

BOOK REVIEW

Other Realities? The Enigma of Franek Kluski's Mediumship by Zofia Weaver. Hove, UK: White Crow Books, 2015. 152pp + xxi. \$16.99 (paperback). \$8.99 (Kindle). ISBN 978-1-910121-39-9.

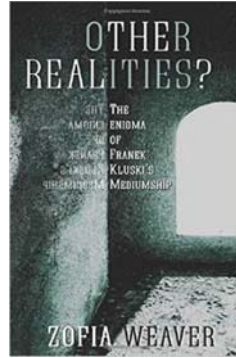
Scholarly studies of physical mediumship typically list D. D. Home and Eusapia Palladino as the most convincingly documented mediums of all time, and most also rate Home's case as among the most spectacular. Although many consider other cases of physical mediumship to be as dramatic as that of Home (e.g., those of Carlos Mirabelli, and Indridi Indridason), and while other less dramatic cases are often ranked as highly significant (e.g., Kathleen Goligher, Rudi Schneider, Eva C.), the prevailing view is that, despite their different virtues, these cases lie within the shadows of Home and Palladino. My own survey of physical mediumship (Braude 1997) represents this received opinion, an opinion which the book currently under review has forced me to reconsider.

I've known all along about the apparently spectacular case of the Polish medium Franek Kluski (1873–1943).¹ For example, I knew that (under conditions that seemed to rule out fraud) he reportedly produced lifelike materialized forms of both humans and animals, and that he frequently used warm paraffin to produce moulds of ostensibly materialized hands, some obtained under apparently quite tight conditions at the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI) in France, under the supervision of Gustave Geley and Charles Richet. The problem, however, was that the most important and extensive documentation of Kluski's phenomena had never been translated from Polish into English, and so there was very little on which I and other Polish-challenged commentators could rely. (But see Barrington 1994a, 1994b, Coleman 1994, Pawłowski 1925, Varvoglis 2002).

Zofia Weaver's new book has quite simply changed the landscape. In addition to summarizing the case as a whole, she has translated large chunks of the most important eyewitness accounts. So it's now possible for students of physical mediumship to form a competent assessment of Kluski's place in parapsychological history. My own take on the matter, after reading this book, is that Kluski probably deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as Home and Palladino.

I realize that many recoil at the prospect of relying on eyewitness accounts from cases of physical mediumship, but as I noted in my Editorial

in this *Journal* in Volume 28(2), Summer 2014, the usual concerns result simply from sloppy thinking (see also the discussions in Braude 1997, 2007). And in the Kluski case, the conditions of observation were often quite good and unfavorable both to malobservation and trickery of sufficient magnitude, and the observers were often wily veterans of sittings with physical mediums or at least obviously alert and quite sharp. In fact, I agree with Weaver's comment that in the Kluski case "The quality of the sitters is reflected in the quality of the reporting" (p. 7).



In one important respect, Kluski's mediumship differs from that of the other major players in this arena, including Home and Palladino. As Weaver notes,

He never performed publicly as a medium, never made any public references to his mediumship, never profited financially from it, and gave it up after a fairly brief period of intense experimentation. (p. 9)

Indeed, Kluski had a day job as a banking professional and creative writer. Physical mediumship was a passionate side interest, but Kluski had no interest in promoting his expertise. In fact, his mediumship had such an adverse effect on his health that after several years of mediumistic activity he either stopped it altogether or at least cut back severely. In fact, Weaver observes

he never wrote about his mediumistic experiences, fearing the kind of sensationalism they would attract, and although he allowed researchers to investigate the phenomena he produced, he never tried to obtain any material benefit from his psychic abilities. He was offered large sums of money to undertake tours of America but, as he confided to a contemporary, he believed that he could not convince the whole world that he was not cheating, and therefore would rather leave his children a name unsullied by controversy. (p. 10)

Kluski could also have used his mediumship as a platform to promote his literary works, but he declined that opportunity as well, along with refusing the many invitations to speak publicly about his séances.

As for the phenomena themselves, they ranged from poltergeist-like knocks, raps, apports of objects from other rooms in the apartment, and movement of objects in the room, to dramatic light phenomena, some of which coalesced from nebula-like shapes, at close range and under either

red light or the light of nearby luminescent screens, into solid human or animal forms that interacted with sitters, and which could often be seen at the same time as the medium (and which in any case didn't resemble the medium). Sometimes the materialized figures (called "phantoms") even illuminated themselves, apparently from within. And then, of course, there were the moulds of hands, and the hands usually looked nothing like Kluski's (often they seemed to be those of a child or a woman). Moreover, the hand-moulds were often produced on the spot in accordance with the expressed or silent wishes of the sitters.

I should also note that the materialized phantoms exhibited certain intriguing regularities. Weaver writes:

a significant difference began to be apparent between phantoms showing themselves in the light of a screen, and those which illuminated themselves with their own light. The latter were less numerous but incomparably more perfect in their appearance. While about half of the phantoms which illuminated themselves with a screen were recognised as those of deceased persons known to the participants during their lifetime, those emitting their own strong light were of a different nature. The dignified appearance of some of them sometimes resembled famous historical figures or types characteristic of ancient epochs, both Eastern and European. (pp. 31–32)

However, as in other cases of physical mediumship, Kluski's phantoms provided little if anything in the way of evidence for postmortem survival. Weaver is careful to note how the behavior and development of the materialized figures seemed to correspond to the spoken or unspoken wishes of the sitters. So for example, depending on what sitters wanted to experience, a materialized human figure of a male might gradually morph into that of a female, or the figure of a uniformed military officer might morph into that of a civilian. Weaver correctly notes that this seems to connect to the famous Toronto "Philip" experiments in which a group of sitters invented a character with whom they seemed to interact during a séance, and whose responses to questions never exceeded what the group had agreed upon in advance (see Owen & Sparrow 1976, 1974).

As for controls, Kluski was often held while phenomena were produced at a distance, and many reported either that he was immobile during those times or that his body seemed to react to or twitch in accordance with the object or light movements. Sometimes, bruises would appear on Kluski's body after phenomena occurred at a distance. Moreover, although Kluski was seldom undressed or searched, the medical examinations conducted after the sittings allowed for discreet opportunities to look for anything suspicious. On at least one occasion, though (April 24, 1922), Kluski sat

totally naked for Geley and Richet in Warsaw . . . , but this did not stop the phenomena from appearing. Eventually, the researchers settled on controllers on either side of the medium holding his hands and touching his legs with theirs. (p. 39)

Furthermore,

in the early stages of Kluski's mediumship the most elaborate controls were employed, and often repeated in different variants as new researchers flowed in. These controls were applied both in his apartment and in those of his friends. They had the medium tied up and put in a net and used seals, but this did not stop the phenomena, only acting as an irritant by forcing Kluski to adopt unnatural positions. Once it was established that regardless of the controls the phenomena were the same, the more intrusive methods were avoided so as not to exhaust and hurt the medium. (pp. 38–39)

Kluski's moulds merit a few more comments. The idea behind them was to produce a permanent paranormal object (PPO), something whose existence after the séance would provide continuing evidence of paranormality. Weaver provides a good survey of the inadequacy of skeptical efforts to dismiss the moulds. For example, it's implausible that the moulds were produced prior to the séance and smuggled in by Kluski. Some experimenters secretly added a blue dye to the paraffin just before the séance began, and others secretly added cholesterol. In those cases, the moulds appearing during the séance contained the added substances. Moreover, the

splashing of the wax would be heard (and sometimes felt), and within a minute or so warm, soft gloves, different in size, character, and arrangement, would drop on sitters's hands or in their laps, so thin (1 mm) and fragile that most of them got damaged and did not survive. However, most of them did survive long enough for people to feel them when warm and soft, hang on to them, and examine them when cooled. (p. 108)

There's much more I could say here about this fascinating case. But why read me? Go to the source and read this book instead. It's a major addition to the parapsychological literature.

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Note

¹ This is a pseudonym. Kluski's real name was Teofil Modrzejewski.

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