*Question 1*

*The Lonely Londoners comes in 13 more or less loosely connected unnumbered sections (or “episodes”, or “ballads”, or “vignettes”. . . ) of varying length. Some sections are clearly devoted to one character in particular, others have an alternative focus, and one (# 9) is very different from all others. Discuss the structure of the book and try to come up with organizing patterns in its set-up. (For ease of reference, it is recommended to just number the sections: 1 (pp. 1-15), 2 (pp. 15-29), 3 (pp. 29-45), 4 (pp. 45-52), 5 (pp. 52-57), 6 (pp. 57-71), 7 (pp. 71-83), 8 (pp. 83-92), 9 (pp. 92-102), 10 (pp. 102-116), 11 (pp. 116-130), 12 (pp. 130-33), 13 (pp. 133-39)).*

The structure of *The Lonely Londoners* seems to align with the Calypso music tradition. With Calypsonian music, the performer acts primarily as a storyteller, reciting important information about the local’s past as a way of enjoyment, preservation of communal identity, and as a way to process different forms of injustice that have occurred against them. In the novel, the anonymous narrator acts like this performer in his episodic, non-chronological story telling about the boys and their exploits, troubles, and loneliness in London. Of this, Kathie Birat says, “It is the narrator who organizes the representation of the Caribbean diaspora in London, a group to which he belongs, but from which he stands apart as a performer. He is producing a text, a song about Caribbean London, which is both a confrontation with the present and a testimony to the power of the past and of the memory of the Caribbean” (827).

In looking specifically at how these thirteen sections relate to one another, it is helpful to examine what Selvon has to say about it himself. In an interview with Michael Fabre, Selvon says,

“The episodic quality of my novel may come of the quality of West Indian life in London itself. Most of the characters live from day to day, with ups and downs; encounters and chance occurrences are just as important as social rituals. I strove for verisimilitude. This may be the way people are, the way we are in Trinidad where the present is not important. I did not try to change the plot or the sequence in order to make it fit the British tradition, although it does follow it, I believe, with a difference” (66-67).

In one sense, the novel’s structure itself reflects a social realist approach to the experiences of West Indians in London during the 1950s. As a whole, there is not a clear sense of progression or chronology from episode to episode. Each focuses on different, somewhat sporadic, characters and events. This reflects the actual experiences of the boys throughout the novel and the fractured sense of economic and social stability many of them feel while living in London. In episode eleven, Moses discusses the level of stagnation he feels by economic insecurity, non-acceptance by white British people, and homesickness. He says, “Ten years, papa, ten years the old man in Brit’n, and what to show for it? What happen during all that time? From winter to winter, summer to summer, work after work. Sleep, eat, hustle pussy, work. Boy, sometimes I sit there and think about that, think about it real hard. […] Boy, if I was you, I would save up my money and when you have a little thing put by, hustle back to Trinidad” (93).

Yet, according to Sevlon, the sequence still seemingly can be understood within the British tradition, just with a twist to it. By this, I see two similarities. First, though there is a level of difficulty to the sequential ordering of the narrative, a level of linearity can be established by the end. In Section eleven, the reader is made aware that three or four years have passed since section one and Galahad’s arrival. This helps the reader relatively place many of the non-chronologically ordered events within a traditional framework of temporal progression (though it is not as “neat” as many other novels). Second, the non-chronology seen episode-to-episode does not interrupt the novel’s sense of unity. While episodes might tend to emphasize the stories of individuals (with some exceptions, such as episode nine which tells the Summer’s Ballad), each individual, nevertheless, relates to the developing story “of the boys,” regardless of where they occur “in time” or on the page.

Works Cited

* Birat, Kathie. “Making Sense of Memory in the Writings of the Caribbean Diaspora: Sam Selvon’s London Calypso.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 55, no. 6, 2019, pp. 824–835.
* Fabre, Michael. 1988a. “An Interview with Sam Selvon.” In *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, edited by Susheila Nasta, 64–76. Washington, DC: Three Continents Press.
* Selvon, Sam. *The Lonely Londoners*. 1959. Penguin Classics, 2011.

Summary of thirteen sections:

1. Arrival of Sir Galahad
2. Galahad introduced to city
3. Cap’s Ballad
4. Bart Ballad
5. Lewis Ballad
6. Tanty Ballad
7. Galahad Ballad
8. Big City Ballad
9. Summer Ballad
10. Five Past Twelve Ballad and the Fete
11. Galahad and Moses talk about oldtimes
12. Cap Ballad (continued)
13. Confession with Moses