There is no real tradition of "immigrant literature" in Britain the way there is in the United States. Of course there is a long and continuing history of immigration to Britain, but this cannot be compared with the huge numbers who have arrived in successive waves on American soil over a relatively short period. Taking Jewish-American literature and more recently Chicano culture and literature as examples, we can note that the culture and the traditions that immigrants bring with them are partly remodeled by changed circumstances. This literature (or theatre or paintings or films) also bears witness to the experience of what it is like to be a stranger in a strange land.

The Lonely Londoners by Sam Selvon and Yardie by Victor Headley both have more or less the same tale to tell, relating the story of West Indian immigrants arriving and settling in Britain. As such, they can be grouped with the very small number of other works that portray the lives of black immigrants in the United Kingdom. The earliest of these was perhaps Jean Rhys's 1934 novel, Voyage in the Dark. Also included in this list would be The Emigrants by George Lamming (1954) and V.S. Naipaul's 1967 novel The Mimic Men.

The Lonely Londoners and Yardie both focus specifically on West Indian immigrants in London and they present the reader with insight into the realities of a subculture which mainstream society does not know very well, a society which, for obvious reasons is almost totally ignored. When it is perceived, this is mainly through the prism of the press and the TV. Often the only other indirect contacts are cultural offshoots like music and foodstuffs.

The two books share a certain number of characteristics and details which it will be interesting to trace. However, the forty years that separate their publication were a period of immense economic and social change in Britain and also for the rest of the world, and this is inevitably reflected in both books.

At the beginning of the 1950s, as Britain was struggling to cope after the end of the Second World War, in certain sectors of the economy there were plenty of jobs to be had. The British Empire had crumbled fairly fast yet former colonized peoples remained British citizens. There were no restrictions on their
entry into Britain and shipping companies for example exploited this lucrative market. In 1947 547 immigrants arrived in Britain from Jamaica alone. In 1955, for West Indians, this figure had increased to 18,000 per year and by 1965 numbers in the UK had jumped to 850,000, or 2% of the total population. By 1987 the non-white population of Britain was around 2.4 million, which represented 4.5% of the population. Successive legislation over the years and changes in the economic environment have stemmed this flow. However, for the first time, the census carried out in 1991 required respondents to identify their ethnic origin, and it is estimated that around 45% of the non-white population was born in Britain and 33% of these numbers are aged under 16. This second generation, children of the post-war settlers and born in Britain, are growing up and facing problems of their own. *The Lonely Londoners* and *Yardie* are, each in its own way, reflections of economic and social reality in Britain, rooted in a lifestyle and a culture that go largely unknown and unsuspected.

Both novels begin with the arrival of new immigrants in London. In the earlier novel, the people arrive at Waterloo on the boat train. In the Nineties the central character of *Yardie* arrives at Heathrow. In both cases the newcomers are met by total strangers who have been asked or instructed to pick them up:

One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unreality about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if not London at all but some strange place on another planet, Moses Aloetta hop on a number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove to go to Waterloo to meet a fellar who was coming from Trinidad on the boat train [*The Lonely Londoners* 7]

The methods of transport and the weather conditions tell us that life in London is not one of luxury and comfort. Sam Selvon goes on to portray the lives of black, working-class immigrants trying to make a living in the cold, crushing, urban environment of central London. The novel revolves around Moses Aloetta who also seems to be the narrator, and the fortunes and misadventures of him and his group of friends and acquaintances.

The arrival of D (he is only known by this enigmatic initial) the main figure in *Yardie* is striking in its difference:

The long line of passengers waiting to pass through immigration control was noisy but colourful. After spending over eight hours in the skies they were impatient [...] For many it was the first time they had left Jamaica, arriving on the fabled shores of England their heads filled high with expectations. This year, an early spring had spread its warmth over the country. [5]

The sun was bright and warm [...] welcoming him to his new country. [9]

D is borne away in “a shiny blue Mercedes 350 sports model” (8). In fact, he is an illegal immigrant, arriving in Britain on false papers. A tough boy from the ghettos of Kingston, Jamaica, acting as a courier for a drug syndicate, he has flown to London with a kilo of cocaine strapped around him. However, he man-