

‘MARGARET DANCED THROUGH NEIL ARMSTRONG’:  
READERS RESPONDING TO SUSAN POWER’S SPIRITUAL FICTION

Paul S. Mills

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Approved by

Advisory Committee

Diana Ashe

Lewis Walker

Lee Schweninger  
Chair

Accepted by

Robert Roer  
Dean, Graduate School

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## ABSTRACT

In this study I investigate the believability and readability of Susan Power's novel The Grass Dancer in an effort to better understand what makes the spiritual literature so well accepted and revered, even with the overabundant presence of apparent magic or supernatural phenomena. Power's book won the Hemingway award for first fiction and it was a bestseller. Spirituality, magic, and supernatural events are often integral parts of the storyline and most of the time the situations are different from what the casual reader is used to; occasionally even trained readers are unaccustomed to some of the conventions of Power's book.

In order to investigate the believability of one particular aspect of Power's fiction thoroughly, I interviewed five graduate students who had read the novel for a graduate course in American Indian literature. I also chose three undergraduate students to serve as casual readers. I watched each casual reader reading an excerpt from the book, a chapter titled "Moonwalk," which was Power first wrote as a short story. Readers answered questions and gave their responses to the fiction so that I could record their individual reactions, transcribe them into appendices and investigate them thoroughly to determine what made the supernatural material in the book believable and enjoyable.

Reader-response criticism is used as a guideline throughout this investigation, not so much as a rubric to determine if the respondents were right or wrong about their observations. I used critics like Holland, Rosenblatt, Fish and Rabinowitz to give the reader of this thesis a peek into what may be happening for a specific reader during a particular reading event.

The graduate students' responses proved, among other things, that they were interested in the motives of the author and that they were thinking critically and applying criticism while reading. Their reactions seemed genuinely earnest and also crafted from training received in college classrooms. There were also some standard literary responses which would be expected with this type of study, and some that were a mixture of personal material and critical analysis. The responses given by the undergraduate students, or casual readers, for the most part were heartfelt, either reminiscent of something remembered from long ago, or recognized to be a part of the way that they were raised.

All of the responses in this investigation seemed to maintain that the readers found Power's fiction believable and enjoyable; their reasons range in scope and often involve personal beliefs. However, they all lead the specific reader, eventually, in a personal search of his or her own ideas about the supernatural events that occur inside of the text. If there is one concrete finding in this investigation, it is that all readers are different and to understand how a reader will respond, that reader must be questioned.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the persons who volunteered their time and responses to this study, without question: *Alastair, Ainsley, Amena, Abey, Andra, Aidan, Aileen*, and *Alanna* all helped me and anyone else who may read this thesis to better understand how and why a person responds to supernatural events in the manner that they do.

I would like to thank Dr. Lee Schweninger for introducing Susan Power's novel, The Grass Dancer, to me in an undergraduate course several years ago. Also, thanks to Dr. Lewis Walker, for everything that he has taught me about literary research; he is a great inspiration and he takes ultimate pride in his work. Thanks also go to Dr. Diana Ashe for allowing me to witness an instructor who really enjoys her work, as well as for showing an inspiring teacher how to communicate effectively with students and how to maintain a classroom setting that remains interesting.

Additional thanks go to all of the people who work at the William Madison Randall Library at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington; they enjoy making research easier. My thanks also go to Norman Holland, the author of the article, "Who Reads What How?" as it was his format of including actual readers' responses to tricky instances in literature that gave me the idea of interviewing several different readers to better understand how a diverse group of people accepted the supernatural events in Susan Power's The Grass Dancer.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all of my family members, friends and colleagues who supported me throughout my college career. My mother, Ellen, my father and stepmother, Paul Sr. and Barbara, my grandfathers, Frank Gore and Clyde Mills, and my wife, Dawn, have all been very supportive of me over the years. My siblings, Paula, Roxanne, and Chad have all helped me more than they know; I love you all. My father-in-law, Charles, and my mother-in-law, Becky, have been especially helpful when it was really needed the most. My colleagues, Alicia, Melanie, Billy and Ryan have all encouraged me to go forward when things got to be pretty hectic; thank you all for your encouragement. My close friends Tommy, Tanoth, David and Kelly have all lent much needed support when I was unsure about my career path. Last, but certainly not the least, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my son, Charles William Keegan Mills.

*The capacity of the human being to evoke images of things or events not present, and even never experienced, or which may never have existed, is undoubtedly an important element in art.*

— Louise Rosenblatt, The Reader, the Text, the Poem

*Readability, on thoughtful inspection, shows itself to be a highly complex, many-sided topic whose fuller understanding requires insights from many different disciplines, perhaps even research techniques that are still not well developed.*

— Wallace Chafe, Sources of Difficulty in the Processing of Written Language

## INTRODUCTION

On July 20, 1969, a young Sioux Indian named Harley Wind Soldier and the rest of his family prepare to watch astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin become American heroes and popular icons by walking on the moon while Margaret Many Wounds, Harley's grandmother, lies in bed dying. Moments after Margaret passes away, Harley sees her appear on a black and white television, dancing on the moon. She appears to physically pass through Neil Armstrong, leaving behind no evidence of her presence except a small "quiver" in the astronaut's breathing apparatus:

[Harley] waited for Armstrong and Aldrin to see her, but they must have seen only the ground. Finally she came upon them, and Harley caught his breath because Margaret danced through Neil Armstrong. The astronaut never ceased digging at the ground, leaving footprints like heavy tank treads, but his oxygen system quivered a little as she passed (Power 121).



An analysis of the manner in which readers respond to this very ambiguous moment in the “Moonwalk” chapter of Susan Power’s book The Grass Dancer makes an interesting reader-response investigation. Readers could presumably construe the outwardly "magical" events in the chapter in many different fashions, with each conflicting view affecting the respective reader’s ideas in contradictory ways in response to how the novel is received.

Susan Power’s fiction seems to make a fervent impression on most readers, almost placing them in a trance or mystifying them with sacred tales containing family secrets. Characters who have magical or spiritual powers inhabit Power’s literary world, challenging inquisitive readers who may disbelieve the supernatural. Readers confront ghosts who find their way into Power’s fiction, as well. Most of Power’s characters, unlike resisting readers, are not surprised by the magic or spirituality that takes place in her work; in fact, they almost accept it for a part of their daily lives. In an introduction to an interview with Susan Power, Eileen LeBlanc says,

Power develops her stories from the characters up. She writes often on the Indian experience, but not, she says, with any political agenda. If a stand is made on an issue [that] did or does affect the Native American, it arises from the character as part of his or her makeup. In [...] The Grass Dancer, the history weaves through the chapters, which can almost stand alone, easily excerpted and understood. And though the characters are of a different culture, they are drawn with insightful detail and the rich heritage is as natural to the reader as to the characters in the stories. (Interview

with Power)

The time that Power spent learning to write contracts and other documents in law school affected her writing style. She says that learning to write like a lawyer made her completely aware of the goal of writing:

I learned so much about writing in law school. You learn a lot of discipline, especially how to deal with language, how to be really, really specific, because, of course, lawyers have to learn to be really specific with their language. They want to be able to write contracts that are foolproof. And also they want to learn to manipulate language, so they can get around things, you know, if they need to. So I learned an awful lot about writing, I feel as if it was a part of my writing education. (Interview with Power)

The aim of this investigation is not to examine the characters' dealings with the magic and spirituality in the text or the particular writing style of the author; it is what the reader does with this supernatural material that is under investigation here. What do readers think of the magic and spirituality in Power's book The Grass Dancer? Do they believe it to be true or does it appear to be implausible and unlikely? How does Power's writing make ghosts who are dancing on the moon believable by most readers? In this investigation I will attempt to find out the ways in which different readers formulate their responses to the magic and spirituality of Power's "Moonwalk" chapter. Do they believe the bizarre occurrences actually happen? Do they discredit the mystic events? How do the respective responses to the unexplained happenings make the readers react? What

makes the events believable or not believable? All of these questions are explored in this extended study into readers' responses to Power's novel. It would be reasonable to suggest that if the supernatural events are unbelievable, then the book is not convincing. The success of the book depends on the reader and how he or she accepts the supernatural. In this study, I examine readers' responses to Power's fiction to determine whether her spiritual literary world is believable or unbelievable, in order to reinforce the idea that how the reader responds to the magical events affects how the reader accepts the fiction.

To make the argument that the believability of the supernatural events in Power's book directs the reader's responses and ultimately decides whether he or she enjoys the book, I needed to find out how readers accept the paranormal events that take place in the book. Reader-response critics such as Louise Rosenblatt, Norman Holland and Stanley Fish led me to the analysis that would help to interpret the responses of the people who read Susan Power's fiction. In Reading Lessons, Scott Carpenter explains that

As the name implies, reader-response criticism focuses less on the text as an autonomous object and more on the position and function of the reader. Interpretation, according to this model, results from the combination of these two entities—reader and text—and the multiplicity of possible interpretations springs largely from the diverse perspectives and backgrounds various readers bring to the text. Reading thus consists less of drawing meaning out of a text than it does of creating that meaning *intersubjectively*, by an interaction between reader and text. (143)

Finding out how readers respond to a text can be a difficult process because each reader creates his or her own specific meaning while reading. According to reader-response critic Norman Holland in “The Question: Who Reads What How?” for instance, the reader, not the text, determines how people will accept certain events in a novel:

It is quite impossible to say from a text alone how people will respond to it. Only after we have understood how some specific individual responds, how the different parts of his individual personality recreate the different details of the text, can we begin to formulate general hypotheses about the way many or all readers respond. (976)

Holland says that a critic would need to look at more than just the text to understand how readers would respond to it. In the case of The Grass Dancer one needs to investigate how actual readers respond to the text to understand how they accept the supernatural. Understanding how one specific individual responds still will not prove how many will respond, because what one specific reader may think is unbelievable is possibly very believable to another. This makes understanding how readers respond to various pieces of literature different almost every time. Another factor is the type of reading that the reader is taking part in. Are they reading to find an explanation or are they concentrating on what occurs while reading?

Rosenblatt makes two distinctions between types of reading: efferent and aesthetic reading. In efferent reading, “the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue after reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out,” while “in aesthetic reading, [...], the

reader's primary concern is what happens during the actual reading event" (23-24). An efferent read of the "Moonwalk" chapter would involve a reader whose awareness is pointed externally towards thoughts to be preserved and procedures to be executed after the reading event. In contrast, an aesthetic reading of the "Moonwalk" chapter would probably imply that the reader's attention is concentrated on what he or she is living through for the duration of his or her involvement with the words on the page. These differences in types of reading also make for more difficulty in finding out how many readers would respond to the same piece of text.

Holland's investigation in "Who Reads What How" involves explaining the responses of five students who have read the William Faulkner short story "A Rose for Emily." Holland's idea was to investigate the various readers' responses to a passage in the short story that seemed to elicit very different responses. He found that differences in the readers' responses to the same piece of literature were due to the variance in the personalities of the respondents as well as the things that the readers brought with them to the reading event.

I decided to incorporate Holland's idea of exploring several actual readers' responses in order to better understand how the text is actually accepted. In order to record the true and natural responses of the persons that I interviewed, I promised to keep their identities a secret and to assign each of them a different alias so that they could not be identified. This was also a practice that I borrowed from Holland, as I noticed that the names were aliases: "Sam, Saul, Shep, Sebastian, and Sandra (as I shall call them)..." (Holland 969). I would need actual readers' responses to apply the format that was

established by Holland, so I set up personal interviews with students who had already read the entire book to determine how those readers responded to the magic and spirituality of the “Moonwalk” chapter as well as the rest of the novel. I then observed a different set of readers of the chapter titled “Moonwalk,” which Power first wrote as a short story, and interviewed them to get a sense of how casual readers respond to the supernatural events that take place in this seemingly magical episode. By casual readers, I mean readers who would not necessarily be reading this text for a class or to critically analyze it. A casual reader would be a reader who is reading the text for enjoyment purposes or for a specific interest in the topic. A casual reader could also be defined as an untrained reader. After interviewing the readers, establishing their reactions to Power’s story, and then analyzing what was said about the text, I transcribed the interviews and included them as appendices to this investigation. The appendices have been included in order to provide other students who may read this thesis while studying readers’ responses full access to the entire responses of the persons interviewed.

In my estimation, ghosts, magic, and spirituality are difficult subjects for some traditional Western readers, making the suspension of disbelief difficult. Also, I think that some of the material in Power’s book may appear to marginalize outsiders, making comprehension difficult for the casual reader. Information that may seem unconventional to casual readers may trouble them, like the advice to Margaret from her dead husband on how to get to the great “council fire” in the sky after she passes away: “Follow Wanagi Tacanku to its very end. It won’t take you long. When you come to the edge of the universe you will see us by the fire. Push across the border. Five steps will bring you to

us” (Power 118). The problem is that if Power’s writing is not realistic or believable to all readers, then the text becomes just another unbelievable or fantastical “story” as opposed to spiritual literature, and thus it is awarded less credibility.

The lack of credibility can lend a ineffectual feel to the text, mainly by taking away from the importance of the religious story and of its place in time and history, and forcing it to belong to a genre of fantasy or popular literature such as the gaudy romance novels, gory forensic investigation mysteries or garish science fiction stories that litter the checkout stands at Wal-Mart. If Power’s magic is perceived as fantastical, the reader is not asked to believe in the literary world of The Grass Dancer, so it would be reasonable to suggest that they wouldn’t. A realistic view of the spirituality would ask the reader to view the events as real and to believe in the spirituality of the literary world that Power created, possibly leading them towards acceptance and credibility.

Investigating what a few readers perceive may not determine what the majority of readers think or how they might react, but it will provide a general direction to begin with in determining how the reader accepts supernatural events that take place in this chapter and what impact that has on how much the reader enjoys the literature.

#### Overview of Criticism Published on The Grass Dancer

Since Power’s book came out in 1994, there is a limited amount of criticism written about it. Although a number of reviews have been published on the book, there are, to date, only three published articles on The Grass Dancer; each one is briefly described below and will be referred to later in the investigation.

In “Visitors from the Spirit Path: Tribal Magic in Susan Power’s The Grass Dancer,” critic Neil Wright calls Power’s book “a compelling work, a weaving of many ancestral stories and legends into a true narrative whole; these stories, tracing the history of two tribal families, imply the incompatibility of the white and tribal worlds but do not disallow their mingling and mutual knowledge of each other.” Wright continues to note, “this book [...] could be called a feminist piece, a search for identity, or a religious psychomachia; but I believe that its real literary home is in the realm of magical realism” (39).

Wright basically reviews the events that take place in the book, but it is in his introduction to the article that he reveals a critical view on spiritual or supernatural events that take place in American Indian literature:

The latest entry into the canon of American literature may well be the literature of the indigenous Americans themselves, which has heretofore been received only as mythology. Surely we ought to greet this new arrival with warm welcome: fresh voices to be heard, new material to fathom, and a formerly suppressed world view now open to elaboration; however, there is irony in store for Western tradition as it prepares to receive the Indian legacy in literary form. For it is no secret that the vital core of tribal Indian life and the essence of Indian identity are absolutely incompatible with the rational, technological, and spiritual groundwork of the West. This, in fact, is the subtext of a very recent and well-wrought novel in the genre, Susan Power’s The Grass Dancer. (39)



Neil Wright is not the only critic to place The Grass Dancer in the genre of magical realism. In “Pan-American (Re)Visions: Magical Realism and Amerindian Cultures in Susan Power’s The Grass Dancer, Gioconda Belli’s La Mujer Habitada, Linda Hogan’s Power, and Mario Vargas Llosa’s El Hablador,” Roland Walter, a critic who is a professor of English and Literary Theory at the Federal University of Pernambuco in Brazil, describes the genre as one that “realizes the hybridization of the natural and the supernatural by focusing on specific historical moments in order to problematize present-day disjunctive realities. It is a form of writing characterized by a dual character: an inward doubleness—the natural and the supernatural” (66). Walter’s ideas about the hybridization of the natural and the supernatural and about memory could prove to be a valuable clue when I analyze the unexplainable events that take place in the “Moonwalk” chapter of Susan Power’s book.

Jacqueline Vaught Brogan calls Power’s book “a radical and subversive call to Native Americans (particularly the Sioux) to resist assimilation within the larger white culture” (112). After a lengthy history regarding other revolutionary pieces of Native American literature, Brogan asserts that the “heroine” of the novel, Red Dress or Cuwignaka Duta, is a representation of Power’s response to American Indian critic Paula Gunn Allen’s request to writers to portray American Indian women in a more representative role:

Paula Gunn Allen forcefully argues that what were largely matriarchal cultures have been rewritten by history and the dominant white culture into patriarchal and violent cultures that belie the women-centered and

peace-loving original Native American ones. [...] In “Stealing the Thunder,” a chapter subtitled “Future Visions for American Indian Women, Tribes, and Literary Studies,” Paula Gunn Allen provocatively calls upon the power of a new ‘imagination’ which will see women again as (albeit largely pacifist women) at the center of American tribal history and literature. And it is to this call that I believe Susan Power responds in The Grass Dancer. (Brogan 114)

Although most of the criticism in this article is politically based, Brogan also addresses the spirituality of Power’s novel, suggesting that the book incorporates elements of ritual and dream, including

Harley Wind Soldier seeing his grandmother, Margaret Many Wounds (a character who notably rejects Catholicism on her deathbed in favor of her native Sioux faith), literally walking on the moon even as the first astronauts do. In fact, when one daughter tries to interest her in watching the astronauts by claiming ‘it will be history,’ Margaret Many Wounds retorts, ‘It’s all history’ (115) –a remark that validates the spiritual component of the book as being as real as actual events. (Brogan 112)

#### Overview of the “Moonwalk” Chapter

Margaret Many Wounds was dying. She knew it because she could feel and see herself fading away. In her last days, Margaret refused the Catholic faith that she had adopted and “recovered her old faith from her youth, from the old days when there was

magic, before the concept of sin had washed over Dakota people [...] She took to praying to Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit of her childhood, who had not been a jealous God, she thought, but had waited patiently for her to honor Him again” (Power 101).

In order to better prepare her mother for death, Margaret’s daughter Lydia wrote and asked her twin sister, Evie, to return home. Lydia still lived on the reservation with her mother and had not spoken since a tragic accident five years earlier had taken the life of her husband, Calvin Wind Soldier. While thousands of Americans flocked to Florida to witness history being made by astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Mike Collins as they prepared to launch from the Earth on their rocket to the moon, Evie and her husband Philbert, a retired rodeo cowboy, made a pilgrimage from Minneapolis to South Dakota in one day in order to take care of Evie’s mother during her last days.

Margaret asked for one last bowl of Sioux corn soup, which “had been a staple on the reservation, but was increasingly a delicacy, as it required extensive preparation” (Power 99-100). The twin sisters prepared the corn soup for Margaret, which would take about two days to make. Philbert kept tabs on Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins in orbit around the Earth by listening to updates on the radio. The night before the lunar landing, several apparent apparitions magically appeared and attended Margaret’s bedside, it seemed that they were there to hear a deathbed confession that Margaret was ready to make.

Evie overheard her mother’s confession as she lied on the floor trying to sleep beside the husband whom she married because of a supposed view of her father (one that she made up, because she never knew her father). Margaret had been married, when she

was young, to an Indian who had recently come home from the “white” schools in the east. She taught him to find himself among the conventions, cultures and the way of life that he had forgotten while he was away at school. Margaret and her new husband’s relationship was a strong one, but it was cut short, lasting only two years, as her new husband died of tuberculosis. Many years later, in 1942 during a time of world war, Margaret found herself working in a prison camp as a nurse. “They called me a nurse, but I’d had no training, just a willingness to work with prisoners of war,” she said. “About a thousand of them were in the Bismarck camp” (Power 109). During this time, Margaret carried on an affair with a Japanese-American doctor who had lost his wife to food poisoning. That Japanese-American turned out to be Evie and Lydia’s father. Margaret returned to the reservation and lied about the true identity of the man who had gotten her pregnant, by claiming that the man was a Canadian Indian. Margaret explained to the ostensible crowd that gathered around her bed, “maybe I was worried my girls would be teased because their mother went to bed with the Enemy. Maybe I was afraid that people would call them ’breeds” (Power 111). Evie was stunned to hear the true identity of her father and of the way that her mother had lied to her, her twin sister, and anyone else who would listen.

Margaret had told her daughters their father was a Blood Indian from Calgary. A champion rodeo rider who had won the All-Around title in North Dakota the year that Margaret was forty-seven and starting to get an itch. He had been ten years younger, but crazy in love, taking Margaret home to Canada, where they married. Eventually he’d left her and she

made her way back to the reservation to have Evie and Lydia.

That was the legend. (Power 111-112)

Margaret's confession stunned Evie, but she kept it to herself, maybe because she had married Philbert, foolishly, on a supposed vision of her rodeo-star father, whom she named "Sonny Porter." As Evie pondered what she had just heard, her husband Philbert brought the television from her sister's house so that Margaret could see the astronauts as they prepared to walk on the moon. When told that the astronauts were getting ready to make history by being the first people to walk on the moon, Margaret made another surprising confession: "I've been there," she said. "When I was little, [...] my grandfather woke me up in the middle of the night [and] carried me on his shoulders to a field of prairie grass as high as his waist. He showed me the moon, told me I could go there if I wanted to bad enough. And for just one second I was really there, looking back at the spinning earth, bright as a blue eye (Power 113).

Margaret paid little or no attention to what was happening on the television; she concentrated on trying to reach her grandson, Harley, to teach him some valuable family lessons. She told him about the dress that belonged to her grandmother that was locked away in the Field Museum in Chicago. She wanted to make sure that someone in the family would attempt to liberate it some day. Meanwhile, "Evie was desperate for the astronauts to leave their vehicle and walk on the moon. She wanted to see it happen to know it was real: a scientific miracle worked out with equations. 'It will be history,' she said aloud," and her mother replied that "it's all history" (Power 115).

After the corn soup was discovered to be ready, Evie tried to serve it to her

mother, only to find out that Margaret had already passed away. As Evie and Lydia prepared their mother for burial, Harley watched the television with amazement as his grandmother appeared on the moon. She danced in a step that Harley recognized as Sioux powwow toward the astronauts:

Her progress was steady, and she didn't bounce like the men in space suits [...]. Margaret danced beyond the astronauts and their stiff metal flag. She kept moving forward until she came to the beginning of her trail, mired in the gritty Lake of Dreams. She raised a foot and found Wanagi Tacanku, the Spirit Road, rippling beneath her feet. She set off, no longer dancing, walking briskly towards the council fire, five steps beyond the edge of the universe. (Power 121-122)

#### “Moonwalk” Chapter as a Short Story

In a review of Power's book, titled “*Grass Dancer* Evokes Past, Present” found in the Princeton Weekly Bulletin, Caroline Moseley writes that “the book originated with ‘an image,’ says the author. ‘I blame anesthesia a bit. I was recovering from an appendectomy and had an image of a Dakota woman in a beautiful traditional buckskin dress dancing on the moon” (Moseley). Power wrote the short story “Moonwalk” at a creative writer's workshop and soon had the insight that a book could be written around the characters that she had created.

This fact led me to believe that the “Moonwalk” chapter could be read as a short story. If the chapter could be read as a short story, then I would be able to have several

undergraduate students read it to serve as a panel of casual, or untrained readers. This assignment of reading the short story would also save time that would be taken up by the casual readers having to read the whole novel. I believed that the chapter would be a sufficient testing ground for the casual readers and if I were to interview them I could determine how untrained readers formatted their responses to the supernatural events that take place in this wildly outlandish tale.

To get a better sense of whether my theory on the chapter as a short story would hold, I asked each graduate student whether they thought that the chapter worked as an effective short story and had them answer questions about their expectations of casual readers of the “Moonwalk” chapter.

*Ainsley* said that she thought that the chapter would work as a short story and that “all of the characters are told about through their actions. It could stand-alone” (Appendix A). She said that she thought that Harley was the main character of the short story because “everything depends on how Harley is responding; Harley is the one who sees her on the moon; everyone else is oblivious to it; it’s all about Harley...Margaret could be construed by some as the main character, but I think that Harley is definitely the main character in the short story” (Appendix A).

*Alastair* didn’t agree. “I would have to say that Margaret is the main character in the chapter, or short story ‘Moonwalk.’ But Harley is a main focus; he is the next generation. Margaret reaches out to him, to pass on some family business” (Appendix B). He also disagreed about the chapter making an effective short story. He thinks that it works as a short story, but not a good one:

Paul: Do you think that this chapter works as a short story?

Alastair: I say yes, but to take this chapter out of context of the novel seems to leave the reader asking so much. Power would be asking an awful lot of her intended audience to accept these characters at their full depth—almost too much. This chapter as a short story has too much of a dispersed focus. The focus is too wide to expect one person’s narrow point of view to experience things through that character. You have so much going on with Margaret’s struggle to get out the truth and to reach out to Harley, Harley’s first interactions with the spirit world and how he handles it, and also Evie who experiences something traumatizing like finding out her vision of her father has been way off. The reader is pulled in three different directions. With that said, a reader can get something out of this chapter. In my opinion, it can stand alone as a short story, but it’s not a very good one. (Appendix B)

*Amena* had read the chapter as a short story before reading the entire novel, but she didn’t remember it until she started reading. She also related her feelings on whether the students would have a hard time with the chapter if they read it as a short story:

I think that it definitely works as a short story, and I had actually read it, myself, as a short story although I didn’t realize it until I reread it in The Grass Dancer, and, like, I knew that I had read it before as a short story. I think it does work, I think it would challenge my students, we have recently been reading stories that challenge them, we just read ...“Fleur,”



we just read “Fleur” (by Louise Erdrich). And they did have some trouble with that, but a lot of them were able to go with it and say that this is the Native American experience and who are we to judge this where someone might read about a mainline “Christian” religious experience and doubt it, so...I think that they would need help, trying to understand it, but I think that it would work for them. (Appendix C)

*Andra* also believed that the chapter works as a short story, because “the characters are pretty well developed and [...] there is resolution, because at the end when she passes away, Harley has hope that there is life after death.” She also believes that the main character in the “Moonwalk” chapter is “The grandmother, Margaret, [...] because the action centers around her, basically. She creates the action and the all of the tension and feelings between the members of the family” (Appendix D).

*Abey* agrees with *Andra*:

I think it could work as a short story; it’s just about Harley and his relationship with his grandma, which was the primary relationship in the story. Evie and everyone else are secondary, you know supporting characters. But I think it’s nice to have the novel around it, you know so we get to know everyone a little bit more. I want to say Harley [is the main character of the story], but I think it would have to be the grandmother, [Margaret]. (Appendix E)

I decided to go ahead with my plan to use the short story or chapter “Moonwalk” for casual readers to read, instead of having them reading the entire novel. The five

graduate students all seemed to agree with me that the chapter made an effective short story, although some of them had contrasting ideas about who the main character of the story was. Having the casual readers read this chapter, in my opinion, would make a useful exercise in better understanding untrained readers' responses to supernatural events in American Indian literatures.

## METHODS

To understand how readers might respond to Power's spiritual fiction, I selected five graduate students who had previously read The Grass Dancer while they were in an American Indian Literatures graduate course. I interviewed them to get their personal responses to the book. To ensure that they answered honestly, I promised to assign them fictitious names to protect their identity. *Alastair*, whose ultimate goal is to be a successful writer himself, was the only male graduate student interviewed for the purposes of this study; the other four were females. *Ainsley* and *Amena* are both teachers of undergraduate literature and writing. In addition to what they had to say about the believability of Power's fiction, I was interested in these two because I thought that it might be appealing to see how they expected undergraduate readers to accept the spiritual fiction that occurs in Power's integral chapter formed from the short story "Moonwalk." For this exercise I also selected *Abey* and *Andra*, two graduate students who are also teachers. *Abey* is a middle school teacher, and *Andra* teaches composition at a community college.

*Alastair*, *Ainsley*, *Amena*, *Abey* and *Andra* all happily volunteered their services, and each was more than willing to offer up the responses that they had to the spirituality and supernatural events that take place in the novel. I asked how the graduate students received the supernatural events in the "Moonwalk" chapter, and their responses helped me to better understand how trained readers who read this book respond to the events in question. In a different context, Sydney Bolt, author of the book The Right Response contends that trained fiction readers are few and far between:

Few students in further education are trained fiction readers: all they have been taught is how to collect information from printed words. At school, when they have read a novel, the lesson has usually taken the form of ‘comprehension’ of the narrative as manifest in the ability to answer [certain] questions. (Bolt 59)

Despite Bolt’s contention, the graduate students in the field of English whom I selected for this study would surely make up a valuable group of trained readers, as they have all taken several literature courses and at least one graduate level theory course. They also had the benefit of having been through the American Indian Literatures graduate course at the university, and they were all pretty well adapted to both the conventions of the novel as a genre and to American Indian literature as a field.

To more fully understand how casual readers would accept the supernatural events, I needed to get the responses of readers who had not already read the book for a class. Since Power first wrote the chapter at a graduate workshop as a short story, I selected three more readers to read just the “Moonwalk” chapter. Just as I changed the names of the graduate students, I also selected three false names for the casual readers. I asked the following to read the chapter while they were being observed: *Aidan*, a male community college student majoring in architectural design; *Aileen*, a female student at a community college who is undecided about her career; and *Alanna*, who is an undergraduate at a university interested in the study of English.

I instructed each “casual reader” to stop *if and when* they had any problems with *any* part of the story. After they read, I asked them specific questions. I observed each

one of them during the reading to determine whether their physical behavior would be an indicator of their overall enjoyment of the text. With the responses of the “casual readers,” *Aidan*, *Aileen*, and *Alanna*, I would be able to formulate opinions on whether or not the supernatural events that occur in this chapter are believable, and I also would get some indication of just how effective “Moonwalk” is as a short story.

## RESULTS

### Graduate Students

I asked the graduate students *Alastair*, *Ainsley*, *Amena*, *Abey* and *Andra* a variety of questions, ranging from whether they actually believed the spiritual events in the chapter took place to how they thought that the chapter fits into the rest of the book. I asked them to review the book and to bring any notes that they had made when initially reading it to the interview. The only information that they had prior to the interview was that I would be concentrating primarily on the “Moonwalk” chapter, but I also informed them that they might mention responses to any part of the book if they liked. In my opinion, the way that the interviews went gauged how much the interviewed person enjoyed reading the book; the tone, as well as the actual verbal responses, would be small tests that I hoped would provide further information on how they received the supernatural events.

Hearing how they responded allowed me to formulate an opinion on how each one of them accepted the mystical matter in question. To get a primary sense of their enjoyment or disapproval of the supernatural information, I began each interview with the same question: “Did you enjoy reading The Grass Dancer?” According to their responses, I could judge how well the spirituality was received.

### Alastair

*Alastair* gave lengthy and complete answers and needed no reminders when asked to recall a portion of the book. The interview took place at *Alistair*'s apartment, where we casually talked with one another in an environment that was anything but institutional.

He seemed genuinely interested in how the investigation would work and was more than willing to participate.

When I asked *Alastair* the initial question “Did you enjoy the book?” he immediately insisted that he did. His instantaneous approval of the book led me to believe that he did actually enjoy reading The Grass Dancer, which surprised me. I thought that *Alastair* would be quick to criticize the book; maybe I thought that he would question some of the supernatural occurrences in the book or maybe I thought that he would be a skeptic. When asked who the main character of the book was, he stated: “I stand by the fact that it is Harley because he is the one who has the epiphany at the end; it is his moment, and it seems like the book is totally centered on him. He is the character that develops more than anyone else” (Appendix B).

Although *Alastair* thought that the main character of the book was Harley, “a mystical kid, who is in tune with his grandmother’s way of life and who hasn’t been exposed to the white influences yet” (Appendix B), he stated that he believed that Margaret is the central character in the “Moonwalk” chapter. “I would have to say that Margaret is the main character in the chapter, or short story ‘Moonwalk.’ Harley is a main focus; [but] he is the next generation. Margaret reaches out to him, to pass on some family business” (Appendix B). *Alastair* critiqued each character in the chapter with thoughtful commentary before ultimately ostracizing Evie quite vehemently. (This criticism or dislike is something that other readers would echo):

Evie experiences total disillusionment in this chapter. She married a guy on an imagined vision of her father, there is a realization that her mother

has lied to her, but she does not change. For instance, when Margaret has passed, her daughters begin to prepare her body. Lydia thinks ‘you will fly with powerful wings,’ she displays the tribal mode of thinking. But Evie is totally in the white world; she thinks: ‘you will never dance again.’ Evie doesn’t really change in this chapter; she cannot be the main character. (Appendix B)

*Alastair* was obviously passionate about the book. He almost hated Evie, the character. He had really given this opportunity to vent some thought. His ideas about the magic and spirituality, I thought, would be complex and emotional. The next line of questioning went as follows:

Paul: So, do you believe the magic and spirituality that takes place in this chapter and in the book as a whole?

Alastair: I think that Susan Power is asking me to believe in the world of this novel, that the paranormal, the magic and the spirit world all do exist. Not in the world that you and I live in. Overall, I think that she does a very good job; I think that it is totally believable. I believe what Power is asking me to believe.

Paul: Would you say that in this chapter, you started to believe the magic in the book was real, or that maybe there was a chance that it was real?

Alastair: I can tell you that while reading this chapter I finally believed that these people weren’t just being over-imaginative. However, with that being said, we have to be able to question the narrator.



Paul: You don't trust the narrator?

Alastair: Well there is no way of knowing if we can. I mean, the magic never happens in front of a crowd, does it? No group of people ever witnesses it. There is no hard, hard evidence. The magic always takes place in an intimate group, or more often than not to one person. Power doesn't make it obvious if the magic is real or not. She may have been after a wide readership. (Appendix B)

I thought that there was an important connection between the appearance of a white woman's ghost that occurs in "The Medicine Hole" chapter and the events that take place in the "Moonwalk" chapter. In "The Medicine Hole" chapter, Herod Small War awakes to find that he is embraced with the ghost of a former lover:

*Yes, she whispered. I forgive you.* She pulled away then, drifting from my embrace. I opened my eyes and found myself looking at Clara. Her hands were full of the bent pins she used to fasten her hair in a tight bun. Clara blew me a kiss with her white fingers and floated upward to the ceiling. She smoothed her bib apron with a meaty hand and used its edge to clean the windowpane before gliding through it.

My tongue was locked to the roof of my mouth. As a Yuwipi man, I had heard spirit voices and encountered dead ancestors, but a white ghost was something different altogether. I glanced at the floor. Archie and the two boys slept soundly, shivering in their damp clothes. Their empty hands were curled into fists. (Power 94-95)

I asked Alastair about Clara's ghost and a possible connection to "Moonwalk." *Alastair* expressed his view about the appearance of Clara's ghost and the connection with the spirituality that occurs in the next chapter when he admitted how he really felt about the events as he read:

Herod is experiencing what the narrator says he is experiencing. Susan Power is clever; she doesn't make it obvious. Herod, when he sees the Ghost is just waking up from sleeping. He is in a dreamlike state; you know, he is just waking up. Should we believe what he sees? We want to believe it. Power wants us to believe it. She doesn't want to undercut her audience; she wants to keep everyone involved. She knows that some people won't believe the ghost's visit, so she makes Herod sleepy when he reportedly sees it—you can say that he is dreaming if you don't believe in ghosts. Along the same lines, you could say that Harley was a little kid when he saw his grandmother walking on the moon. This way, Power can defend her writing. (Appendix B)

Although Alistair admits to believing the spirituality and also divulges that while reading this chapter he finally believed that the people in the book weren't just being "over-imaginative," he refuses to believe that Margaret actually had an audience attending to her deathbed confession, described by Power in the following way:

Margaret tried to sleep, but she heard scuffling feet and smothered giggles at the foot of her bed. They were sitting on little wooden chairs, facing her bed, waiting like an audience. She started to ask them who they

were, and caught herself just in time. It would be rude. Dakota hospitality required that she welcome all visitors.

“Do you want me to tell you the story?” Margaret asked the dark figures. “It’s been in my head for many days now.” They all nodded. Margaret closed her eyes and pressed her hands together. She began to speak: [...]. (106)

Alastair works his way through the text to determine that Margaret is hallucinating during this part of the story.

Paul: Was there anything that bothered you in this chapter?

Alastair: Yes

Paul: So you don’t believe that there was an audience listening to her confession?

Alastair: No, it sounds to me like Margaret is at this point—hallucinating. Power couldn’t expect us to believe it. Evie has no reaction, and she is alone. Had Evie reacted strangely or come out and said that she saw ancestors looking in the windows—I might be willing to believe that. In the spirit world, logic does not apply, but this is the real world, the one where Evie lives. (Appendix B)

*Alastair* believes what Power wants him to believe. He fails to see through the deception in regards to the intent of the author and he demands that the reader must be able to question the narrator. He investigates each character with fervor, often becoming almost angry with them because of their actions. In my opinion he spoke truthfully when

he said, “ I can tell you that while reading this chapter I finally believed that these people weren’t just being over-imaginative” (Appendix B).

Ainsley

Although *Ainsley* seemed to mix up the characters at one point, she often appeared to be reading my mind, thinking ahead, trying to guess where the questions were leading. I interviewed her in a quiet, charming office that she shares with a few other teachers, which is located in a hidden position under the stairs of a passageway in the English Department. *Ainsley* actually contacted me later, to add something that she thought about after our initial interview. She was obviously interested in the investigation.

*Ainsley* reported to me that she did like the book and that she thought that the main character of the novel was Harley, “because everything in the book is centered on Harley; the quest for his identity, the grass dancing issue, the female grass dancer Pumpkin; everything relates to Harley” (Appendix A). Just as I had asked *Alastair*, I asked *Ainsley* who the main character of the “Moonwalk” chapter was:

Paul: Just as I asked you who the main character of the book is, who is the main character of this short story?

Ainsley: Harley.

*Paul: Harley is the main character of the short story? Why?*

Ainsley: Because everything depends on how Harley is responding, Harley is the one who sees her on the moon everyone else is oblivious to it; it’s all about Harley.

Paul: So you would say that it's all about Harley and not all about Margaret.

Ainsley: Margaret could be construed by some as the main character, but I think that Harley is definitely the main character in the short story.

(Appendix A)

I originally thought that *Ainsley* wasn't so sure about her response to this question or that she hadn't put much thought into this part of the interview, partly because she admitted that there is a chance that Margaret could be the main character of the chapter but also because she didn't really continue to elaborate on her feelings after I questioned her on the issue. I continued to feel that she wasn't quite into the interview when I asked her about her responses to the supernatural phenomena that occur in the "Moonwalk" chapter:

Paul: While reading the chapter did you view the events as actual, or as of someone's imagination? Did you believe the magic? Does Margaret really have an audience on her deathbed?

Ainsley: Yeah.

*Paul: She does?*

Ainsley: Yeah.

Paul: Um...does Harley really have the moon enter his head?

Ainsley: Sure I think the reader has the moon enter their head when they read this text, as well.

Paul: The reader has the moon enter his head?

Ainsley: Yeah, along with Harley, I think that you are reading that through him.

*Paul: All right. So you did believe that there was some supernatural...*

Ainsley: Absolutely.

*Paul: While you were reading?*

Ainsley: Mmhh [Affirmative]. (Appendix A)

*Ainsley's* guarded answers again led me to question her interest in the novel, as it was almost clear to me that she was giving standard literary answers to my questions. However, she soon proved to me that she had put some deep thought into the text when I asked her about the appearance of Clara, the ghost of a white woman that appears in the chapter previous to the "Moonwalk" chapter. She began to study my questions more closely, and almost appeared to be one step ahead of the investigation at times:

Paul: Clara's Ghost appears in the chapter before the Moonwalk chapter, in the chapter called "The Medicine Hole." In that chapter, Herod Small War sees the ghost of Clara, a white woman, but when he sees it he is in a dreamlike state...

Ainsley: Do I think he sees it?

Paul: And do you think there is a connection with what happens in the next chapter [Moonwalk]?

Ainsley: I think he definitely sees it, and I also think it goes back... like a link to his sexuality too, because he is having problems with his wife, I remember, and then he recalls the sexual encounter with the woman, the

ghost, and even though he may not turn away, in the same way he is abandoning the marriage with his wife. So, I definitely believe there is a spiritual connection, and I do believe he sees the ghost, but it also is a manifestation of what is going on, and that is his main concern.

Paul: So it's possible that it's really happening, it's also possible that he is really just concerned about his relationship with women?

Ainsley: I think that it's really happening, but maybe the ghost is just coming to him to remind him or make him aware of what is going on in his life. I feel like there is a purpose for the ghost's visit to him. Maybe he only sees the ghost because he is concerned with the way he treated the woman and the way he treated his wife. (Appendix A)

As stated earlier, Ainsley is a teacher of undergraduate literature and writing. I thought that it would be interesting to get her opinion on whether this chapter would be hard for her students, or students in general, to understand the complex information that is relayed in the "Moonwalk" chapter. She stated that she thought that the students would have a hard time grasping the information and that they would be confused and would ultimately need more information, "because they would want everything explained and there are points in the chapter that can be kind of confusing" (Appendix A). She also remarked that the reality of the actual moonwalk that involved the astronauts, Armstrong and Aldrin, made the instance of Margaret dancing on the moon problematic:

Paul: Is there anything else, specifically, that Power does to make the story more believable? Is it because the chapter involves an historical

event? Is it strictly because the astronauts' moonwalk did take place historically, is it because you have seen actual footage of these astronauts bouncing up and down on the moon, and that it becomes as if you were there?

Ainsley: Umm...to make it more visual?

*Paul: Because it is so visual, does that make it more real?*

Ainsley: I think it is more problematic because it is such a visual and historical event.

*Paul: It's problematic?*

Ainsley: Yeah. Because we are so science based it would be harder, it would be more of a challenge, the way that she sets it up.

Paul: So you think that that would lead to a problem for more resistant readers.

Ainsley: Yeah. Because we have been taught this is what the moon is and this is what it looks like, so how on earth can this woman be dancing through Neil Armstrong? We have seen the footage; we know that it didn't happen. (Appendix A)

*Ainsley's* responses began as standard literary responses, mentioning "link[s] to sexuality," "spiritual connections," "manifestation[s]" of sexuality (Appendix A). However, her notion that readers might have problems with the visual images of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, reality, and the literary world of The Grass Dancer remained etched in my memory and eventually forced me to question other readers about the



conundrum.

Amena

My interview with *Amena* took place in a busy section of the English department at the university. We were interrupted several times by individuals who failed to notice an interview was taking place. All the same, *Amena* dutifully answered my questions, smiling and laughing her way through the light-hearted responses and lowering her voice when necessary to make sure that her more serious testimony escaped the ears of the passers-by. *Amena* was the first reader who actually gave me some deep and personal information to back up why she believed in the supernatural events that took place in “Moonwalk.”

*Amena* stated that she enjoyed the book, which I immediately believed to be the truth, due to the eagerness that she displayed when asked the question. She believed that Harley is the main character of the book, primarily “because [the novel] seems to open with him and his concerns and then it closes out with some kind of understanding of his place in the world; so even though it seems there are other characters that are important, it seems to be him who we are ultimately concerned with as readers” (Appendix C).

*Amena* also eagerly stated that she believed the supernatural events that took place in the “Moonwalk” chapter because she has experienced unexplainable events and that made it easier for her to accept the events in the story as true: “I am non-traditional student, and I have lived long enough that I have lost people that I have loved, and I also lived in a house that I think was probably haunted... and I know that sounds flakey, but there it is...[laughs]...I think from that standpoint I would have given credence to these

events” (Appendix C).

Believability is something that *Amena* came back to again, when she described how Susan Power kept her interest while she was reading the book.

I think that the way that she develops her characters and got me so involved in the characters’ lives that [it] encouraged me even more to believe it, because if I believe in the characters then I don’t want to think that they are insane or that they are so off-based that they are believing in these just wildly improbable things. If I trust her construction of these characters and believe in these characters then I am more inclined to go along with the events. (Appendix C)

When asked about Clara’s ghost in “The Medicine Hole” chapter, *Amena* admitted that the ghost’s appearance could be viewed in different ways, but her acceptance of other supernatural events as well as other personal beliefs led her to view the ghost as real:

Paul: Let’s see, I wanted to talk to you a minute about Clara’s ghost. In the “Medicine Hole” chapter, the chapter that comes before the “Moonwalk” chapter, Herod Small War, the healer, sees the ghost of a white woman who is his former lover. Could it be read that Herod is dreaming when he sees Clara, the ghost of his former lover? In other words, do you view the events that take place in this chapter as actual, does this ghost really appear, or do you think that she is a figment of Herod’s imagination?

Amena: I think that it can either be a ghost or it can be him dreaming but given as many supernatural events that there are in the whole book I would tend to believe that she really is a ghost. And that is not that shocking to me as a reader, because I have had experiences myself where certain unexplained things have happened and I think that if you poll any given number of people that, if they're honest, that they will admit that, perhaps when a loved one has died, something, not necessarily a full blown ghost, but there has been some kind of...an event that is not particularly explainable by scientific methods.

Paul: [...] Do you see a connection with the "Moonwalk" chapter?

Amena: I would say from the standpoint of, it sets us up as readers to...this is one more point in The Grass Dancer, where I think that [Susan Power] is encouraging us, bit by bit, to believe in these supernatural things, if we were not willing to, but by the time...It's like a building of one event and another event and another event so that she is trying to penetrate our consciousness, I think, and say that this is part of the Native American experience and she is trying to say, I think, "just go with it."

(Appendix C)

I wanted to get *Amena's* thoughts on whether or not this chapter works as a short story, and also I wanted to see what she thought about how her students would respond to the chapter, if it were read as a short story. *Amena* stated that "it definitely works as a short story, and I had actually read it, myself, as a short story although I didn't realize it

until I reread it in The Grass Dancer” (Appendix C). She expressed her opinions about her students’ responses by saying,

I think it does work, I think it would challenge my students, we have recently been reading stories that challenge them, we just read [...] “Fleur” [by Louise Erdrich]. And they did have some trouble with that, but a lot of them were able to go with it and say that “this is the Native American experience,” and “who are we to judge this where someone might read about a mainline “Christian” religious experience and doubt it,” so [...] I think that they would need help, trying to understand it, but I think that it would work for them. (Appendix C)

Andra

*Andra*’s interview took place in a coffee shop that is attached to the university library. Her responses were standard literary responses, she delivered them as if she were discussing the text in a classroom setting; there was no real personal information divulged. She seemed focused on the critical side of the literature, as if she almost refused to link any personal matters with the reading of the text.

Her responses were arguably the most critical of all of the respondents in this exercise. I don’t want to make it seem as if *Andra* didn’t care about the book, or that she only knows how to respond critically: other persons interviewed talked about critical aspects of the story; however, I expected *Andra* to give me a clue as to what her personal responses were or why she believed or discounted the spirituality in the text, and she did not.

*Andra* stated that she enjoyed reading The Grass Dancer and that she “believed in the book” (Appendix D). When asked about the main character of the book, she stated that she believed that there were “many main characters in this book. Particularly Harley and Charlene come to mind, although it seems like Pumpkin is always there. I feel like there is more of a focus on them” (Appendix D).

When asked if the “Moonwalk” chapter was an important and integral part of the novel as a whole, *Andra* downplayed it, noting some important features of the chapter, such as “family dynamics.” She finished her analysis of the chapter, which I had previously labeled the central chapter of the book, by explaining that “saying the chapter is central to the book is complicating because it helps Harley, but at the same time it doesn’t resolve. He still has an identity crisis later” (Appendix D).

To better understand how *Andra* accepted some of the supernatural events that take place in the book, my questioning led in the direction of Margaret Many Wounds and Clara’s ghost:

Paul: In that chapter, there are several events that can be construed as supernatural. Harley sees his grandmother walking on the moon, he has the moon enter his head, and Margaret appears to have an audience at the foot of her bed. When you are reading, do you believe that it is actually happening?

*Andra*: I considered it to be a metaphor when I read it.

Paul: So it wasn’t really happening, she wasn’t really walking on the moon?

Andra: No, I see it as a metaphor, as like a global experience.

Paul: In the chapter that comes before this one, the one titled “The Medicine Hole,” Herod Small War sees a ghost of his former lover Clara. Does he see this ghost or is this another metaphor?

Andra: I believe that he sees that ghost.

Paul: He sees it, really?

Andra: Yes, because she appears to other people as well in the novel. She appears and talks to Charlene and I think that she reappears at the end.

Paul: Is there a connection to the events in this chapter and the events that take place in the next chapter, the “Moonwalk” chapter?

Andra: I didn’t see a connection at that time. I considered them to be separate events. (Appendix D)

### Abey

*Abey* was most definitely the one who was touched by the book the most. She told me, before the interview and during it, that this book made her cry. Her responses were direct and to the point, and through her reactions it was easy to see that she thoroughly enjoyed The Grass Dancer. *Abey*’s interview took place in a busy hallway in the English department, but still she shared her personal responses and was committed to giving me her sincere approval of the book.

*Abey* told me that she loved the book and that she cried while reading this book, in two specific instances. “It happened twice,” she admitted. “When the grandmother

died and when she was dancing on the moon. I could see it” (Appendix E). *Abey* had made a personal connection with the fiction. She told me that she thought that Harley was the main character of the book, because it relates mostly “about his roots and history, and [...] it describes who he is and the experiences that he is going through because he is a Native American” (Appendix E).

Abey said that she thought that the “Moonwalk” chapter was really important because it is the point in the novel when he is introduced to his connections to the spiritual world and also when he is shown his relation to his heritage through his grandmother. She also mentioned the rituals: making the corn soup and preparing Margaret for burial. “It’s very ritualistic. This chapter is very intense,” she said (Appendix E). Her emphatic responses to the supernatural events that occur in the chapter made her appear to be captured by the fiction:

Paul: While reading the Moonwalk chapter, did you view the apparently supernatural events that were taking place as actual?

Abey: Oh, they’re real.

Paul: So does Margaret actually have an audience?

Abey: A spiritual audience.

Paul: So they’re real spirits?

Abey: Yes.

Paul: They’re ghosts?

Abey: Yes.

Paul: When Harley has the moon enter his head, is that a spiritual event or

is that Harley imagining, is that his imagination?

Abey: I think it is a spiritual or supernatural event.

Paul: Did you believe it?

Abey: Completely.

Paul: Another supernatural event that takes place in the book, but not in this chapter, in the one just before this one, in “The Medicine Hole,” Herod Small War sees the ghost of the white woman Clara. Does Herod really see this ghost or is it a figment of his imagination? Herod is in a dreamlike state and has just awakened from sleep.

Abey: Well, I thought that it was just another ghost story. I mean we see this ghost, and then we see the ghost of the grandmother in the next chapter.

Paul: Is there a connection between that ghost and this ghost? Is there a parallel between the two; is there something that Power is doing to tie these two together?

Abey: I think that maybe she wants the reader to see these women ghosts as like looking out for the men that they left behind. (Appendix E)

*Abey* also provided an interesting counterpoint to the point raised by *Ainsley* in regards to the reality of the astronauts on the moon and how it affects the reader’s perceptions of Margaret’s “Moonwalk.” She explains that “when the astronauts are on the moon and she is dancing around and through them it kind of situates or positions her in history [...] it’s like her spirit can transcend time and space, [making] it more



powerful, [...] because she's out there and they don't even realize that she's out there, because they have no connection to her; but Harley does and Harley can see her"

(Appendix E).

### Casual Readers

I asked *Alanna*, *Aidan*, and *Aileen* to read the chapter, stopping to talk aloud about any problems that they encountered on the way to the end if they needed to. Each "casual reader" finished reading the material without stopping to admit any problems, before they answered the questions that I had prepared for them. Their responses were shorter than the graduate students', and as could be expected they seemed to be less analytical than graduate student readers. This simplicity was welcome to me as it offered what casual readers truly think when reading a text that may be unusual to them.

#### Alanna

*Alanna* read the "Moonwalk" chapter fairly quickly, finding one spot of trouble, but not stopping to talk through it. She said that she enjoyed reading the story, and that it kept her attention. She admitted to not liking Evie because "she was a little negative towards her mother and the rest of the characters" (Appendix F). Her trouble came when Margaret was giving her deathbed confession about the true identity of the father of her twin daughters and an audience of listeners suddenly appears "out of nowhere" to overhear it:

Alanna: The only part that I was confused on was when Margaret was

talking to the people at the end of her bed, um...I really didn't know what was going on there, I just figured that she was losing it, you know being that close to death.

Paul: So you really don't believe that there was an audience there, that it was just something in her head?

Alanna: Yeah, but at least it gave her a chance to open up and like let out some family secrets...her daughter Evie actually found out who her father was. (Appendix F)

*Alanna* had no problems with what she calls “spiritual, or almost religious” events that lead to Margaret’s appearance on the moon. “It is almost like a family tradition,” *Alanna* reveals; “a passing down of information from one generation to the next. Her grandson could really feel that she was there and that she was going to be a part of his life forever” (Appendix F). The phenomena in this chapter were all easy for her to believe, because she claims to have had a near-death experience during which her grandfather appeared to her that she related to the events in the story: “it was easy for me to understand and believe because...I mean well, ‘cause [laughs] I’ve had close encounters with death, and like, I saw my grandfather there...I had a traumatic accident, I fell off of a cliff, and I almost died; I felt his presence there with me, so this was easy for me to understand” (Appendix F).

Aidan

*Aidan* appeared to struggle a little while reading the short story, sometimes

breathing an impatient sigh, sometimes physically flipping through the pages to see how many were left. I felt that he was uncomfortable. He told me that he really liked the story, but there were some parts of it that were hard for him to get through. “There were some parts,” he evaluated, “where they were talking about some individual things that was, you know, like dragging down the story... like telling personal... features. Like when they were explaining each individual person... I guess that they want you to see what each person has been through. Like when they were talking about the family history. It was in depth, a little too much” (Appendix G).

*Aidan* said that he liked the idea of having Margaret step out of her body and dance on the moon, but he admits to believing that the appearance of Margaret on the moon was a construction of Harley’s “over-imaginative thinking. I believe that it was a figment of the little boy’s imagination. It was in his mind,” said *Aidan*, “and to him, it was something personal. He was probably closer to her soul than anyone else in the story was” (Appendix G).

I had to know if *Aidan*’s recollection of the real events that occurred on the moon and the reality that these events really happened prevented him in any way from believing that Margaret’s moonwalk really happened. Because that actual event has been drilled in every American’s head, is it harder to believe that Margaret really danced through Neil Armstrong? “Not really,” said *Aidan*. “I thought that her grandson *thought* that he saw his grandmother’s *spirit* dancing on the moon. I can’t say that any ideas that I previously held about the real moonwalk had any effect on the reading of this story that I had” (Appendix G).

To relate to Margaret's deathbed audience, *Aidan* thought back to an old story that his grandmother told to him when he was a small child:

I kind of associated it with a story that my grandmother told me one time. She was like real sick, and she thought that she was going to die. It was right after my grandfather had passed away and I guess she got real down in the dumps and she was in the bed for like four or five days, and she said that on the fourth or fifth day she was laying there and like pictures of um...like...the movies, were on the wall and she thought that she was in them, that she was the lead actress. That story just kind of stuck in my head when I was reading about Margaret in this story.

Paul: So you associated that story about your grandmother with the one about Margaret, and that made it believable to you, because you thought that she was near death and that you have heard first hand reports of near death experiences from your grandmother?

Aidan: Right. That is what explains it. (Appendix G)

Aileen

*Aileen* finished reading the story very quickly, so quickly that I suspected that she just glossed over it. However, after I asked her a few questions it was apparent that she had read and understood the story. She happily admitted that she loved the story and that she did not want to put the book down; she wanted to know more about this family. Just as other readers had, she produced a negative response towards Margaret's daughter Evie:

Aileen: It troubled me that Evie was beyond her mother's stories and tales now. She was too far away from the Indian way of life; she had separated herself from her mother that much. Since she has been off of the reservation for so long, she doesn't want or need to hear the tales. It bothered me.

Paul: So, you don't like Evie?

Aileen: She acts like she is ashamed when she finds out that her father is Japanese; she acted like it bothered her. Because she married Philbert only because she thought that he was like her father. I can understand why she was mad at her mother for not telling her, you know because her mother wouldn't have been able to raise them the way that she did, with them being full blooded. But it just made me mad to think that she was embarrassed to find out that he was Japanese and not an Indian. And also it makes me mad that she only dreamed up the name "Sonny Porter" and called information only one time and then just gave up on it. If she really wanted to know who she was she could have pursued it further.

Paul: So you basically don't like Evie, as a character?

Aileen: Right [Laughs]. (Appendix H)

Although *Aileen* was sure that she didn't like Evie as a character, she wasn't so sure who the main character in the story was; she was torn between Margaret and Evie, but she decided that it probably was Margaret, because the story "is all about her and what is happening to her, [and] it's why they all come together" (Appendix H). She thought that

most of the characters were pretty well developed, except for the Japanese doctor: “I wish they would’ve gone into a little bit more about who he was, and where he ended up. I would have liked to get some more information on him. But other than that I thought they were all pretty well developed, especially Margaret, she was very developed through the stories that she accidentally told her daughter” (Appendix H).

*Aileen* wasn’t born when the astronauts first walked on the moon, but she remembered seeing footage of the event. I asked her if her realization that Neil Armstrong really did walk on the moon prevented her from accepting Power’s claim that Margaret was there, too. She said that even though it’s been placed in her head that these two American guys were there all by themselves, she still could believe that Margaret was dancing there beside them, because of the way that her dad raised her. “He raised us to believe in different things,” she said. “Magical and spiritual things that can happen. Like when my grandmother died, my father said that he could see spirits around her, waiting for her, the same way that it happens in this story” (Appendix H).

## DISCUSSION

*Alastair, Ainsley, Amena, Andra, and Abey* responded differently on several issues but each distinctive response proved something about each reader. *Alastair's* responses proved that his main interest was to determine the author's intentions. His replies were direct, but he continued to question what it was that created his reactions. He believed the magic, but only after he had questioned the narrator and the author's intentions. He stated outright that he didn't trust the narrator.

Well there is no way of knowing if we can. I mean, the magic never happens in front of a crowd, does it? No group of people ever witnesses it. There is no hard, hard evidence. The magic always takes place in an intimate group, or more often than not to one person. Power doesn't make it obvious if the magic is real or not. She may have been after a wide readership. (Appendix B)

His ideas about Power's methods of keeping even the most resistant reader involved were reminiscent of Peter Rabinowitz's ideas about authorial intent. In his book Before Reading he argues that "an author has, in most cases, no firm knowledge of the actual readers who will pick up his or her book. Yet he or she cannot begin to fill up a blank page without making assumptions about the readers' beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions" (999). According to Rabinowitz, "as a result" of the assumptions made about the audience, "authors are forced to guess; they design their books rhetorically for some more or less hypothetical audience which I call the authorial audience. Artistic choices are based on these assumptions—conscious or unconscious—about readers" (999).

*Alastair* found that Power's text keeps the reader involved, in a way, just in case they were resisting the spiritual phenomena, by leaving an opening for them to rationalize the events in a realistic manner. In a similar way, the text can suggest a comparable argument early in the novel. On the opening pages of the narrative, drunken white men give horrible renditions of a very popular and well-accepted song, "Crazy" by Patsy Cline. Since this scene is played out in a country/western bar, complete with a jukebox with punchable numbers, it possibly introduces the casual or untrained reader to the Native American world by associating reservation life with something that the traditional western reader would certainly recognize. The scene, which takes place in an establishment called "Border Beer," effectively introduces the reader to the lifestyle that is described more fully in the pages to come:

Henry Burger's best friend, Lloyd, punched in the jukebox combination for the sixth time that evening. Patsy Cline was singing "Crazy" in that voice Henry recognized as sorrow become liquid, tears glazing her vocal cords.

"Will you give it a rest?!" someone shouted, but it was too dark in Border Beer for Henry to spot the patron.

Lloyd ignored the complaint, howled, "I'm cra-a-azy for lo-o-ovin you-ou," half a measure behind Patsy, while squeezing the long neck of his beer bottle. (Power 3)

This observation could also be applied to the appearance of a white woman's ghost in "The Medicine Hole" chapter. "Clara," the ghost, appears to the Sioux healer



Herod Small War while he is in a dreamlike state. Here the casual reader is given a chance to relate something that he or she knows to be ritual or customary “white” belief to an unknown ritual that may be puzzling if they are not ready for it. This may also be a choice that Power made in order to include those who may be resisting the Indian spirituality in the text.

*Ainsley’s* responses were critical, just as *Alastair’s* were, but they were more concentrated on another critical side of the literature. She believed the supernatural events while she read, but her reasons for believing were different from *Alastair’s*. She seemed really concerned with the pinned up sexuality that was represented by the appearance of Clara, the ghost. To this reader, the magic meant something else. *Ainsley* stated that the ghost might only be appearing to Herod to make him aware of what is going on in his life with respect to how he treats women. She said that she felt like there was a purpose for the ghost’s visit to him; maybe he only saw the ghost because he was concerned with the way he treated the woman, before she was a ghost. Also, according to *Ainsley*, the ghost is supposed to be reminding Herod of the way he has been ignoring his wife, more recently. According to Herod, things have been strange between him and his wife lately:

‘I want us to climax together,’ my wife told me, and all I could picture was the two of us dragging our old bones up the side of Mt. Everest. I was horrified by this sort of talk, which flew in the face of Dakota prudery. I refused to take her seriously.

‘What has come over you?’ I asked her.

She pointed to her books. ‘New ways, Herod. I am learning the new ways and have new expectations.’ She said this boldly, but I noticed that she watched the ground as she spoke.

Truthfully, I was more than a little afraid that I wouldn’t be able to live up to her expectations, rise to the occasion, so to speak. At seventy-six I was in pretty good shape, but sometimes my body went its own way and wouldn’t listen to me. So after a lifetime of nights spent beside Alberta’s soft form, I escaped to the pantry, where the folding cot was hard and the wind played its tricks on me, but my wife’s small hands couldn’t tease my flesh. (Power 82)

*Ainsley* saw the ghost’s visit as a strategy used by Power to remind the reader of a character’s flaw, in this case, his apparent cycle of abuse towards women. *Ainsley*’s interpretive strategy, or seeing the ghost’s visit as a sign, is put into execution during the reading event. Stanley Fish states that “interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading [...]; they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them” (Fish 987). According to Fish, *Ainsley*’s strategy to interpret the text actually makes the text what it is.

*Amena*’s responses, to me, seemed to be authentic, honest and personally crafted due to the tone that she used while expressing her opinions on the text to me. Her responses to the text were molded from personal beliefs and practices. She admitted to several “flaky” ideas, as she called them, about the supernatural that may or may not be a

part of what most people call reality. But just what is reality? Louise Rosenblatt questions most people's assumptions about reality with this passage from her book The Reader, the Text, the Poem:

Philosophers, psychologists, and anthropologists have led us to question how much of what we take to be 'reality' has been structured by the human organism and the assumptions of our culture. Our vision of the 'real' world often depends on what we bring to it not only from past 'reality' but also from the world of fiction or the imagination. Literature especially invites confusion about its relation with reality (33).

According to Rosenblatt, reality only means what each specific reader brings with him or her to the reading event. If *Amena* believes in the supernatural before she reads the "Moonwalk" chapter, then her sense of reality helps her to mold her reactions to the text, making believability a non-issue for her. *Amena* said that the supernatural material did not surprise her that much because she had experiences where particular unexplained things happened and she also thinks that many people would admit to similar experiences if they were honest.

*Andra's* responses, as mentioned earlier, were standard literary responses. But the metaphor that she sees in the "Moonwalk" chapter did not exist until *Andra* saw it there. *Andra* says that the supernatural events in the chapter "Moonwalk," specifically the instances of the grandmother walking on the moon, Harley having the moon enter his head, and also when Margaret appears to have an audience at the foot of her bed are all metaphors for "a global experience" (Appendix D). The words were there, but *Andra's*

application of the metaphor to the words present in the text is something that she is responsible for. Holland emphasizes that

A literary text, after all, in an objective sense consists only of a certain configuration of specks of carbon black on dried wood pulp. When these marks become words, when those words become images or **metaphors** or characters or events, they do so because the reader plays the part of a prince to the sleeping beauty. He gives them life out of his own desires. (976)

*Abey's* responses were a mixture of personal and critical. She stated that she felt the connection between Harley and his grandmother, but she also noticed the ability of Margaret to transcend time, space and history to be present on the moon just when Harley was watching on television. Maybe because of her graduate school training, *Abey* could allow herself to overlook her intimate connection with the text to analyze the text critically. Although *Abey* was thinking critically about Margaret's transcendence of time, she also allowed personal responses to the text and her imagination to make an intimate connection with the words on the page and to find out what her heart felt, too:

Paul: While reading the Moonwalk chapter, did you view the apparently supernatural events that were taking place as actual?

*Abey*: Oh, they're real.

Paul: So does Margaret actually have an audience?

*Abey*: A spiritual audience.

Paul: So they're real spirits?

Abey: Yes.

Paul: They're ghosts?

Abey: Yes.

Paul: When Harley has the moon enter his head, is that a spiritual event or is that Harley imagining, is that his imagination?

Abey: I think it is a spiritual or supernatural event.

Paul: Did you believe it?

Abey: Completely. (Appendix E)

Graduate school training may not have had a great impact on *Abey's* reading of the text. Imagination played an important role in *Abey's* responses. Her ability to apply her imagination is apparently something that she learned on her own. "Reading fiction is something [that readers] have largely had to teach themselves. Imagination, the first requirement, they supply with ease. When they read thrillers, spy stories, or science fiction, they see the events described as actual" (Bolt 59). *Abey's* imagination was guided by her educational experiences so her reading turned out to be a mixture of personal and critical analysis.

*Alanna's* responses were personal and unadulterated. She associated the near death experience that she had to the reading. She responded personally, by bringing something deep and personal to bear on the text. The text elicited a response in her that reminded her of her grandfather's presence with her when she fell off of a cliff. The personal response was remembered during the reading event, while she read. This intimate occurrence made Harley and his grandmother's spiritual connection even more

believable to *Alanna*.

According to Holland the reader brings [her] “lifestyle to bear on the work. [S]he mingles [her] unconscious loves and fears and adaptations with the words and images [s]he synthesizes at a conscious level” (976). *Alanna*’s near-death experience during which her grandfather appeared to her was brought to bear on the supernatural events in the story: Alanna postulates “it was easy for me to understand and believe because [...] I’ve had close encounters with death, and like, I saw my grandfather there...” (Appendix F). This “traumatic accident,” and feeling her grandfather’s presence there, were the unconscious loves and fears that *Alanna* mingled with the words and images in the text.

*Aidan* responded by reminiscing about something that he remembered from his childhood. While reading, *Aidan* linked the spirituality to a story that he heard long ago from his grandmother. His remembrance of the story that his grandmother told him directed his responses to the text. He read the text, responded personally, and fulfilled the purpose of the reading event. His grandmother’s story “just kind of stuck in [his] head when [he] was reading about Margaret in this story” (Appendix G). *Aidan* associated the story about his grandmother with the one about Margaret and that made it believable to him because he thought that Margaret was near death, like his grandmother was, and he had heard first-hand reports of near death experiences which were weird or unexplainable. “The reader’s primary purpose,” according to Louise Rosenblatt, “is fulfilled during the reading event, as he fixes his attention on the actual experience he is living through. This permits the whole range of responses generated by the text to enter into the center of awareness, and out of these materials he selects and weaves what he

sees as the literary work of art” (27-28). *Aidan*’s responses referring to his grandmother’s near death experience were brought into the “center of awareness” during the reading event. With these responses, *Aidan* selected and weaved information from his past into the reading experience, making the unexplainable, in effect, believable.

*Aileen*’s responses were recognized as a part of the way that she was raised, but this realization came during the interview. She attributed her acceptance of the supernatural experiences ascribed to American Indian spirituality to her father’s tolerance of other faiths, cultures, and ways of life. She also realized that her acceptance of the supernatural was influenced by a story about her grandmother, but unlike *Aidan* she realized this after the reading event: “That’s the way that my dad is. He raised us to believe in different things, magical and spiritual things that can happen. Like when my grandmother died, my father said that he could see spirits around her, waiting for her, the same way that it happens in this story” (Appendix H). She recognized this bit of information after the reading event, while she worked through the material during the interview. Does this make her responses ineffective, since they were crafted after the event? Not according to Fish: “Intention is known when and only when it is recognized,” says Fish. “It is recognized as soon as you decide about it; you decide about it as soon as you make a sense; and you make a sense [...] as soon as you can” (985). *Aileen* made sense of her acceptance of the supernatural events after she had read the story, as soon as she was able to decide about it.

## CONCLUSION

How the reader responds to the spirituality and supernatural events of the “Moonwalk” chapter is important because the stance of the reader is critical at this point, as the stories begin to digress further and further in time and the tribal magic becomes a larger and more important part of the storyline: each of the subsequent chapters “adds one more mystic step to the dance, which leads back to a primal mother figure and guardian of the Dakota tribe, the fabulous and still vital enchantress whose name is Cunignaka Duta, or Red Dress” (Wright 39). The reader’s opinion of the spirituality or magic that takes place in this chapter tints his or her ability to believe what takes place later in the book, when Red Dress is a more vital part of the storyline and when Power presents Mercury Thunder’s magic as “not a bedtime story,” or “not a dream” (184).

I think that Margaret’s moonwalk is the central event in the book, because it comes just before a smart descent into the past with several instances of magic and as many interconnected activities as a Shakespeare play. The reader’s ability to decipher the magic is important. It seems easy enough to surmise that readers can construe Harley’s vision of his grandmother on the moon in at least three different ways. Each view offers the possibility of a number of different combinations of results for the reader and each view also affects the rest of the book for that particular reader. Whether it is viewed as a product of an over active imagination, an allegory or a metaphor, or a process that is actually happening depends on the reader that you ask.

The first view of Margaret’s moonwalk is that Harley’s vision is a construction of his imagination, combined with the memory of his grandmother’s death and the events that took place that day (the moonwalk by the astronauts). This would be the view of



readers like *Aidan* who believed that the moonwalk is just a matter of over imagination. This implied view would seem to make the reader think that the events that took place in the “Moonwalk” chapter were figments of Harley’s imagination and of his clouded memory. In my opinion, if *Aidan* thinks that this is just a clouded memory or a figment of a character’s imagination, then the supernatural phenomena that comes later in the book would be problematic to him and it may be dismissed as fantastical information or unbelievable material.

Surely, if *Aidan* couldn’t imagine that the events that occurred in July of 1969 really happened to Margaret Many Wounds, then he would have trouble grasping the concept that Anna “Mercury” Thunder, a character described by some other characters as a witch, “magically” caused her niece to dance all night long in the snow until she died. Neil Wright summarizes the possibly unbelievable events that lead Anna Thunder towards practicing the magic that was passed on to her from her ancestors:

As a young mother, Anna had a baby boy named Chaske who caught tuberculosis and died during a terrible winter storm. Anna’s sister Joyce Blue Kettle promised to bring the doctor but instead took her daughter Bernadine to dance at the winter powwow, an all-night affair in the town hall. When Anna found out how her sister had betrayed her, she made a beautiful pair of beaded moccasins for Bernadine, marched to Joyce’s house in the dead of night, and used her magic to summon the girl out into the snow. (Wright 41)

It may also be hard for *Aidan* or other resisting readers to grasp that Red Dress,

the character who apparently is the magical inspiration for Anna Thunder, employed some sort of magic to try and save her people by causing several U.S. soldiers to commit suicide. Red Dress tells the reader what happens during the “mystical meeting” between one of the soldiers and herself in her chapter in the book:

Later I will find myself standing beside the river, drawn to the battered cottonwood tree once blasted by a revolver. I am utterly alone, I will hear the man before I see him. He is not so graceful; his stumbling feet churn the dry grass. *Whiss. Whiss.* He is the sleepy one with red hair and freckles, the one whose voice is easily lost. He walks to me without hesitation and doesn't flinch when I reach for his hand. The stones are there, clenched in the fist I peel open one finger at a time. I return the stones to my pouch and pluck a strand of hair from my head. I lean into the man as I wind the thread of hair around a brass button on his jacket; the slow circles enchant us both. He wears the rope across his chest like a cartridge belt. I tell him what to do. I look into his eyes for the first time and see only myself. I have forgotten their color. I leave him to his work, stand with my back to the man and the tree. (Power 268)

If the reader has lost faith in the text, and is having a hard time believing the magical events in the book, the reading event becomes much different, in my opinion. The reader is not soaking up the material; he or she is only reading the words so that they pass through his or her head, never slowing down long enough to make a permanent impact. This weaker reading of the text may lead the reader away from believing in the

words and symbols and on towards a problematic view of the spiritual events in the book and it may eventually cause the reader to give the book less credibility, thus lowering their overall value of the book and the events that take place in it. Disallowing the possibility that the magic is real may even cause a resisting reader like *Aidan* to lose sight of the textual experience or make him lose the suspension of disbelief, enabling him to think of other things while reading and thus making all of his responses irrelevant. Such was almost the case with *Aidan*, who admitted to almost losing the direction of the text while reading, albeit because of different circumstances; he claimed that there

were some parts where they were talking about some individual things that was [...] dragging down the story. [...] Like when they were explaining each individual person. I guess that they want you to see what each person has been through. Like when they were talking about the family history. It was in depth, a little too much. (Appendix G)

*Aidan's* efferent reading style caused him to search for some meaning in the story, but he admitted to almost losing sight of his goal during the reading event. If *Aidan* is not truly trying to get into the chapter, then he probably would not enjoy reading the rest of the book and may even abandon the novel before finishing it. The suggestion here is that some readers do not "take responsibility for determining meaning of the text" (Bartholomae 6). Reader-response suggests that an untrained or unpracticed reader or a reader who simply lacks the verbal skills will have trouble making meaning from a text that remains for these reasons, foreign. But that unknowing response, a response that says "I don't believe it," or "I don't understand it," or that "to me, there is no meaning,"

is a sense that a reader can make out of the text. Not believing in the magic may cause a resisting reader to follow this pattern.

A second reading of the “Moonwalk” chapter is that Margaret’s walk on the moon never took place at all, that it is only an allegory or a metaphor of the spirituality that the grandmother is trying to teach to her young, fatherless grandson before she dies. Remember how *Andra* felt that the supernatural events were metaphors? “Paul: So it wasn’t really happening, she wasn’t really walking on the moon? Andra: No, I see it as a metaphor, as like a global experience” (Appendix D). Readers like *Andra* with this view may have a point, as Margaret makes sure to point out to her grandson that there are as many moons as there are people to look at them. This information is passed down from Margaret to Harley like a family tradition that he must learn to carry on his heritage:

Harley alone remained behind to entertain his grandmother. He saw there were two moons in the world: one on television and one in the sky outside his grandmother’s window.

“Two moons,” he told Margaret, curling his thumb and forefinger into a telescope he peeked through.

“More than that,” Margaret told him, “many, many more. For every person who can see it, there’s another one.”

Harley covered his eyes with his hands. The idea filled all of the skies he could imagine, and all the rooms, and the spaces between trees, until moons like opaque marbles tumbled out of heaven to roll in a spectacular avalanche down the buttes. (Power 115-16)

Margaret also tells Harley that she has already been to the moon; long before the white astronauts arrived there on their spaceship, her grandfather showed her how to get there. This account told by Margaret is also in line with the belief that the grandmother wants the grandson to stand in defiance of the white man's world and to remain attached to the Indian spirituality that is in his blood and to question everything that the white world represents.

This second reading of the events in the "Moonwalk" chapter may possibly make the reader concur with the revolutionary view held by Brogan. She believes that the book is rebellious in nature and that Power is "reminding us again of the unfortunate 'history' between the domination of Native Americans and continued white exploration and conquest" (112). This reading would make for a very complex view of the chapter, as it involves literary principles like metaphors and resolution of conflict and it also makes note of an important convention of the genre of Native American literature: a call to action. According to Brogan, "The success of [Power's] novel, its ability to evoke in English a Native American spirituality, suggests the compatibility between the Native American and historically dominant white cultures. However, permeating Power's novel is the beautiful but disturbing voice of Red Dress, calling to the Dakota spirit, insisting that the only possibility is rebellion" (Brogan 123).

A third reading of the "Moonwalk" chapter insists that the moonwalk performed by Margaret did actually happen. This reading suggests that all of the events take place just as the omniscient narrator describes them. Providing the reader with a historical act that has been witnessed by almost everyone, but revealing what we all missed, Power sets

up the reader to look deeper into what we all saw and to imagine that it really occurred as she described it. This view, taken by *Alastair* (somewhat), *Ainsley*, *Amena*, *Abey*, *Alanna*, and *Aileen* can be constructed differently, according to the respective reader. *Alastair* admits to believing the magic because of some crafty tricks played by the author. Although *Alastair* is wise enough to question the narrator and the author, the writing is powerful enough for him to believe. While *Alastair* states that the moonwalk is believable, he refuses to believe that there is an actual audience attending to Margaret, due to evidence found in the text:

Margaret's audience during her deathbed confession about the true identity of Lydia and Evie's father [troubled me]. I don't really know who is in the room, if anyone is in the room; Margaret doesn't really address anyone specifically. The text says, "Evie was stunned and too angry to cry. She was glad she alone had overheard Margaret's confession." It sounds to me, according to the narrator and to Evie, that there [were] actually no audience members present. (Appendix B)

*Ainsley* also stated that she believed the supernatural events, but for a different reason. She muses that everything in the novel happens for a reason that may be unnoticeable, at first. *Ainsley* doesn't elaborate on why the "Moonwalk" chapter is so believable, but her synopsis of what goes on during the ghost's visit to Herod Small War informs us of what her thinking process is during supernatural events. Herod is seeing the ghost, according to *Ainsley*'s argument, because it draws attention to something that is problematic within himself. His problems with the female persons in his life lead to a

visit from a ghost of a former lover in order to remind him of how he treats women.

*Amena* believes the supernatural events that go on in the central chapter because she relates them to something that happened to her in her personal life. She claimed to have lived in a house that was visited by spirits and she also has lost a loved one, and admits that there are some strange things that can happen when someone is close to or nearing death. *Alanna* similarly relates the supernatural moonwalk to something that took place within her own life, as she had a near death experience that parallels the experiences that are incurred by Harley and Margaret. *Amena* and *Alanna* both took part in an aesthetic reading event. Their attentions were focused on what they were living through during the read. *Abey* and *Aileen* both believe that the supernatural events took place, but for different reasons. *Abey* says that her imagination allowed her to see the events taking place, and that they were so real that it made her cry, while *Aileen* contends that the way that she was brought up and the views of her father allowed her to believe that there was a possibility that these magical or spiritual events were happening.

For whatever reasons, the events that take place in The Grass Dancer and in the “Moonwalk” chapter are believable to most readers. The reasons that the fiction is believable range in scope and personal beliefs; however, they all lead the reader in search of his or her ideas about the text. Power’s characters all accept the magic for what it is: a part of their daily lives. The readers in this investigation confirm that the text is powerful and moving and the author can be credited with giving the reader every opportunity to formulate his or her own opinion; however, the reader ultimately has the power to approve or disapprove of the magic that occurs. As Holland says, “the reader

plays the part of a prince to the sleeping beauty. He gives them life out of his own desires” (976).

Any way the reader looks at it, spirituality in Power’s novel is present and different from what the casual reader is used to, sometimes even different from what trained readers expect. Responses will differ, and the discussion that stems from those differing responses will rage on in literary halls for ages. Susan Power’s audience has been exposed to some very believable American Indian spirituality in both her book The Grass Dancer and especially in her short story and chapter “Moonwalk.” This believability, or readability, is possibly what made her book so well accepted making it a best seller and also winning the Hemingway Prize for first fiction and it is possibly what distinguishes her literature from what is seen in front of the register at the checkout of Barnes and Noble.

Readers of Power’s literature are never wrong about the assumptions that they make about the text. “The reader’s attention to the text activates certain elements in his [or her] past experience—external reference, internal response—that have become linked with the verbal symbols. Meaning will emerge from a network of relationships among the things symbolized as he [or she] senses them” (Rosenblatt 11). These variable responses also demonstrate that although readers may see many things in Power’s fiction in many different fashions according to how they read or what they bring with them to the text, the novel remains believable and readable, and that makes it successful. Her work, in my opinion, proves one of the main arguments of readers-response criticism: meaning is not inherent in the text because the reader supplies it. Reader-response



criticism and studying the responses of actual readers definitely demonstrate ways that readers read and how each reader is different from the one beside him or her. This investigation provides an outline for understanding how differences in specific readers affects how the same material could be viewed in many different ways.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Interview with Ainsley

Paul: Did you enjoy reading the book?

Ainsley: I liked it a lot.

Paul: Who the Main character in The Grass Dancer?

Ainsley: I think the main character in the book is Harley.

Paul: You think its Harley?

Ainsley: Yes, because everything in the book is centered on Harley, the quest for his identity, the grass dancing issue, the female grass dancer Pumpkin, everything relates to Harley.

Paul: Why is the Moonwalk chapter important?

Ainsley: I think it's important because it is one of the first places Harley comes into contact with some sort of spiritual identity, he remembers his grandmother, and he's searching for some place in his culture.

Paul: While reading the chapter did you view the events as actual, or as of someone's imagination? Did you believe the magic? Does Margaret really have an audience on her deathbed?

Ainsley: Yeah.

Paul: She does?

Ainsley: Yeah.

Paul: Um...does Harley really have the moon enter his head?

Ainsley: Sure I think the reader has the moon enter their head when they read this text, as well.

Paul: The reader has the moon enter his head?

Ainsley: Yeah, along with Harley, I think that you are reading that through him.

Paul: All right. So you did believe that there was some supernatural...

Ainsley: Absolutely.

Paul: Umm...while you were reading?

Ainsley: Mmhh [Affirmative]

Paul reads quote on Evie's thoughts being read by her mother. Page 100

Paul: Does this passage suggest that Margaret has some supernatural power?

Ainsley: Umm...Is Evie the one that is mad at Margaret?

Paul: Evie is the one who talks; Lydia is the one who doesn't.

Ainsley: That's right. OK, so Evie is the one who kind of lost her identity.

Paul: Does this quote from the book make you believe that Margaret has supernatural powers?

Ainsley: OK, I see what you're saying...because she is thinking these things, and not saying them aloud, right?

Paul: Well, in the text, Evie's words are italicized, and they are not quotes.

Ainsley: Oh, I see. Well, yeah, of course I can see that.

Paul: Clara's Ghost appears in the chapter before the Moonwalk chapter, in the chapter called "The Medicine Hole." In that chapter, Herod Small War sees the ghost of Clara, a white woman, but when he sees it he is in a dreamlike state...

Ainsley: Do I think he sees it?

Paul: And do you think there is a connection with what happens in the next chapter?

Ainsley: I think he definitely sees it, and I also think it goes back... like a link to his sexuality too, because he is having problems with his wife, remember and then he recalls the sexual encounter with the woman, the ghost, and even though he may not turn away, in the same way he is abandoning the marriage with his wife. So, I definitely believe there is a spiritual connection, and I do believe he sees the ghost, but it also is a manifestation of what is going on, and that is his main concern.

Paul: So it's possible that it's really happening, it's also possible that he is really just concerned about his relationship with women?

Ainsley: I think that it's really happening, but maybe the ghost is just coming to him to remind him aware of what he is going on in his life. I feel like there is a purpose for the ghost's visit to him. Maybe he only sees the ghost because he is concerned with the way he treated the woman and the way he treated his wife.

Paul: Let's talk about the chapter as a short story

Paul: Does the chapter work as a short story? Why or why not? Are the characters developed? Does the story tell you about the characters through their actions?

Ainsley: Oh yeah, all of the characters are told about through their actions. It could stand-alone.

Paul: It could stand-alone, it could stand-alone, but does it reveal character through actions? And do we, as readers know what the true nature of the character is?

Ainsley: I think so, definitely. Mostly, in response to Margaret, you can tell what the true nature of a character is in this short story.

Paul: Just as I asked you who the main character of the book is, who is the main character of this short story?

Ainsley: Harley.

Paul: Harley is the main character of the short story? Why?

Ainsley: Because everything depends on how Harley is responding, Harley is the one who sees her on the moon everyone else is oblivious to it; it's all about Harley.

Paul: So you would say that it's all about Harley and not all about Margaret.

Ainsley: Margaret could be construed by some as the main character, but I think that Harley is definitely the main character in the short story.

Paul: Would your undergraduate students have problems reading this chapter as a short story?

Ainsley: Yes.

Paul: Because?

Ainsley: Well, they wouldn't believe it for one.

Paul: They wouldn't believe the magic?

Ainsley: No. They would be confused. Because they would want everything explained and there are points in the chapter that can be kind of confusing.

Paul: When Harley sits on the bed, watching his grandmother dance on the moon, do you believe that he really sees her?

Ainsley: Yes.

Paul: Do you believe that he sees it, or can I convince you that he doesn't really see her, but that he is coached into seeing her dance there?

Ainsley: Can you convince me that it doesn't happen?

Paul: Can I convince you?

Ainsley: No, you cannot convince me that he really doesn't see her, or that she is of his imagination.

Paul: What if I tell you that it was suggested to Harley, by his grandmother that there would be someone dancing on the moon?

Ainsley: Oh yeah. But it still has nothing to do with it.

Paul: What if I told you that Harley gets the picture of his grandmother's blue dress from her minutes before she dies, and that is what he sees her wearing when she dances on the moon?

Ainsley: What does that have to do with it, because the thought is put in his head?  
(Suddenly) Oh. It could be both.

Paul: It could be both? All right. I'll accept that.

Ainsley: But, I mean, just because something is put into your head doesn't mean that you're never going to envision something, necessarily. Maybe she put that there because she knew that we would respond differently and that we would help each other understand it.

Paul: Ok.

Paul: Is there anything else, specifically, that Power does to make the story more believable? Is it because the chapter involves an historical event? Is it strictly because the astronauts' moonwalk did take place historically, is it because you have seen actual footage of these astronauts bouncing up and down on the moon, and that it becomes as if you were there?



Ainsley: Umm...to make it more visual?

Paul: Because it is so visual, does that make it more real?

Ainsley: I think it is more problematic because it is such a visual and historical event.

Paul: It's problematic?

Ainsley: Yeah. Because we are so science based it would be harder, it would be more of a challenge, the way that she sets it up.

Paul: So you think that that would lead to a problem for more resistant readers.

Ainsley: Yeah. Because we have been taught this is what the moon is and this is what it looks like, so how on earth can this woman be dancing through Neil Armstrong? We have seen the footage; we know that it didn't happen.

Paul: Would you have had problems believing the events that take place in this book if you had read it as an "unschooled reader"?

Ainsley: It's hard to say how I would have responded, but I would probably have believed it.

Paul: Is there any other Native American fiction that you have read that would be an example of how magic and spirituality can be believable or not believable?

Ainsley: Like The Grass Dancer, Linda Hogan's book Mean Spirit contains magic that seems real and believable.

Paul: You believe that the "protectors" were real; you believed that at the end of the book they were all going to this mythical and magical world that could only be found by those who knew that it was there?

Ainsley: I believed it all, I believed the protectors were real, and I believed I in the magical world in the mountains. I believed it all. I might be the only person who believed it.

Paul: We'll see.

## Appendix B

### Interview with Alastair

Paul: Did you enjoy the book?

Alastair: I did.

Paul: Who is the main character of the book?

Alastair: I stand by the fact that it is Harley, because he is the one who has the epiphany at the end, it is his moment, and it seems like the book is totally centered on him. He is the character that develops more than anyone else.

Paul: Who is the main character of the story "Moonwalk"?

Alastair: I would have to say that Margaret is the main character in the chapter, or short story "Moonwalk." But Harley is a main focus; he is the next generation. Margaret reaches out to him, to pass on some family business. Lydia is definitely not the main character, she is hardly mentioned, and Evie experiences total disillusionment. She married a guy on an imagined vision of her father, there is a realization that her mother has lied to her, but she does not change. For instance, when Margaret has passed, her daughters begin to prepare her body. Lydia thinks "You will fly with powerful wings," she displays the tribal mode of thinking. But Evie is totally in the white world; she thinks: "you will never dance again." Evie doesn't really change in this chapter; she cannot be the main character.

Paul: So it's not Harley, it's Margaret?

Alastair: Yeah, but Harley is this mystical kid, who is in tune with his grandmother's way of life. He hasn't been exposed to the white influences like Evie has. When we first

meet him in this chapter, he is this little kid playing with keys; we don't see the adult character in him as a child. He seems to take things at face value; when he sees his grandmother on the television dancing on the moon, he just responds like, "there she is," not realizing, or thinking that anything paranormal is going on.

Paul: So, do you believe the magic and spirituality that takes place in this chapter and in the book as a whole?

Alastair: I think that Susan Power is asking me to believe in the world of this novel, that the paranormal, the magic and the spirit world all do exist. Not in the world that you and I live in. Overall, I think that she does a very good job; I think that it is totally believable. I believe what Power is asking me to believe.

Paul: Would you say that in this chapter, you started to believe the magic in the book was real, or that maybe there was a chance that it was real?

Alastair: I can tell you that while reading this chapter I finally believed that these people weren't just being over-imaginative. However, with that being said, we have to be able to question the narrator.

Paul: You don't trust the narrator?

Alastair: Well there is no way of knowing if we can. I mean, the magic never happens in front of a crowd, does it? No group of people ever witnesses it. There is no hard, hard evidence. The magic always takes place in an intimate group, or more often than not to one person. Power doesn't make it obvious if the magic is real or not. Like with Clara's Ghost, that appears in "The Medicine Hole" chapter. Herod is experiencing what the narrator says he is experiencing. Susan Power is clever; she doesn't make it obvious. Herod, when he sees the Ghost' is just waking up from sleeping. He is in a dreamlike

state; you know he is just waking up. Should we believe what he sees? We want to believe it. Power wants us to believe it. She doesn't want to undercut her audience; she wants to keep everyone involved. She knows that some people won't believe the ghost's visit, so she makes Herod sleepy when he reportedly sees it—you can say that he is dreaming if you don't believe in ghosts. Along the same lines, you could say that Harley was a little kid when he saw his grandmother walking on the moon. This way, Power can defend her writing; she may have been after a wide readership.

Paul: Was there anything that bothered you in this chapter?

Alastair: Yes; Margaret's audience during her deathbed confession about the true identity of Lydia and Evie's father. I don't really know who is in the room, if anyone is in the room; Margaret doesn't really address anyone specifically. The text says, "Evie was stunned and too angry to cry. She was glad she alone had overheard Margaret's confession." It sounds to me, according to the narrator and to Evie, that there was actually no audience members present.

Paul: So you don't believe that there was an audience listening to her confession?

Alastair: No, it sounds to me like Margaret is at this point—hallucinating. Power couldn't expect us to believe it. Evie has no reaction, and she is alone. Had Evie reacted strangely or come out and said that she saw ancestors looking in the windows—I might be willing to believe that. In the spirit world, logic does not apply, but this is the real world, the one where Evie lives.

Paul: Do you think that this chapter works as a short story?

Alastair: I say yes, but to take this chapter out of context of the novel seems to leave the reader asking so much. Power would be asking an awful lot of her intended audience to

accept these characters at their full depth—almost too much. This chapter as a short story has too much of a dispersed focus. The focus is too wide to expect one person's narrow point of view to experience things through that character. You have so much going on with Margaret's struggle to get out the truth and to reach out to Harley, Harley's first interactions with the spirit world and how he handles it, and also Evie who experiences something traumatizing like finding out her vision of her father has been way off. The reader is pulled in three different directions. With that said, a reader can get something out of this chapter. In my opinion, it can stand alone as a short story, but it's not a very good one.

## Appendix C

### Interview with Amena

Paul: First I want to ask you, did you enjoy reading the book?

Amena: I really liked reading this book.

Paul: Who is the main character in the book?

Amena: In the whole book, not just in the chapter?

Paul: Yes, in the book.

Amena: Uh, Harley.

Paul: Can you explain why?

Amena: Because it seems to open with him and his concerns and then it closes out with some kind of understanding of his place in the world, so even though it seems there are other characters that are important, it seems to be him who we are ultimately concerned with as readers.

Paul: How does the “Moonwalk” chapter work in the book?

Amena: The “Moonwalk” chapter works because it seems that it explains Harley’s connection with the Native American religion and that the, perhaps, supernatural powers that he may develop, in connection with his ancestors’ kind of grounds him even though he seems so young that he later forgets that experience, pretty much.

Paul: While reading the “Moonwalk” chapter, did you read the supernatural events that take place as actual, are they actually taking place in the literary world of The Grass Dancer, or are they of someone’s (Harley’s, Margaret’s, the Narrator’s) imagination?

Amena: Mmmhh...(thinks)

Paul: Does Margaret actually have an audience?

Amena: It is my interpretation is that she does, (thinking) Yeah, I can go with it because I think that when she is nearing death, she is open to another world that a person who is not nearing death is not open to, like there is some kind of rift, and she is able to, see into another world.

Paul reads quote in the chapter in which Evie's thoughts seem to be overheard by Margaret.

Paul: In your mind, does this quote make Margaret appear to have supernatural powers?

Amena: I can't say that I thought that it was an instance of Margaret actually reading her daughter's thoughts, umm, but again I would not put that out of the bounds of reality given the special circumstances, where she is nearing death and she seems to have a heightened sensitivity at this time. I don't believe that throughout her life she was able to read her daughters' thoughts, but...it is within the realm of possibility.

Paul: Let's see, I wanted to talk to you a minute about Clara's Ghost. In the "Medicine Hole" chapter, the chapter that comes before the "Moonwalk" chapter, Herod Small War, the healer, sees the ghost of a white woman who is his former lover. Could it be read that Herod is dreaming when he sees Clara, the ghost of his former lover? In other words, do you view the events that take place in this chapter as actual, does this ghost really appear, or do you think that she is a figment of Herod's imagination?

Amena: I think that it can either be a ghost or it can be him dreaming but given as many supernatural events that there are in the whole book I would tend to believe that she really is a ghost. And that is not that shocking to me as a reader, because I have had



experiences myself where certain unexplained things have happened and I think that if you poll any given number of people that, if they're honest, that they will admit that, perhaps when a loved one has died, something, not necessarily a full blown ghost, but there has been some kind of...an event that is not particularly explainable by scientific methods.

Paul: Now, do you see a connection with the "Moonwalk" chapter?

Amena: I would say from the standpoint of, it sets us up as readers to...this is one more point in The Grass Dancer, where I think that [Susan Power] is encouraging us, bit by bit, to believe in these supernatural things, if we were not willing to, but by the time...It's like a building of one event and another event and another event so that she is trying to penetrate our consciousness, I think, and say that this is part of the Native American experience and she is trying to say, I think, "just go with it."

Paul reads a definition of the short story

Paul: With this in mind, in your opinion does this chapter work as a short story? And do you think that your students would have trouble reading this as a short story?

Amena: I think that it definitely works as a short story, and I had actually read it, myself, as a short story although I didn't realize it until I reread it in The Grass Dancer, and, like, I knew that I had read it before as a short story. I think it does work, I think it would challenge my students, we have recently been reading stories that challenge them, we just read ...Fleur, we just read Fleur (by Louise Erdrich). And they did have some trouble with that, but a lot of them were able to go with it and say that this is the Native American experience and who are we to judge this where someone might read about a

mainline “Christian” religious experience and doubt it, so...I think that they would need help, trying to understand it, but I think that it would work for them.

Paul: Is there anything in this book, or about this book, this chapter that reminds you of anything else that you have read, for example in regards to spirituality, magic, or believability?

Amena: Well, Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich immediately comes to mind. Even though the two books are different they do seem to share the fact that the Native American experience for many individuals is fraught with uh, experiences that others may call supernatural but which they would take for granted, and they also share the matter of fact way that in The Grass Dancer and Love Medicine these instances are presented. They are just presented and no big fuss is made over them, they are just taken for granted, and um, it seems to be a natural part of life.

Paul: When you said that you believe the instances in the book, you meant that you believed it when you were reading, right?

Amena: Mmhhh (Affirmative)

Paul: Looking back, do you still believe now?

Amena: Yes

Paul: Would you believe, I’m sorry, would you have believed the spirituality and magic that goes on this book if you would have read it as a casual reader? As an undergraduate, do you think that you would have had problems with it?

Amena: I am non-traditional student and I have lived long enough that I have lost people that I have loved, and I also lived in a house that I think was probably haunted... and I know that sounds flaky, but there it is...(laughs)...I think from that standpoint I would

have given credence to these events even though I hadn't had graduate school training to, maybe, help me interpret it better, so, yeah...I hesitate to say that, but for the purposes of this study I will bear all...(laughs).

Paul: Did you notice anything specific that Susan Power did to make her literary world more believable, is there anything else that you wanted to add about the way that Power works her magic?

Amena: I think that the way that she develops her characters and got me so involved in the characters' lives that that encouraged me even more to believe it, because if I believe in the characters then I don't want to think that they are insane or that they are so off-based that they are believing in these just wildly improbable things. If I trust her construction of these characters and believe in these characters then I am more inclined to go along with the events.

## Appendix D

### Interview with Andra

Paul: Did you enjoy reading the book?

Andra: I did enjoy reading the book.

Paul: At any point were you like, “this isn’t working for me”?

Andra: No. I believed in the book.

Paul: In your opinion, who is the main character in the book, The Grass Dancer?

Andra: I would say that there are many main characters in this book. Particularly Harley and Charlene come to mind, although, it seems like Pumpkin is always there. I feel like there is more of a focus on them.

Paul: Do you feel like the “Moonwalk” chapter is a central and important part of the book?

Andra: I think it is an important part of the book, because it shows the dynamic of the family, between the sister and the mother and between the grandmother and the grandson. I would say that saying the chapter is central to the book is complicating because it helps Harley, but at the same time it doesn’t resolve. He still has identity crisis later. So I would say that it has an important effect on him.

Paul: In that chapter, there are several events that can be construed as supernatural. Harley sees his grandmother walking on the moon, he has the moon enter his head, and Margaret appears to have an audience at the foot of her bed. When you are reading, do you believe that it is actually happening?

Andra: I considered it to be a metaphor when I read it.

Paul: So it wasn't really happening, she wasn't really walking on the moon?

Andra: No, I see it as a metaphor, as like a global experience.

Paul: In the chapter that comes before this one, the one titled "The Medicine Hole,"

Herod Small War sees a ghost of his former lover Clara. Does he see this ghost or is this another metaphor?

Andra: I believe that he sees that ghost.

Paul: He sees it, really?

Andra: Yes, because she appears to other people as well in the novel. She appears and talks to Charlene and I think that she reappears at the end.

Paul: Is there a connection to the events in this chapter and the events that take place in the next chapter, the "Moonwalk" chapter?

Andra: I didn't see a connection at that time. I considered them to be separate events.

Paul: Does this chapter work as a short story?

Andra: I think it works as a short story. The characters are pretty well developed and I think there is resolution, because at the end when she passes away, Harley has hope that there is life after death.

Paul: Who would you say is the main character of this short story?

Andra: The grandmother, Margaret. Because the action centers around her, basically.

She creates the action and the all of the tension and feelings between the members of the family.

## Appendix E

### Interview with Abey

Paul: Did you enjoy reading this book?

Abey: Yes, I loved this book. I liked it better than all of the other ones we read in the American Indian Literatures course.

Paul: I think you told me once that this book made you cry. Is that correct?

Abey: Yes, it was this chapter.

Paul: Which part of the chapter made you cry?

Abey: It happened twice. When the grandmother died and when she was dancing on the moon. I could see it.

Paul: Who do you think that the main character in the book is?

Abey: Harley. It's about his family, but I think it's kind of telling about his roots and history and in a way it describes who he is and the experiences that he is going through because he is a Native American.

Paul: How does the Moonwalk chapter work in the book? Is this chapter important?

Abey: It is when he realizes his ties to the spiritual world and his ties to his heritage through his grandmother.

Paul: While reading the Moonwalk chapter, did you view the apparently supernatural events that were taking place as actual?

Abey: Oh, they're real.

Paul: So does Margaret actually have an audience?

Abey: A spiritual audience.

Paul: So they're real spirits?

Abey: Yes.

Paul: They're ghosts?

Abey: Yes.

Paul: When Harley has the moon enter his head, is that a spiritual event or is that Harley imagining, is that his imagination?

Abey: I think it is a spiritual or supernatural event.

Paul: Did you believe it?

Abey: Completely.

Paul reads quote on Evie on page 100.

Abey: That's funny; I never noticed that.

Paul: So does she have magic, or is this something that Power is doing to fool with the reader?

Abey: I think that it reinforces the supernatural connection.

Paul: Another supernatural event that takes place in the book, but not in this chapter, in the one just before this one, in "The Medicine Hole," Herod Small War sees the ghost of the white woman Clara. Does Herod really see this ghost or is it a figment of his imagination, he is in a dreamlike state and has just awoken from sleep.

Abey: Well, I thought that it was just another ghost story. I mean we see this ghost, and then we see the ghost of the grandmother in the next chapter.

Paul: Is there a connection between that ghost and this ghost? Is there a parallel between the two; is there something that Power is doing to tie these two together?

Abey: I think that maybe she wants the reader to see these women ghosts as like looking out for the men that they left behind.

Paul: Does this chapter work as a short story?

Abey: I think it could work as a short story; it's just about Harley and his relationship with his grandma, which was the primary relationship in the story. Evie and everyone else are secondary, you know supporting characters. But I think it's nice to have the novel around it, you know so we get to know everyone a little bit more.

Paul: Who do you think the main character of the short story is?

Abey: I want to say Harley, but I think it would have to be the grandmother.

Paul: Is there anything that you wish Power would have elaborated on a little bit more in this chapter, or do you think that it is complete.

Abey: I think that it's one of the strongest chapters in the book. I meant the other chapters definitely help because we get more of a feel for the Native American heritage, but I think it is a strong section.

Paul: Is there anything about this book that reminds you or that you can relate to anything else that you have read?

Abey: It reminded me, quite a bit, of Mean Spirit, by Linda Hogan. Because of the ghosts, and spirituality and the connection to nature.

Paul: Do you think that the visual image of the two astronauts on the moon, we have all seen video of this, do you think that takes away credibility or does it support the story?

Abey: I was thinking about this the other day. When the astronauts are on the moon and she is dancing around and through them it kind of situates or positions her in history, but then it doesn't because it is so surreal. It's like her spirit can transcend time and space. It makes it more powerful, I think, because she's out there and they don't even realize that



she's out there, because they have no connection to her; but Harley does and Harley can see her.

Paul: Is there anything else that you felt was important about the book?

Abey: I thought it was interesting how Evie was referred to as the prodigal daughter returning to the mother on page 106. That made me think instantly of something in the Bible, you know returning home because the mother was going to die, but they couldn't really completely mend their differences, they had a little time but not much. And then, just the rituals, you know, making the corn soup, and preparing Margaret for burial; it's very ritualistic. This chapter is very intense.

## Appendix F

### Interview with Alanna

Alanna: I think that the story was interesting.

Paul: You say it was interesting?

Alanna: Yeah, it was really interesting. It kept my attention the whole time.

Paul: All right, Ok. Did you like it?

Alanna: Yeah I liked it. I liked it a lot.

Paul: Was there anything in the chapter that you didn't quite understand or anything that confused you?

Alanna: The only part that I was confused on was when Margaret was talking to the people at the end of her bed, um...I really didn't know what was going on there, I just figured that she was losing it, you know being that close to death.

Paul: So you really don't believe that there was an audience there, that it was just something in her head?

Alanna: Yeah, but at least it gave her a chance to open up and like let out some family secrets...her daughter Evie actually found out who her father was.

Paul: Would you say that is Margaret really dancing on the moon at the end of the story?

Alanna: Yeah, she was. I mean, I think that she was. Maybe her soul was, but she wasn't.

Paul: Would you say that the events that take place in this story are magical or spiritual?

Alanna: I would say spiritual, almost religious. It is almost like a family tradition, a passing down of information from one generation to the next. Her grandson could really feel that she was there and that she was going to be a part of his life forever.

Paul: Is there anything about the story that you didn't like?

Alanna: Yeah, the one daughter was a little negative.

Paul: You mean Evie?

Alanna: Yes, she was a little negative towards her mother and the rest of the characters, so I really didn't like her character.

Paul: Did you have a hard time believing anything magical or spiritual in this story?

Alanna: No, it was easy for me to understand and believe because...I mean well, 'cause (laughs) I've had close encounters with death, and like, I saw my grandfather there...I had a traumatic accident, I fell off of a cliff, and I almost died; I felt his presence there with me, so this was easy for me to understand.

## Appendix G

### Interview with Aidan

Paul: First, honestly, did you enjoy reading the story?

Aidan: Yeah, I sure did.

Paul: You enjoyed the story and you enjoyed reading the story as well?

Aidan: Um, yeah.

Paul: Did you find it hard to read?

Aidan: There wasn't any...uh...I mean I could pretty much understand everything they were saying.

Paul: While you were reading did you lose yourself within the story or did you find yourself saying, "O.K. how much more do I have to read?"

Aidan: Um...there were some parts where they were talking about some individual things that was, you know, like dragging down the story.

Paul: Like what?

Aidan: Um...you know like telling personal...features. Like when they were explaining each individual person...I guess that they want you to see what each person has been through. Like when they were talking about the family history. It was in depth, a little too much.

Paul: Was there any part of the story that you didn't quite understand, anything that troubled you?

Aidan: No, not really.

Paul: Or anything that maybe you really liked about the story?

Aidan: You know, like when Margaret stepped out of her body, I kind of saw that in my head, when she did that I thought that it was pretty cool.

Paul: What did you think of her audience, you know the audience that gathered around to hear her story?

Aidan: Like the imaginary people, is that what it was?

**Paul: So you thought that they were imaginary people?**

Aidan: Yeah. I kind of associated it with a story that my grandmother told me one time. She was like real sick, and she thought that she was going to die. It was right after my grandfather had passed away and I guess she got real down in the dumps and she was in the bed for like four or five days, and she said that on the fourth or fifth day she was laying there and like pictures of um...like the movies were on the wall and she thought that she was in them, she was the lead actress. That story just kind of stuck in my head when I was reading about Margaret in this story.

Paul: So you associated that story about your grandmother with the one about Margaret, and that made it believable to you, because you thought that she was near death and that you have heard first hand reports of near death experiences from your grandmother?

Aidan: Right. That is what explains it.

Paul: So, what about the end? Was Margaret really dancing on the moon?

Aidan: I believe that it was a figment of the little boy's imagination. It was in his mind, and to him, it was something personal. He was probably closer to her sole than anyone else in the story was.

Paul: Does your recollection of the real events that occurred on the moon and the reality that these events really happened, prevent you in anyway of believing that Margaret's moonwalk really happened? Because that event has been drilled in your head, does it make it harder to believe that Margaret really danced through Neil Armstrong?

Aidan: Not really. I thought that her grandson thought that he saw his grandmother's spirit dancing on the moon. I can't say that any ideas that I previously held about the real moonwalk had any effect on the reading of this story that I had.

Paul: Who is the main character of this story?

Aidan: I would have to say the old lady, Margaret. It is based on her and upon her life's activities and the outcomes of her decisions.

Paul: Is there anything else that you wanted to relate about the story?

Aidan: No, it was a pretty good story, I liked it. It was readable. If I had read this for a class I would definitely have enjoyed it.

## Appendix H

### Interview with Aileen

Paul: First of all, did you enjoy the story and did you enjoy reading the story?

Aileen: Yes. I did very much.

Paul: Was there any part that troubled you, or anything that you weren't real sure what was going on or what was happening?

Aileen: One part troubled me. Where it says (on page 113) “‘Oh,’ Evie said. Years before, she would have treasured this anecdote, but it had come too late for her to enjoy it or believe.”

Paul: So you didn't understand...

Aileen: No, it troubled me that Evie was beyond her mother's stories and tales now. She was too far away from the Indian way of life; she had separated herself from her mother that much. Since she has been off of the reservation for so long, she doesn't want or need to hear the tales. It bothered me.

Paul: So, you don't like Evie?

Aileen: She acts like she is ashamed when she finds out that her father is Japanese she acted like it bothered her. Because she married Philbert only because she thought that he was like her father. I can understand why she was mad at her mother for not telling her, you know because her mother wouldn't have been able to raise them the way that she did, with them being full blooded. But it just made me mad to think that she was embarrassed to find out that he was Japanese and not an Indian. And also it makes me mad that she only dreamed up the name “Sonny Porter” and called information only one time and then

just gave up on it. If she really wanted to know who she was she could have pursued it further.

Paul: So you basically don't like Evie, as a character?

Aileen: Right. (Laughs)

Paul Reads quote on page 100

Aileen: I didn't really notice that before. She heard what Evie was thinking.

Paul: So does that make you think that Margaret has some supernatural ability to read minds?

Aileen: Yeah, like a magical talent.

Paul: What did you think of Margaret's deathbed audience that appears out of nowhere?

Aileen: I felt like, well everybody is different, but I felt like that it was people who were on the other side waiting for her.

Paul: Like her dead relatives?

Aileen: Right.

Paul: So, in other words, these are spiritual apparitions, these are ghosts, right?

Aileen: Yeah, mmhhh.

Paul: Does Margaret really dance on the moon at the end?

Aileen: Yes, I think that she does. In her beliefs, not probably in... not really, but in her own mind...

Paul: But did you believe that she was there dancing on the moon?

Aileen: Yeah, uhuh. Her spirit was.

Paul: Her spirit?

Aileen: Yes her spirit was, but not her.



Paul: Does your recollection and realization that Neil Armstrong really did walk on the moon prevent you from accepting Power's claim that Margaret was there too?

Aileen: No.

Paul: Even though it's been pounded in your head that these two guys were there by themselves, you still can believe that Margaret was dancing there beside them?

Aileen: Yes, because that is the way that I was raised. That's the way that my dad is. He raised us to believe in different things, magical and spiritual things that can happen. Like when my grandmother died, my father said that he could see spirits around her, waiting for her, the same way that it happens in this story.

Paul: Who is the main character in this story?

Aileen: Umm, it's hard to decide if it's Margaret or if it is Evie. Margaret probably, because it is all about her and what is happening to her, it's why they all come together.

Paul: Did all of the characters seem to be pretty well developed enough to where you felt like you knew them?

Aileen: Yes.

Paul: Every one of them? Philbert?

Aileen: Well, not him, not enough to know him but enough to kind of know about him. But I wish they would've touched more on the Japanese doctor, who turns out to be Evie and Lydia's dad, I wish they would've gone into a little bit more about who he was, and where he ended up. I would have liked to get some more information on him. But other than that I thought they were all pretty well developed, especially Margaret, she was very developed through the stories that she accidentally told her daughter.

Paul: Did you have trouble reading it? Did you want to stop?

Aileen: No, I wanted to continue. I loved it. I wanted to know more about this family.

It kept me very interested.

Paul: Is this something that everyday people can read and enjoy, or do you have to be into Native American literature or a student assigned this book to read for a class to understand and appreciate this?

Aileen: No, I don't think so. Well, it depends on what kind of person it is, because if they are not open to believing in things they would want to read it and they would understand what was going on and if they weren't open to different types of literature they may not be into it.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Paul S. Mills Jr. was born on August 6, 1971 in Wilmington, North Carolina. After graduating from high school at E.A. Laney in Wilmington, he enlisted in the United States Navy and attended basic training at San Diego Naval Recruit Training Center before being assigned to Air Traffic Control School at the Naval Air Technical Training Center in Millington, Tennessee. After a four-year enlistment at the Fleet Area Control and Surveillance Facility of the Virginia Capes in Virginia Beach, Virginia that also coincided with the Desert Storm conflict in the Persian Gulf, Paul returned to his beloved hometown to obtain his bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington in May 2001. That fall, he entered the graduate program in English at UNCW, where he studied Shakespeare, Document Design, and American Indian literatures among other topics. During his second semester in the graduate program, Paul and his wife, Dawn, had their first son, Keegan, born on February 21, 2002. After receiving his Master's Degree, Paul will begin teaching undergraduate English courses while he watches his son grow and as he begins the process of applying to Ph.D. programs around the Southeastern United States.