Houdini

* + ‘Margery’ Mina Crandon – most investigated + controversial medium of 20th century
    - Born in Canada 1888 🡪 Divorced grocer in 1918 + married Boston surgeon, Dr. Le Crandon
    - Crandon – highly respected instructor at Harvard Medical School
      * 1923 – Crandon had extreme interest in psychical research
      * Mina had no interest until husband became interested
        + May 1923 – table tilting in response to questions
        + Table continued to tilt till Mina left the room
      * Pseudonym ‘Margery’ given to protect social standing as wife
    - Spirit control – brother Walter, died from trash crash in 1911
      * Spoke in profanity, mission to perform process of mind over matter
    - Seances – attendance was invitation only (protect Crandon’s Harvard rep)
      * Risque – held sessions in nude + manifested ectoplasm from vagina
      * Walter’s voice not coming from Mina – originate from different part of room
      * Nov 1923 – J. Malcolm Bird attended a séance, suggested for Mina to enter Scientific American competition
  + First formal investigation – a few months after start of private séances
    - Prof. McDougall (head of Harvard Psychology) + committee from uni
    - 5 months of observation – phenomena through fraudulent means
  + Scientific American investigation - $2500 to anyone with conclusive proof that psychic phenomena truly existed
    - Investigation – had a lot of press
    - Dr Crandon – wrote to Doyle his willingness to crucify investigators who doubted
    - Committee
      * Harry Houdini – magician + escape artist
        + Not notified of being on committee till 3 months into investigation
        + Committee was about to award prize to Bird
        + Discovered most of committee was given generous hospitality

One borrowed money from Dr. Crandon

Another wanted backing for research

An old member had amorous encounters with medium

Compromised committee’s objectivity

* + - * Hereward Carrington – popular occult writer
      * Dr. Walter Prince – American psychical researcher
      * Dr. Comstock – introduced Technicolour to films
      * Dr. McDougall – Harvard psych professor (in first investigation)
      * J. Malcolm Bird – secretary of committee
        + No investigative role – observe, organize + record investigation
        + Wanted Houdini disqualified, had investigations without him
        + Friction between Houdini + Margery supporters (with Bird)

Deadlock – Carrington + Bird believed vs others refused to commit without Houdini’s opinion

* + - Series of tests – began in Jan 1924
      * Control conditions enforced – ensure no fraud (conscious/unconscious) goes undetected
      * General supervision by Crandon
      * Investigators signed affidavit
        + Touched ectoplasm on wrist – Margery shrieked 🡪 ill + haemorrhaged for several days
        + Researcher drove thick needle into flesh

No flinch in entrance 🡪 suffered when awakened

* + - * + Burned by corrosive chemicals
      * Phenomena range – breezes, raps, spirit writing in several languages, independent voice manifestations, apports, imprint of spirit fingerprints in paraffin
      * Encased in wood box (only permits arms + legs protruding)
        + Box made by Houdini – fraud-preventer box
        + Had arguments with Dr. Crandon about box
        + Rang bell, snuff candles, rock chairs in opposite side of room
      * Filled mouth with coloured water
        + Walter + entities spoke freely + answer questions
        + Water removed – same amount + colour
      * Inflated balloon placed in medium’s mouth (blocks larynx)
        + Voices able to still speak
      * Margery placed in box 🡪 Walter ripped off top with invisible force
  + Houdini – outspoken as Margery as fraud
    - Public crusade – private grief tied to mother’s death 🡪 séances were deception
    - Crandon didn’t trust Houdini
    - Bell box between Houdini’s feet instead of Margery’s
      * Felt Margery’s foot ringing bell with sensitive leg
    - Megaphone – floating above head, Houdini told Walter to through towards him
      * Margery’s momentarily free 🡪 snatched megaphone + placed on head
      * When hands controlled 🡪 megaphone sailed with snap of head
    - Electric doorbell – challenged spirit to ring bell (inside box) whilst in box (hand out)
      * Walter spirit – ‘still trying to get some publicity by haunting séance rooms?’
        + Directed Malcolm Bird to take doorbell out of room to examine doorbell for trickery (Bird hesitated)
        + Bird discovered rubber pieces on bell’s contact points 🡪 can’t ring

No proof that Houdini tampered with it

* + - * + Bell started ringing 🡪 ‘how does that suit you, Mr Houdini?’
        + Ruler also found in box – Houdini’s assistant placed it for fraud

Houdini claims it was planted against him

* + - After 6 weeks – Bird wrote praise in articles + committee undecided
      * Houdini feared they would hand prize to Crandons – felt insulted
        + Published 1924 report saying he exposed her tricks
        + Accused 2 committee members (Carrington + Bird) for assist
        + Carrington – after 40 sittings with Margery 🡪 praised Margery
  + After Scientific American investigation
    - Ectoplasmic limbs – from medium as crude hands, claimed responsible for phenomena
    - Dingwall – officer invited to séances
      * Ectoplasm connected by umbilical cord
      * Felt like cold raw beef/soft wet rubber
      * No light allowed – was permitted to view with ligh of red lamp
      * Dr. Crandon – too much light 🡪 inhibiting on ectoplasm
      * Couldn’t actually see where ectoplasm extruded from
      * Photographs – appeared they hanged from invisible threads
      * Looked like animal lung tissue
  + Fingerprints in paraffin
    - Séance – two dishes, one hot water (had dental wax), second cold water (wax softens 🡪 Walter claims to imprint his thumb) 🡪 thumbprint belongs to none in room
    - Expert used by Crandons – claims print matched print from Walter’s old razer
    - Dudley researcher – found Boston dentist admitted he gave Margery wax with imprint
      * Can’t prove all phenomena produced products through deception
      * Majority of researchers – she’s too good to be true
      * Bird – admitted guilt of elaborations + half-truths