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"Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and the Search for a Populist Landscape Aesthetic"

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This essay examines how Ngugi wa Thiong'o, East Africa's most prominent writer, treats the landscape as a fundamental social phenomenon in two of his most important novels, *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. Basing his ideas in an ecological theory of landscape aesthetics resembling one recently developed in America, Ngugi understands that ability to control and manipulate a landscape defines a society. Nostalgia for the landscape lost to colonialism and to the corrupting and alienating influences of international capitalism needs to be replaced by its progressive evaluation as it is reshaped by collective action for a new future. Alienation from, and loss of responsibility for, the land may be a major factor contributing to Africa's environmental problems. Ngugi's position casts doubt on professional land management's ultimate ability to influence the shape of the landscape in the face of the collective social will.

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