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In the Castle of My Dream

But we read at different times for different things. We take to novels our own ideas of what the novel should be; and those ideas are made by our needs, our education, our background or perhaps our ideas of our background. Because we read, really, to find out what we already know, we can take a writer's virtues for granted. And his originality, the news he is offering us, can go over our heads.¹

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Although the narrative of *In the Castle of My Skin*,³ George Lamming's first novel, is set entirely in the island of Barbados where G., the main character, lives in a small rural community, the author does not fail to allude to other countries that are in some way or other connected with this small territory lost in the Caribbean Sea. In the first place, he frequently cites Great Britain which has privileged links with "Little England," its model colony. Then, he makes numerous references to the West Indies' close and powerful neighbour: the United States. Indeed, regularly throughout the novel, Lamming mentions the U. S. A., mainly through Pa, the oldest man in the village, who went to Panama to build the canal and who spent some time in the Canal Zone (which was under American administration) and above all through Trumper, G.'s best friend, who has decided to emigrate to America whereas G. has made up his mind to go to High School.

¹. V. S. Naipaul, "Conrad's Darkness," in *The Return of Eva Peron*, (1980) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 205.

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³. George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, (1953) (London: Longman, 1988). All further references are to this edition.

Even if the author does not emphasize the North American myths, even if it is clear that the theme of America does not constitute the backbone of this *bildungsroman*, one quickly realizes that it plays a noticeable role. A careful reading of *In the Castle of My Skin* reveals that this topic crops up at key-passages. Thus, Lamming evokes the U. S. A. at the very beginning of the story. After describing the riots that flared up in Barbados, he reminds the reader that the United States can play a major role in the island's future and in the last chapter of the book he deals with the impact it is going to have on the Barbadian population. One is therefore entitled to wonder why there are so many remarks about America in a work of fiction whose background is Barbados and the Caribbean.

It is interesting to note that the first descriptions of, or rather hints of, America are delivered by people who have no first-hand knowledge of it, who have never been there and who can only rely upon what they have heard or maybe read. Consequently, they tend to conjure up a picture of America as a remote land, difficult to reach, where different people with peculiar habits live. In fact, they find it hard to relate the American mainland to the world they know, whether geographical or historical. This is the case when the young Trumper who is still a schoolboy asks his friend Bob what he knows about America. The latter replies: "You talking about the olden times . . . You talkin' about a way back in 1492" (148). The writer indicates clearly that for the inhabitants of Barbados, America has remained the timeless, "mythical America" which was popular in European literature or culture until the end of the eighteenth century.⁴

But Lamming's fiction is set in the 1930s-1940s and one wonders why these villagers do not have a more up-to-date vision of America. The answer can be found in the education they received at school. Let us remember that until immediately after the Second World War Barbados was under British rule. Its educational system was that of a colony and was not meant to improve the denizens' level of education. Its aim was rather to teach them to accept their colonial status — being only a tiny part of a huge empire —, their non-existence as a nation and their non-belonging to the twentieth century. Small wonder that they cling to an image of America over which time seems to have no hold.

⁴. "Mais la révolte des colonies américaines contre l'Angleterre détestée fait entrer l'Amérique dans la légende. Les insurgents sont le symbole de la liberté et de la nature triomphante. Une véritable mutation s'accomplit alors, selon François Furet : d'un espace sans histoire, où vit le noble sauvage à l'antipode du civilisé, se substitue celle de l'entrée dans l'histoire tout court." Ronald Creagh, "Les Etats-Unis sont-ils une utopie?" in Luc Bureau et Jean Ferrari (eds.), *La rencontre des imaginaires* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1993), p. 55.

Similarly, Pa's fancied portrayal of America bears out his colonial condition, his exile on a small island given over to plantation. Since Barbados is a densely populated area, his chief preoccupation is land, and he is especially attracted by America as a promised land, "where . . . there be milk an' honey flowin' as it use to flow in the ancient time . . . there ain't nothing to prevent you or me or any man Jack once he got the money, there ain't nothin' to stop him ownin' this land" (78). For someone like Pa whose forefathers were enslaved, this conception of America is not aberrant, all the more so since the old man, just like most of his fellow-citizens, is a staunch Christian who has witnessed the flooding of his village, an inhabitant of which was even compared to Noah, and who feels that it is now time for the younger ones to find a safe place to live. If America is synonymous with living space and tolerance, there is certainly no better place than America on Earth.⁵

Yet, if Lamming has chosen to show some of his characters musing about the attractive possibilities of the "frontier," the author's pragmatism leads us to be careful: we do not expect him to stage only characters who can be fooled by such fine words as "the American way of life." The reader supposes that some of his protagonists, as conscious representatives of an evolving society, will take up the gauntlet and debunk all the sham that makes the Third World hope and that is known as "the American Dream."⁶ But this does not happen. Strangely enough, no one will ever prevent people from trying to emigrate to America. Not a single character warns the others about an America hit by the Great Depression, or qualifies all these optimistic statements, not even Pa who has nonetheless worked for an American company in Panama and who probably has no illusions about what is expected of an immigrant worker. In fact, nobody questions the American Dream because there are many reasons to think that the island's current mutations are going to put this dream within everybody's reach. Contrary to what has happened in the past, it is not only a happy few who will benefit from it. Everybody is going to have equal chances, which is what Pa has understood and tries to communicate to his spouse:

5. "Ouverte à tous les opprimés, l'Amérique est en même temps le dernier asile face à un monde perdu par la tyrannie et "l'esclavage universel". Les Américains sont les fils de Noé, réfugiés dans l'arche qui, seule, surnage lors du déluge." Elise Marienstras, *Les mythes fondateurs de la nation américaine* (Paris: François Maspéro, 1976), p. 101.

6. "Comme dans toutes les grandes nations, [l'imaginaire collectif] s'est structuré sur des récits fondateurs et des constructions mythiques . . . mais il s'est souvent médiatisé dans les formules à succès tels que l'*American way of life*, ou la "frontière" qui ne sont que des variantes de ce qu'on a nommé "le rêve américain." Ronald Creagh, "Les Etats-Unis sont-ils une utopie?", *ibid.*, p. 51.

Old Woman: 'Twill be a next Panama all over again . . .

Old Man: Not this time, he says. This time, he says, 'twill be America. But he ain't call it by that name all the time. He christened it by a next name which he call the United States . . . You makin' the mistake of your life, Ma. 'Twill be different. (78)

It cannot be "a next Panama" because the colonial powers have begun to lose their possessions all over the world and new horizons are being opened. As the European empires collapse, the new countries do not look towards America, a former colony, but towards the United States, an emerging superpower from which they expect much and which seems to give them satisfaction: "A delegation which was sent to Washington brought back the news that the United States Government would contract a considerable number of labourers for three or four years. The rates of pay seemed fantastic to people like Trumper who had never worked" (217). One could have thought that the process of decolonization, by throwing independent or near-independent nations into the vortex of world history, would have shattered the American Dream instead of re-enacting it. This is not the case because entering world history simply means entering Western or rather European history, at least at the beginning, and this is not enough to destroy a myth which owes more to the Biblical tradition than anything else, and which insists on a break with European history.⁷

Thus the American Dream survives, which the author demonstrates through Trumper's departure: "We stood on the pier together and watched the ship which was anchored in the distance. There were hundreds of them leaving for America" (208). The American Dream manages to outlast decolonization and one observes a general rush in the direction of America, but nobody can say if this hope is going to eventuate or not, nobody can guarantee that the people who are leaving are going to succeed. It is a possibility that is offered to G.'s fellow-countrymen by the new generation of politicians who sense that the years to come will bring some changes, who may have an interest in getting rid of part of the local population and who may have exaggerated the potentialities of the United States. But the writer never calls into question the villagers' unwavering faith in America. The person who leads them to the U. S. A. is compared to Moses. Lamming even indicates that some of them, including Trumper, have always had this idea of

7. "Le plus souvent, l'Atlantique est comparé à la mer Rouge, l'émigration des sectes anglaises est identifiée à la fuite des Hébreux . . . Même les auteurs non puritains reprennent ces comparaisons . . . car, plus qu'un argument théologique, ils y trouvent la justification de leur création. Pour pouvoir affirmer la naissance d'une nation nouvelle, il fallait être en mesure de s'innocenter de la rupture avec l'histoire européenne." Elise Marienstras, *ibid.*, p. 76.

emigrating in mind. It is as if the author were implying that the West Indians cannot fail to go to the U. S. A., and that they have much to gain by going there, a point he made forcefully some years later in his collection of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile*:

The West Indies are lucky to be where they are: next door to America, not the America of the Mason Dixon line or the colonizing policies in the guise of freedom and self-defence, not the America that is afraid of its own strength. It's a different America the West Indies can explore. It's the America that started in a womb of promise, the America that started as an alternative to the old and privileged Prospero, too old and too privileged to pay attention to the needs of his own native Calibans.⁸

But it is not easy to go to a dream land that started in "a womb of promise," as this requires at least a passage through "the womb of space," "to suggest intuitively the dead-end of a cultural homogeneous model."⁹ The emigrants who are on their way to America do not know it yet, but they will have to adjust to American civilisation. Although most of them stem from a creole society and are of mixed origins, they have been brought up in a colonial system, with its trail of prejudices, which has made them monolithic characters, and which therefore does not allow them to cope with the American melting-pot. Their education obviously prevents them from fully understanding what it means. As a result, they will start by sinking into a "melting-plot."¹⁰ They were all heading for the American Dream, but it is the American "nightmare" that is awaiting the Barbadians.

At the very outset of their journey, the narrator informs the reader of his anxiety as regards this trip to America: "It seemed I wasn't going to see any of those faces again" (208). And indeed, the crossing rapidly takes an odd turn. As Trumper expresses it when he comes back to Barbados: "I was sea-sick couple-days . . . So I didn't see the place from the sea, but I hear the rest talkin' 'bout the statues o' liberty an' all the rest" (276). Feeling sick because of the rough seas, Trumper is so to speak driven onto the coasts of America which he has failed to recognize since he was lying on his berth when he went past the Statue of Liberty, America's symbolical beacon. As a result, he is at a loss when he gets off

8. George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, (1960) (London & New York: Allison & Busby, 1984), p. 152.

9. Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 11.

10. Concerning the passage from "melting-pot" to "melting-plot," from "the American Dream" to "the American nightmare," see Bernard Terramorsi, "*Peter Rugg, the Missing Man*, de William Austin (1824), pouvoirs surnaturels et pouvoir politique: naissance de la superpuissance américaine," in Bureau & Ferrari, *ibid.*, p. 219.

the ship: "I don't exactly recall what kind o' feelin' I had, but nothing seem real to me" (276). By dint of wanting the American Dream to come true, Trumper, the archetypal West Indian immigrant, has succeeded; but not the way he expected. The dream becomes reality in the sense that it is now part of his life. He lives in a dream: "Although everything goin' on round for you to see, nothing still seem real" (276). Or is it rather reality that is slipping away, that is metamorphosing into fantasy? One wonders: "But the first night I walk down Broadway, that wus something out o' this world" (276). What is sure is that the Caribbean immigrant who arrives in America finds himself in dire straits. Having abandoned his island and its colonial past, he has managed to travel to America, not following the forgotten slave trade triangle but crossing the plugged Bermuda triangle successfully (from Barbados to New York), only to be unable to identify what he was looking for, only to be unable to recognize the U. S. A.. Yet he can easily be forgiven. How could he "re-cognize" what he does not "cognize", since he has never been to the United States? In fact, what happens to him is that he fails to distinguish what he was told, or better, what he remembered of it. Does it mean that he was told lies, that the former immigrants who came back from America did not relate the truth? The narrative indicates rather that Trumper's problems derive from his unbelief. He has too many doubts about the United States:

"Tis only what I hear them say," said Boy Blue. "You push in what they call a dime through a little hole, and the plate o' food come out at you through another hole. An' some say you can put in a next dime in a next hole an' you hear the music whatever you want to hear while you eatin."

"I ain't like the sound o' that much," said Trumper. (161)

Trumper does not manage to identify the face of America (he did not see the Statue of Liberty) because he does not appreciate it at its face value. He has been brought up on a pocket-sized island and as a result thinks too small: he did not entirely believe in the tall story of America, that was his biggest mistake, for "nothin' ain't small in the United States" (274). Hence, Trumper is the epitome of the West Indian's ambivalent situation: the dream has come true, and he now lives in the U. S. A., but not prepared for such a shock, he does not realize what is happening to him. In order ultimately to grasp his plight, he must once and for all shed his colonial's skin, but this can only be done through experience, the actual, practical (and once more paradoxical) knowledge of or contact with a dream. This leads him inevitably to a sort of twilight zone, in which he will undergo a night-ride with a devilish woman whose succubus nature is not without evoking a

"night-mare:"¹¹ "Get in her car . . . In America every woman got a car like civil servant with bicycle 'bout this place. An' when you get in a car, you don't know what happen next, 'cause you get up next mornin,' God knows where, with your eyes comin' out your head" (277).

At this stage, the reader certainly thinks that the joke must not be taken too far and that it is high time for Trumper to get out of this nightmare, this "melting-plot," in order to re-integrate and take advantage of America's "melting-pot," of "the American dream" which gives everyone a chance to prosper, whatever one's origins or race. After all, is all this not rather far-fetched? Unfortunately not, and Trumper confirms this: "that first night . . . I get in a vehicle and drive back to my camp. When the car stop, I'd land up some two hundred miles from the camp" (276). Jestng has its limits and an overnight two hundred mile ride is not within the limits, even those of a decently realistic novel. Trumper proves it by stating that "they couldn't find me for two days" (276). It is understood that he left his immigrant camp without notice and that within the space of one night, he passed from the status of legal to that of illegal alien. He has begun to get to the bottom of the immigrants' life in the United States. Is Trumper about to wake up and realize that the country where he has settled is not the mythical, Biblical America, the land of plenty he persuaded himself he would find? One can put it like that. The U. S. A. is not a dream, neither is it a nightmare. Nor is it a land of milk and honey. In brief, in Trumper's words: "If nothin' else, America is a country o' work an' a country o' noise" (277). Could that be Hell? It is obviously not Paradise since no one used to work in Paradise. Is the United States therefore associated with the infernal regions, fifty years before world media publicizes the Muslim fundamentalists' vision of the U. S. A. as a Great Satan? By coincidence, the etymology of the word "Satan" means: to plot against...

It is now apparent that G. had good reason to be worried about his friend's departure, and it is scarcely surprising to see the former puzzled when Trumper returns to Barbados. His homecoming could be a surprise in itself if one sees in G's uncle's fate what is bound to happen to any emigrant: "My brother went to America," my mother said, " It's years now. The last we heard he was on a boat and then take sick, and is probably dead for all we know"(4). However, if the author has mentioned this possibility as being plausible, he seems to have chosen

¹¹. For a more complete description of nightmare and the figures associated with it, see B. Terramorsi, "L'île et le fantastique: à propos des *Sorcières espagnoles* de Prosper Mérimée et de *The Adalantado of the Seven Cities* de Washington Irving," in *Alizés*, n° 1 (Université de La Réunion, Janvier 1991), p. 91.

Trumper to prove that, on second thoughts, there is nothing extraordinary about reappearing in "Little England". But is there really nothing uncommon? Indeed, the emigrant is allowed to return, but on the condition that he change. The letter that Trumper sent to G. and in which the latter read that his friend was not the boy whom he used to go to school with anymore seals this pact: "You don't understand, you don't understand what life is, but I'll tell you when I come and I am coming soon" (219). Although he knows that his friend is due to arrive, this does not prevent G. from being astonished when Trumper turns up. His presence appears all the same to be suspicious, even to G.'s mother. Both characters have a feeling that there is something bizarre about Trumper. They knew he would be back, they expected some change and yet they are surprised: "His assurance puzzled me . . . My mother seemed puzzled too" (273). This is all very strange, all the more so since the narrator gives an all but normal or positive account of him: "Trumper was smiling . . . He looked happy and prosperous" (273). Of course, one can argue that G. and his mother are flabbergasted at Trumper's apparent wealth and social success, but that would be missing the wood for the tree. All things considered, he is just a little better off than before his departure, but he has in no way gained anything substantial, materially speaking, by going to America. In short, he does not become a member of the ruling classes when he goes back to Barbados.

Actually, the whole problem arises from the fact that G. and his mother themselves do not manage to grasp the origin of their amazement. They just sense that something has been altered in Trumper but they do not succeed in finding what. Here is the heart of the matter: is it the real Trumper that is standing before them? Both G. and his mother have the impression they are not talking to him but to something or someone that has taken on his appearance. In this connection, G. notices rapidly that the person who speaks to him does not always sound like Trumper: "One or two words had changed for him, and it was only when he used these words that one detected a change in the manner of speech" (274). Subsequently, the question which suggests itself is: if they are not talking to Trumper, who are they talking to? They are simply conversing with someone who has been to America, but let us not be mistaken: to someone who went to a dream land where he experienced a nightmare, to someone who went in search of Paradise and found Hell instead, and finally to someone who has survived all this. To cut a long story short, Trumper is someone who went beyond the seas and who is now back from the great Beyond, that is to say a ghost. No wonder the narrator reports that G.'s mother "didn't seem to like the sound of America" (275) and that G.

"was expecting her to tell Trumper to make his peace with God and settle down to a quiet life in the village" (275).

Now, if Trumper can be compared to a spirit who flew back safely to the Caribbean, the narrative nonetheless insists on the serious aspect of this information and asks the reader to give the matter proper consideration. The public has long been accustomed, since Lindbergh's Spirit of Saint-Louis, to witness the victorious flights of "spirits" across the Atlantic. Anyway, Trumper will do his best to prove that if he is a spook, he is not a crook. He really has spent some time in America and he wants to be believed. In this respect, he will give an all but credible account of America: "Although he had profited greatly by living in America, he had been very critical. My mother couldn't understand whether he wanted us to believe that America was a good place or a bad place" (282). And indeed, Trumper's reflex is not to praise or condemn the U. S. A.. His sole aim is to convince his audience that the U. S. A. exists and that the emigrant who endeavours to outsmart the various plots which threaten his integration can earn his own plot where he can settle: the satanic land of plot exists, but so does the other side of the coin which is the Biblical plot of land. The only condition is that one must be prepared to undergo the terrible test, the crucible of the melting-pot, of American society:

"You don't know when you'd go back?" my mother asked.

"I don't know," he said, "but I-want-to-go-back different. The emigration scheme might be all right for some people, but it don't give you a kind of freedom you want." (275)

Trumper has learnt his lesson. Only a perfect integration in the American melting-pot will allow him to enjoy "the United States [which] is a place where a man-can-make pots-of-money" (274). That is why he wants to return to the United States, the country of the "melting-pot of money," because he now knows he can make a fortune in the U. S. A., whereas he first went there only to seek his fortune. From now on, Trumper wants to taste the dream of America; he thinks he can recognize it so he wants to go back — he will be a revenant in a land of revenue. Trumper's way of seeing is simple, and down-to-earth: if you give credit to the American dream, the dream will come true, be reified, just as he, a ghost, becomes someone reliable because he wears something tangible: the promising garments of the frontier. G., who doubts Trumper's presence, ends up acknowledging it: "He was wearing a silver chain round his wrist and on the lapel of the jacket a small badge with stars and stripes. We looked at him well" (275).

In the light of the above explanations, one could conclude this study of the American Dream in *In the Castle of My Skin* by asserting that the presence of this concept in George Lamming's novel is aimed at showing that the Barbadian population is not doomed to suffer on this small island which was first exploited by the British before falling into the hands of post-colonial profiteers. It reminds the reader that emigration, a long-standing tradition in the Caribbean, remains a way to improve one's lot and that there is a designated country for this solution whose name is the U. S. A. and where it is possible to start from scratch. In this respect, Trumper can be seen as a sort of travelling salesman trying to sell his product: a self-made man outfit.

But such a conclusion would take into account only one part of Trumper's discourse once he is back from the United States. It would completely erase what he has to say about Black people in America. It is true that one has the feeling Trumper broaches this subject somewhat reluctantly. G. reports that: "The smile had disappeared and Trumper sat erect, serious. I had this feeling that there was something else he wanted to say. It was as though the talk about noise and lights was an attempt to obscure another issue" (277). Trumper finds it difficult to speak about the American Blacks because he is a liar or rather a hypocrite. He feels obliged to refer to the hardships Black people encounter in the U. S. A. but his real concern for them is questionable. What the reader first notices is the way Trumper describes what he calls "My people." The words and the tone he uses betray his lapsing into a rhetorical speech on race: "My people," he said again, "or better, my race. 'Twus in the States I find it, an' I'm gonner keep it till thy kingdom come" (287). It is as though we were listening to Martin Luther King or another important leader of the Civil Rights Movement. Of course, it is conceivable that Trumper is moved by what he has to teach, but if that is the case, one cannot understand why such a committed person is so obsessed by his material possessions or by the way he looks. G. does not fail to sense this obvious dichotomy:

"What people," I asked. I was a bit puzzled.

"My People," said Trumper. His tone was insistent. Then he softened into a smile. I didn't know whether he was smiling at my ignorance, or whether he was smiling his satisfaction with the box and the voice and above all Paul Robeson. (287)

Trumper has learnt his American lesson too well. Although he certainly feels some compassion towards his brothers, he has no time to spare for them, as he cannot rid himself of this need to exalt individual success, to boast of personal achievements. This can above all be seen in the way he always tries to belittle G.

and the education he received. The dialogue between the two characters who discuss politics at the end of the novel only proves that G. perfectly understands what politics are about and that Trumper's only wish is to act like a big brother. The latter's continuous reminder that he wants to go back to the United States only on his own also backs up this thesis: Trumper does not impart details on the Black cause wholeheartedly. He wants to warn G. about the Black people in America because he is afraid that G. might discover the truth one day. When he tells G. who has planned to go to Trinidad to teach there that the latter is not far enough away, the sentence indicates Trumper's desire to show once again that he is cleverer than his friend rather than a real tendency to urge G. to travel abroad. It is likely that Trumper already suspects what G.'s future is going to be like and feels compelled to put him in the know. He does not want to have anything to reproach himself with as the following shows: "But if they don't know, you goin' to know 'cause if my mind tell me right you goin' to go much further than Trinidad, an' that's why I bring you here for this talk, 'cause it frighten the life out o' me to know what's goin' to happen. Now you won't be able to say Trumper didn't tell me" (290). Consequently, one feels the need to move away from some well-meaning critics who, like Ambroise Kom, tend to consider Trumper as the harbinger of Black consciousness.¹² The issue is not to challenge the fact that Trumper has a good knowledge of what is taking place in the U. S. A., but to refute his involvement or interest in the Black cause. Trumper does not participate in the Black Movement because he knows; he may know too much and so he is afraid, as the previous quote reveals. He is scared for many reasons. He has managed to travel in space — to America, where he discovered the Black nation — and in time — when he returns to Barbados, he notices the changes which herald the end of colonization. The text speaks explicitly of these changes which are so deep that they disclose physical scars: "The wood, the train lines: these had disappeared since Trumper's departure, and I had a feeling they affected him" (277).

It is interesting to compare Trumper's peripeteia to those of Rip Van Winkle, Washington Irving's character.¹³ Just as Rip Van Winkle witnesses the

¹². "Cet exil éloigne Trumper de son peuple mais lui permet de mieux saisir les dangers qui le guettent. A l'instar des nationalistes noirs américains, Trumper . . . éprouve pour les classes défavorisées un sentiment de profonde affection qui le révolte. Beaucoup mieux que ses congénères restés à "Little England", il comprend le caractère international des problèmes auxquels se heurtent son pays et s'identifie désormais à tous les noirs opprimés." Ambroise Kom, *George Lamming et le destin des Caraïbes* (Paris: Didier, 1986), p. 75.

¹³. Washington Irving, *Rip Van Winkle*, (1820) (Paris: Aubier collection bilingue, 1979). All page references included in the text with the abbreviation *RIP*.

birth of the United States of America, Trumper does not discover the Black nation but does witness its birth. Just as Rip was the prisoner of "a short, square-built old fellow" (*RIP*, 170), Trumper spent some time among people who "spent money like little boys" (277). Both characters resemble ghosts who meet dwarfs. It is now understandable that Trumper is frightened of an involvement in world history, and prefers to secure a quiet little life for himself. He is more inclined to tell his friend that there are tremendous forces at work than to become personally committed. Moreover, the emergence of a Black nation could be a threat for the "melting-pot": from the financial point of view, will the emigrants benefit from the Black Movement? Trumper does not really know where he stands, which the narrator senses: "This was all very cryptic" (280). He knows that Trumper is no "Rip": he did not disappear for thirty years to come back and be confronted with a new country. Although he is "ripe" enough, that is, he has spent enough time abroad to be aware of the coming upheavals, he lacks the stature of Rip Van Winkle.

This can therefore help the reader to understand why the writer has chosen to tackle the myths of America in a work of fiction which is not directly concerned with them since it is set in Barbados. The answer probably lies in this problematic birth of a Black nation. The presence of "the American dream" in *In the Castle of My Skin* could be interpreted as a means of endowing the novel with the title of seminal work, which would be inkeeping with the remark from a *New Statesman* critic who wrote in the Longman edition of Lamming's opus that it was "the fundamental book of a civilisation."

