

Text and Discussion Questions: Léopold Senghor

“Joal”¹

I remember

Joal!

I remember signares² in the green darkness of verandas,
Signares with eyes surreal as shafts of moonlight on the sand.

I recall the pageantry of sunsets,
Where Koumba N’Dofène³ would have cut his royal cloak.

I remember funeral feasts steaming with the blood of slaughtered herds,
The noise of quarrels, the griots⁴ rhapsodies.

I remember pagan voices beating out the Tantum Ergo,

¹ Senghor’s native village.

² Portuguese word meaning “lady”

³ Koumba N’Dofène: The King of Sine

⁴ Important figure in traditional West African societies—the person who “guards” stories passed down through the generations and shares them with others.

And the processions and the palms and the triumphal arches.

I recall the dancing of the nubile girls,

The battle songs—and oh! The final dance of the young men, chests slender,

Bent, and the women's pure love cry

--Kor Siga!⁵

I remember, I remember...

My head in motion with

What weary pace the length of European days where now and then

An orphan jazz appears sobbing, sobbing, sobbing.

*--Translated from the French by Ellen Conroy Kennedy, Published in *The Negritude Poets*, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989.*

⁵ Term for sister or fiancée

Discussion Questions

1. What is the tone of “Joal?” Explain the importance of memory in the poem.
2. Make a list of words and images which allude to music. What effect does this create in the poem?
3. How does Senghor demonstrate the dual African and European aspects of his personality? In your opinion, why is this important for the poet?