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Tentative Title of Dissertation:

A Return to Turtle Island: Landscape Literacies in American Indian Literature, 1880 – 1920

Abstract:

American Indian authors producing texts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were writing in a time when print culture significantly influenced federal Indian policy. In resistance to the stereotypes of helpless ward or simple savage that drove the reservation and assimilationist eras, their stories reveal the active and enduring place of Indigenous tribal nations in the American narrative. While each writer uses the colonial tool of English alphabetic literacy in producing the material of the text itself, they also articulate an alternative textuality in the reflexive reading of landscapes. This project explores how authors like Sarah Winnemucca, Charles Eastman, Zitkala Sa, and E. Pauline Johnson counter the cognitive imperialism of English language acquisition through their affirmation of an Indigenous ontology that values landscapes as living texts.

For each author, I consider how *landscape literacy* enables their adaptability in reading and interpreting landscapes as a dynamic, multi-layered text that was rapidly transforming with colonial-settler contact and western expansion. In concert with the intellectual agency associated with language literacy, landscape literacy requires an ecological engagement that delivers benefits in a variety of embodied and affective registers. Beyond the practical needs of survival, landscape literacy also allows for recreation and play in a pleasurable space that dissolves boundaries between the ludic and the sacred. Historically alongside federal policies' highly subjective terminology like "adapted to agriculture," "the habits of civilized life," and "beneficial use," each author's written text reveals a refusal to accept victimhood and a desire to celebrate Indigenous ways of knowing.