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.
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.
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
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.
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
The clam 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.
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’.
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.
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
- Olielo’s call for unity to fight against Colonialism
- African woman twice oppressed
THANK YOU