the whereabouts of missing people, before there is confirmation from a foreign consulate or some other trustworthy source (Ossowiecki 1990, pp.13-14). During the war this became his main – and of course unpaid – occupation. People flocked to him for information about missing relatives, and he did not turn anyone away. There are a number of first-hand accounts from reliable sources relating to this period, but it is difficult to judge the overall accuracy of his statements, since on his own admission he sometimes lied in order to spare the families the horrific visions which came to him.

The other "real life" categories include examples of providing descriptions of life histories of strangers, of influencing people mentally, and occasional flashes of precognition. Of more importance, however, is the experimental evidence for Ossowiecki's gifts. These involved reading sealed targets (written or drawn), identifying hidden/wrapped objects, and describing undeveloped photographs (Geley 1921-24, Ossowiecki 1933/1990)

One of the first formal experiments with Geley, on 21st September 1921, involved, among other tests successfully completed by Ossowiecki, reproducing a drawing of a fish enclosed in a sealed opaque envelope (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**



**Drawing by Geley**



**Drawing by Ossowiecki**

Figure 3, reproduced below, gives the result of an informal experiment produced on the spur of the moment on 24th July 1924 for M.Charpentier, League of Nations delegate passing through Warsaw, one of the many witnesses who appear in the Ossowiecki story only once. He was lunching in town with a military friend and Ossowiecki, whom he met for the first time on that occasion. Charpentier appeared quite sceptical, so Ossowiecki suggested that he should go away, draw something and put it in an envelope, and bring it back.

**Figure 3**



**Drawing by Charpentier**



**Drawing by Ossowiecki**

When Charpentier brought back the sealed envelope, Ossowiecki held it for a moment under the table without looking, and then produced his drawing. He also told Charpentier where he had gone, that he knelt on the stool instead of sitting, and what he had intended to draw (a cat) at first. All the information was accurate. Throughout that time Ossowiecki was chatting with the military friend and eating his lunch.

These experiments appear quite convincing, but they have a number of flaws which become apparent when one confronts them with the list of requirements compiled on the basis of procedures employed in some of the best experiments conducted with Ossowiecki using sealed targets. Marks and Kammann discuss sealed targets in their book *Psychology of the Psychic* (Marks and Kammann 1980), but they only draw attention to *some* of these points, without reference to the work of previous

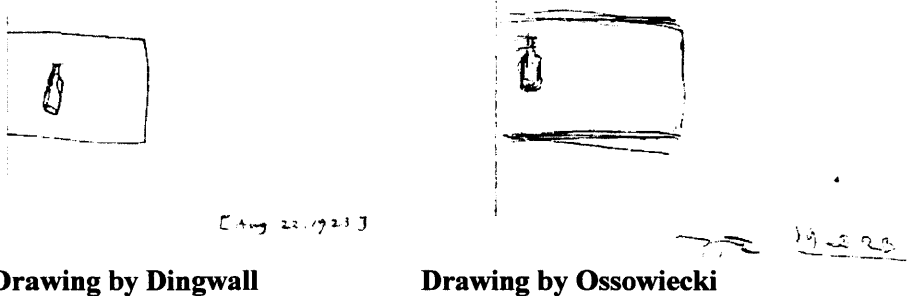
investigators.

*Preparing Experiments with Sealed Targets*

- Do not prepare the target in the presence of the psychic (because the sound and sight of moving pen or pencil can give it away);
- Hide the target in a number of sheets/envelopes (because envelopes are often not as opaque as you think, and can stretch with intense handling);
- Mark the envelope to detect attempts at unsealing;
- Do not leave the envelope alone with the psychic;
- Do not use population stereotypes as targets (when asked to draw something, people will draw a house, a tree, a cat etc. Interestingly enough, research quoted by Marks and Kammann (1980) showed that a student population, faced with guessing highly individualized targets, got nil results);
- Do not prepare the target yourself (precludes the possibility of "fishing" and makes collusion less likely);
- Present the psychic with a random choice of targets unknown to yourself.

An experiment which seems to meet all these conditions was presented at the Warsaw Conference on Psychical Research in 1923 (reported in *Revue Métapsychique* 1923, No.5). Eric Dingwall was in charge of preparing the target (or rather, the target which was eventually chosen from a random selection). He drew the target, placed it in a number of envelopes and made holes in them in such a way that it should be impossible to align them again if they were opened. We have his statement that nobody but himself saw the target and that the envelope was never out of his possession until he gave it to Schrenck-Notzing to conduct the experiment. Schrenck-Notzing presented the envelope to Ossowiecki, along with a number of other possible target envelopes, and Ossowiecki drew this one out at random. (See figure 4). He then correctly gave the colours of the various envelopes in which the target inside was hidden, made the drawing, and mentioned the fact that there were some words he could not read after the date.

The words (not reproduced in Figure.4) were: *Les vignobles du Rhin, de la Moselle et de la Bourgogne donnent un vin excellent*. When drawing the target, Ossowiecki commented that the bottle was leaning slightly, that it did not have a stopper, and that it was drawn with a number of lines. Schrenck-Notzing took away the envelope, and Dingwall confirmed that it was intact. The results were presented at the conference and, understandably, created a furore.

**Figure 4****Drawing by Dingwall****Drawing by Ossowiecki**

The final example in this selection of experiments dates back to 29th October 1925. It was published the next day in the press and in the next issue of the Polish Society's journal (also Ossowiecki 1933/1990). It was organised by the Polish SPR. A sealed letter, written in Spanish, was sent from Spain by Dr. T. Cobo Martinez to Dr Sokołowski for the test. This took place after a public lecture attended by over a hundred people. Ossowiecki sat at a table surrounded by a committee including the speaker, psychical researchers and journalists, who signed the written record. As usual, Ossowiecki gave a very full description of persons, places and circumstances surrounding the creation of the drawing:

*"... a yellow-white house, two storey, entrance through a small garden, on the right a lot of greenery, stone stairs ... The house of a man of modest means. ... a study, he is writing this letter, no, not a letter. A small dark-haired man, an open forehead, very lively, dressed in black, six o'clock. His wife passes, he is upset by a terrible tragedy, he has lived through the loss of a child, a girl. His wife expects another. A boy has been born already, they wanted a girl. Masses of books around, leather chairs, not new.*

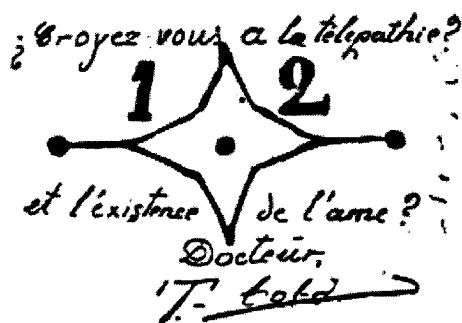
*A strange child next to them. The wife is 32, dark hair, pointed nose, dressed in black, something black hanging from the neck - these are dice.*

*...he has scissors on the table; he is cutting up paper, holding papers. It is not a letter, only something written down. A man of science, studies a lot, has a number of degrees ... He has approached the table and begins to write, he is bent. He is cutting bits of green paper, the seal ready on the table. I see what and how he draws.*

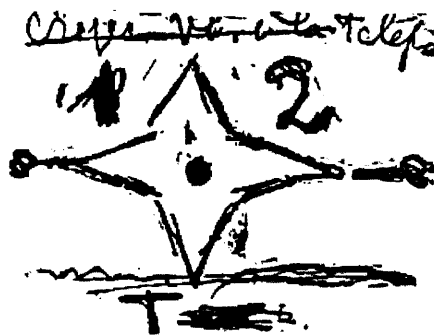
*...He wanted to draw a circle within a square, then a face, and he finished with a point. (Ossowiecki draws) He gets up, lights a cigarette and comes back to the table, he picks up a pencil or a pen and writes a question, draws an enormous T. Here he writes something, two questions, questions about the paranormal. He asks me if I believe in telepathy. At the top there is writing in French. There is someone else in the room, and older man. The question: "Croyez-vous a la telepathie?" The second - do I believe in life after death?*

When the envelope was cut open, inside was found a sheet of white paper, folded in two, covered by three rectangular sheets, two of which were green. The drawings and the sentences written on the white sheet correspond in the smallest detail to the drawing by Ossowiecki.

**Figure 5**



**Drawing by Martinez**



**Drawing by Ossowiecki**

The documents were sent to Martinez, who wrote back to Ossowiecki and the Polish SPR:

*"...Everything that you saw, apart from a leather armchair, is totally accurate..."*

We know very little about Ossowiecki's failures, apart from the "professional" experiments, where everything is duly recorded. However, in real-life situations Ossowiecki's "hits" are not the kind many of us experience by chance, however long the run.

There are many accounts like those related here, with different locations, situations and witnesses. Their value varies, and would be less impressive without the "hard core" of well designed and controlled experiments involving both foreign and Polish researchers. However, when viewed together, they constitute a strong enough "bundle of sticks" for the argument that it is largely owing to Ossowiecki that the 1920s and 1930s are the golden years as far as psychical research is concerned, and perhaps not just in Poland.

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