



Class Notes on

“THE GREEN LEAVES”

By

Grace Ogot

FOR
B A ENGLISH
SEM - VI
ENGL3016

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GRACE OGOT (1930-2015)



- ❖ Born in Nyanza, central district in Kenya, Eastern Coast of Africa
- ❖ Belongs to Luo tribe
- ❖ She was a nurse by profession
- ❖ Kenya became independent on 12 December 1963
- ❖ Held a ministerial position in Kenya's government

OGOT'S WORKS

- ❖ *Land Without Thunder* (1968)
- ❖ *The Other Woman* (1976)
- ❖ *The Island of Tears* (1980)
- ❖ *The Promised Land* (1966)

“THE GREEN LEAVES”

INTRODUCTION :

- ❖ “The Green Leaves” was published in 1968 in Ogot’s short story collection *Land without Thunder*
- ❖ Her grandmother’s influence on her short stories
- ❖ “The Green Leaves” depicts a clash between clan leader Olielo and the white policeman over the “right” way to deal with robbery.

CHARACTERS

- ❖ Nyagar, a well-to-do man in the clan
- ❖ Nyamundhe – his wife
- ❖ Omoro – his cousin
- ❖ Olielo – clan leader
- ❖ Co-wife
- ❖ Three thieves
- ❖ Other clan members

WHAT HAPPENS IN “THE GREEN LEAVES”?

- ❖ Tension between Masala and Mirogi tribes
- ❖ Three Thieves are chased after by the village men for stealing six bulls
- ❖ Two of them escape while one is caught and beaten to death by the men
- ❖ Nyagar is woken up by the noise outside and joins them
- ❖ The dead body of the thief is covered with green leaves

GREED IS PUNISHED

- ❖ All the clan members leave the place to gather in the early morning to bury the dead by riverside
- ❖ All women are within their houses not knowing what happened outside
- ❖ Nager's greed to steal money the thief might have on him
- ❖ Regaining his consciousness the thief kills Nagar and covers his dead body with green leaves

CLAN LEADER ADDRESSES THE GATHERING

- ❖ Early morning all clan members including women come to the place not knowing that the death body beneath the green leaves is of Nyagar
- ❖ Olielo, the clan leader, addresses the gathering informing the last night incident
- ❖ Clan's traditional law permits them to punish the thieves and adulterers

INTERROGATION OF THE MATTER

- ❖ Thirty men are sent to inform the European police officer that they have killed a thief
- ❖ One European police officer and four African officers come with 30 men in two police lorries
- ❖ The European police officer interrogates the clan leader persuading him to tell the truth

PERPLEXED CLAN

- ❖ Olielo responds in his mother tongue – Dholuo – and the African police officer translated Olielo's words
- ❖ “What! You killed a man?”
- ❖ “No we killed a thief”
- ❖ Officers uncover the body.
- ❖ Everybody is stunned to see Nagar's dead body
- ❖ Mistrust among clan members

MOURNING OVER THE DEATH

- ❖ The clan members tries to assure Nyamunde that they have not killed Nagar
- ❖ Nyamunde is convinced that the Clansmen killed her husband
- ❖ The heartbroken Nyamunde mourns over her dead husband and leaves the group singing the mourning song

THE CLAN'S LAWS VS EUROPEAN LAWS

- ❖ The clan laws prohibit any wanton killing but allow punishment to the thieves and adulterers
- ❖ According to the clan laws thieves and adulterers are regarded as animals
- ❖ One who kills them is not guilty of murder.
- ❖ He is looked upon as a person who has rid society of an evil spirit
- ❖ In return society has a duty to protect him and his children

HOW THE AFRICAN CLAN RESISTS AGAINST COLONIALISM?

- ❖ “But the white man’s laws are different”
- ❖ “Because he thinks his laws are superior”
- ❖ “We have ancestors – the white man has none. This is why they bury their dead far away from their houses”
- ❖ “This white man’s trick work only among a divided people.”

SUPERSTITIONS IN THE CLAN

- ❖ **Green leaves:** Covering a dead person with the green leaves suggest the belief of the tribe that it prevents evil spirit of a dead man from entering the village.
- ❖ **Black cat:** Black cat crossing one's way in the morning is a bad sign

FROM SILENCE TO SONG

- ❖ The first appearance of Nyamundhe in this short story is through her **disappearance**
- ❖ The women's silence from the first scene is juxtaposed against the muteness of the thief
- ❖ The first instance of speech on Nyamundhe's part is an inquiry into the safety of her husband
- ❖ Space to discuss whether it is a murder of a 'man' or a 'thief' but no space for a 'husband'

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- ❖ Nyamundhe questions the men, including their leader and the elders, in a single breath
 - ❖ A strong questioning voice in her mourning song
 - ❖ She rejects the hollow promises and mourns her husband loudly
 - ❖ This song is important utterance in the story

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- ❖ The song is borrowed from traditional lore and personalised by adding specific names and their description
 - ❖ The song...
 - a. Has reference to matrilineal genealogy
 - b. Puts forth her concerns of loneliness in suffering
 - c. Throws light on insecurity of a woman without husband

CONCLUSION

- ❖ Clash between notions of justice
- ❖ African laws Vs European Law
- ❖ Resistance against Colonialism
- ❖ Oliele's call for unity to fight against Colonialism
- ❖ African woman twice oppressed

THANK YOU