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Lessons of the long-distance runner

by [Anthony Daniels](#)

On the impact and errors of Alan Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*.

How and why do societies fall apart, without any external compulsion to do so? These are questions that, having spent a great deal of my life in Britain, preoccupy me.

It might be denied, of course, that societies ever truly fall apart: short of annihilation, they always continue in one fashion or another. There is a deal of ruin in a nation, as Adam Smith said; and in any case, from a certain rather narrow perspective, namely that of the per capita gross domestic product, Britain is a vastly better place to live than ever it was before, its current economic crisis notwithstanding.

But it has also managed the difficult trick of being both much richer and much nastier. I remember an Indian doctor whose exceptional sweetness of character inspired the instant affection of all who met him telling me more than a third of a century ago that he considered Britain the most civilized country in the world. No one could poss ...

Anthony Daniels's most recent book is *In Praise of Prejudice* (Encounter Books).

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