

## BOOK REVIEW

**Other Realities? The Enigma of Franek Kluski's Mediumship** by Zofia Weaver. Hove, UK: White Crow Books, 2015. xxi + 152 pp. \$16.99. ISBN 978-1910121399.

Within psychical research, Dr. Zofia Weaver is best known for her research on mediums in Poland (Weaver 2002). One of the more well-known among them was Teofil Modrzejewski (1873–1943), better known as Franek Kluski. Weaver previously wrote an article about him (Weaver 1992), but felt that she had barely scratched the surface. Nevertheless, she left Kluski alone for many years: “The reason was simple: putting a great deal of time and effort into translating and researching the enormous store of material, which looked totally unbelievable, seemed like a waste of time” (p. xi).

As Dr. Alan Gauld notes in his brief Foreword, the English literature on Kluski is limited. One of the more important sources of information is Dr. Gustave Geley's *L'Ectoplasmie et la Clairvoyance* from 1924, which was translated a few years later (Geley 1927). F. W. Pawlowski, who attended several of Kluski's séances, also published an account (Pawlowski 1925). As a native speaker of Polish, Weaver has been able to utilize much more material. The most important source for her was a thick book, published in 1926, written by Kluski's best friend Norbert Okolowicz. This book was also used by Dr. Roman Bugaj during his research, and his essay about Kluski has been translated (Bugaj 1995).

During his childhood, in addition to having a few premonitions, Kluski also saw and talked to apparitions and seemed to have had several out-of-body experiences. At times he also saw auras around people's heads and shoulders. As an adult he was however unwilling to talk about his paranormal experiences. About 1900 he fought in a duel and was shot in the heart area, but to the surgeon's surprise he woke up. It is not known if he had any memories of a near-death experience. What is known is that Kluski henceforth experienced sporadic violent heart palpitations. The bullet was not removed. Not mentioned in the book is that Albert Budden who has connected alien abductions and electromagnetic effects has apparently suggested that the bullet may have functioned as a source of endogenous magnetism (Weaver 2002:63).

In her book, Weaver mentions that Kluski could cause compass needles to spin. In addition, when he held a large magnet there were purple flashes from the poles. She notes:

There are also reports of how Kluski reacted to an impending storm and during it. Okolowicz describes him becoming very agitated, his limbs hot, something like an electrical discharge going through his body. It manifested itself by the tingling and stiffening of toes and particularly fingers, with bluish flames escaping at times from the ends of his fingers, something which could be seen in a darkened room. A storm seemed to exhaust him in a way similar to a *séance*, and he would be adamant about not holding a *séance* at such time. (p. 21)

Weaver also describes phenomena that suggest that Kluski at times functioned like a poltergeist agent. Objects in his presence could move on their own, knockings and other noises without evident causes could also often be heard, and electrical lights would frequently turn on and off. These phenomena are nothing compared with the phenomena that took place around him during *séances*—all the traditional events and more! They bring to mind Dr. John Beloff's (1989) words:

From time to time one comes across a claim about which one can say only that it makes one gasp. It goes so far beyond anything in one's experience, it makes such a mockery of all one's presumptions about what sort of a world it is that one is living in, one is at a loss for words. At the same time one can see no easy way of dismissing it as mere fantasy. (Beloff 1989:328)

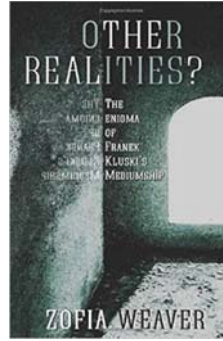
Beloff (1996) did not seem to know what to make of Kluski, nor does this reviewer.

Kluski was identified as a physical medium in 1918 and held more than 350 *séances*, but the materialization *séances* took their toll, and he basically ceased in 1925 for health reasons. His health became better when he instead focused on conveying messages from the dead through automatic writing, but the physical phenomena were less than impressive. Weaver shows that a development definitely occurred. During his first years as a medium, Kluski's trance was light, but it gradually became deeper. The *séance* phenomena also changed over time, for example partial materializations were common in his first years and later self-illuminating full materializations of humans appeared during his *séances*.

Most of the *séances* were held in his own apartment, but 14 were held at the Institut Métapsychique International. Dr. Gustave Geley (1927) has provided an account about the latter *séances*, during which thin fragile paraffin moulds were produced, allegedly by materialized hands. Oddly, the hand moulds had the size of childrens' hands, yet looked more like undersized adult hands. These moulds were much discussed in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* in the early 1990s, and again after two skeptics published an account about how they had produced paraffin

moulds (Polidoro & Garlaschelli 1997). Paul Gaunt (2012), who provided us with a useful Summary, has nevertheless concluded that although paraffin moulds can be made in a number of different ways so far it does not seem possible to reproduce the paper-thin paraffin moulds that were made during some of Kluski's séances.

Since the moulds were so fragile, plaster casts were made and preserved. Sir Oliver Lodge (1924) noted:



The paraffin gloves from which these casts were made, considered in conjunction with the conditions under which they were produced and the crucial tests made to ensure their genuineness, are a standing demonstration of something inexplicable by normal science. (p. 208)

Many years later, Dr. Mario Vargolis (2002) agreed.

Yet, as veteran psychical researcher Eric J. Dingwall (1926) noted, some doubt can be cast on Geley's account due to some errors in his account about the experiments with Eva C. (Marthe Béraud): "What becomes of the oft-repeated stories of Kluski? Had he one hand free as the photographs show was the case with Eva C. ..." (p. 389)? This argument was dusted off during the debate in the 1990s, but no one dared to explicitly suggest experimenter fraud or that the control was not as good as claimed. Needless to say, Geley was however not the sole witness.

Kluski's séances contained a number of phenomena. For example, there were a variety of light phenomena that sometimes transformed and various types of apparitions of both humans and animals. Many readers will find the apparitions difficult to accept as genuine. For example, Weaver notes: "... when close by, the apparitions seemed to have breath, heartbeat, and even tummy rumblings" (p. 45). In addition: "... there were many partial materialisations. There were unfinished busts, hands with missing fingers or fingers hanging on, as well as apparitions which looked as if they had been made from cardboard or rags" (p. 53). These quotes are admittedly cherry-picked. Weaver has, in contrast to Geley (1927) and Imich (1995), not included any pictures of the apparitions, which look artificial. Nevertheless, some observations about how the apparitions transform are difficult to explain.

Kluski basically ceased to give séances in 1925, but he gave a few later on. Dr. Eugene Osty participated in a séance in 1928 (p. 32), and, a year later a Swedish psychical researcher, Eira Hellberg, also sat in on a séance (Wallenkampf 1929)—both were impressed. Yet, in 1933, the veteran

psychical researcher Everard Feilding wrote a brief letter. He and his wife had been at a séance “. . . which seemed to us as so ridiculously fraudulent that we found it extremely difficult to believe in the earlier reports on the man” (Carrington 1957:35). Feilding does not however seem to have published any more detailed account. When the Danish psychical researcher Poul Thorsen visited Kluski in 1939, he had definitively ceased work—his doctor had forbidden him to hold materialization séances (Thorsen 1950). He was however still able to influence compass needles.

Weaver makes some comparisons between Kluski and other physical mediums (Daniel Dunglas Home, Eusapia Palladino, and Indridi Indridason), and a poltergeist agent, but arguably one should also compare accounts of séances with him with accounts of séances with known fraudulent mediums. Regardless, say what one will about Kluski, Weaver has produced a somewhat brief but thought-provoking book. Kluski may remain an enigma.

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