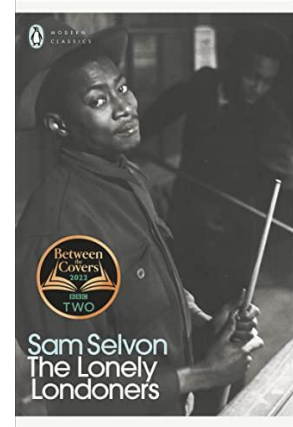


Samuel Selvon: *The Lonely Londoners* A Deep Dive into New Immigrant Struggles

Hitomi Hsu

It is a captivating narrative that delves into the challenges newcomers might face and their sense of isolation. Set against the backdrop of 1950s London, the novel unfolds the lives of Trinidadian immigrants and their journey to establish themselves amidst a foreign culture. A significant part of the Windrush generation, Selvon, hailing from the Caribbean, is among those who migrated to London post-World War II under the 1948 British Nationality Act. The characters work relentlessly to create a new life, grappling with escalating racial discrimination and the economic downturn post-war. Almost like a buzzing street interview on TikTok, *The Lonely Londoners* uncovers the dramatic lives of Jamaican men in London, documenting their day-to-day activities in stream of consciousness — playing cards, pursuing romance, odd jobs, and even pigeons eating — such true-to-life and thus unable to look away.



There are numerous books about London such as Charles Dickson's *The Uncommercial Traveller* and George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* that depict Londoners' hardship through social realism, but risk capitalising exoticism. Distinct from such sympathetic or voyeuristic perspectives, *The Lonely Londoners* stands as a cultural critique from those directly involved. Selvon honestly portrays the racial discrimination experienced in 20th-century Britain beneath the characters' imperfections.

Selvon is shockingly honest in depicting the anxiety experienced by the Trinidadian immigrants. Through witty sketches of the new-come city dwellers, he explores the underlying apprehensions among characters and reflects on broader community self-doubt and distancing caused by oppression: The law school drop-out 'Captain' spends all his money for a decent look; the dark-skinned man 'Five Past Twelve' lives along a thug stereotype; the lighter-skin youth 'Bart' claims himself a Latin American. It is sadly observed that under systematic discrimination, the male characters tend to hide their Trinidadian heritage as a way to fit in. A heart-breaking scene is when Galahad speaks to the colour black upon being teased during his night shifts in the underground — Their dream to become someone big implies their inner wish to be someone else. However, money and women could only bring fleeting satisfaction, their belonging in the city remains elusive. Amidst gender dynamics, class distinctions and racial biases, readers observe a cycle of London life tainted by toxicity.

On the opposite, the sole female character, Auntie Tanty, adds a lighthearted touch to the tale. Courageous and straight-hearted, Tanty speaks boldly for her people ("We is poor people and we don't always have money to buy!"), introducing practical life skills such as credit systems into her new neighborhood. Her experiences are also humorously relatable: from mistaking Piccadilly Circus for a literal circus to stumbling on double-deck buses, Tanty's adventures trigger memories of many newbie Londoners.

In addition to the tongue-twisting plots, the novel's rhythmic narrative is groundbreaking. Using creolised English, Selvon combines colloquial slang and dialects that reflect the language of Trinidadian immigrants. Such fusion of languages opens new discussions on decolonisation and the fusing of cultures in London.

The narrative's core thread interweaves through seasons, mirroring the passage of time and capturing sensory experiences. Amidst diverse characters, the overarching theme revolves around belonging in a vast city. The immersive read encapsulates immigrant struggles while pondering identity and connection in an unfamiliar land.