Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)
A Peer Reviewed (Refereed) International Journal
Impact Factor 6.8992 (ICI) http://www.rjelal.com;
Email:editorrjelal@gmail.com; ISSN:2395-2636 (P); 2321-3108(O)

Vol.14.Issue 1. 2026 (Jan-March)

RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER INDIA
2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

Caliban in Exile: Colonial Legacy and Cultural Disillusionment in George Lamming's *Water with Berries*

Shivani Shailja[1]*, Prof. B.D. Pandey[2]
[1]*Research Scholar, CSJM University (PPN PG College Campus), Pin–208001, Uttar Pradesh, India
[2] Department of English, PPN PG College Campus, Pin–208001, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email: bdpandey20@gmail.com
***Corresponding Author:** Email: shailja1920shivani@gmail.com

DOI: 10.33329/rjelal.14.1.370


Shivani Shailja

Article info
Article Received: 20/02/2026
Article Accepted: 18/03/2026
Published online: 31/03/2026

Abstract

George Lamming's *Water with Berries* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* share deep thematic and structural similarities, with *Water with Berries* functioning as a postcolonial revision of *The Tempest*. Lamming reimagines Shakespeare's play not simply as a source of literary inspiration, but as a metaphor for the colonial and postcolonial experience, especially the tensions between colonizer and colonized, exile and home, power and resistance. In *The Tempest*, Prospero represents colonial authority, having seized the island from Caliban and wielding control through language, magic, and knowledge. While in *Water with Berries*, this dynamic is mirrored through the protagonist Teeton's interactions in post-Windrush London, where he and his fellow Caribbean immigrants are still subject to the subtle yet pervasive control of social, cultural, and political British society. Prospero is himself in exile, though one who ultimately regains power. Caliban is a native displaced in his own land. Lamming's characters, particularly Teeton, Roger, and Derek are in exile in the metropolis, displaced from their native Caribbean homeland. Unlike Prospero, they do not regain control or find resolution, but experience alienation and disappointment. Lamming does not simply mirror *The Tempest*; he critiques and subverts it. While Shakespeare's play ends in forgiveness and resolution, *Water with Berries* ends in tragedy and unresolved tension, reflecting the postcolonial disillusionment that the "mother country" has failed to deliver on its promises. Caliban from *The Tempest* and the Caribbean characters, especially Teeton in George Lamming's *Water with Berries* are deeply connected through the shared theme of exile and the psychological legacy of colonialism. Lamming deliberately draws on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to craft a postcolonial reinterpretation, and

Caliban becomes a symbolic figure of colonial subjects like Teeton, Roger, and Derek.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Alienation, Migration, Exile

In *Water with Berries*, the main characters are Teeton, Derek, and Roger who are Caribbean artists living in England. They came with aspirations shaped by colonial education and propaganda, believing Britain to be the pinnacle of civilization, opportunity, and cultural identity.

"They had come to England thinking they would find a home. What they found was a cage." (*Water with Berries, 97)*. This quote reflects their collective disappointment as they realize that their dreams of belonging and success are undermined by systemic racism, exclusion, and cultural marginalization. It captures one of the central postcolonial themes in George Lamming's *Water with Berries*: the disillusionment of Caribbean immigrants in Britain and the harsh realities of life in the colonial motherland. Growing up in colonized territories, the characters were taught to view England as their cultural and national "home." It symbolized a promised land where intelligence, talent, and hard work would be rewarded. However, upon arrival, that ideal quickly crumbles. The "home" they longed for turns out to be unwelcoming and alienating. The "cage" metaphor is powerful as it implies entrapment, powerlessness, and restricted movement. Although the characters are physically free, their social and psychological freedom is curtailed by lingering colonial structures and racial hierarchies. They are tolerated but never fully accepted and are constantly made to feel foreign. Living in England does not bring about the sense of integration they expected. Instead, it results in cultural dislocation as they're not just cut off from their Caribbean roots but also not fully assimilated into British society. They inhabit a liminal space, trapped between two worlds that does not wholly accept them.

Caliban from *The Tempest* and the Caribbean characters, especially Teeton in George Lamming's *Water with Berries* are deeply connected through the shared theme of exile and the psychological legacy of colonialism. Lamming deliberately draws on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to craft a postcolonial reinterpretation, and Caliban becomes a symbolic figure of colonial subjects like Teeton, Roger, and Derek. Caliban was born on the island but is dispossessed by Prospero, who imposes foreign rule and claims control over the land and Caliban's body and language.

Similarly, in *Water with Berries*, the Caribbean men are metaphorically exiled from their true cultural homeland. While they are in Britain physically, they are displaced spiritually and culturally, cut off from their roots and made to feel alien in the mother country.

"This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak'st from me" (*The Tempest*, 23-24). These lines are spoken by Caliban in Act 1, Scene 2 of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In this scene, Caliban confronts Prospero, asserting his claim to the island based on his maternal lineage. He expresses resentment towards Prospero for usurping control of the island, which he believes is rightfully his inheritance.

This moment is pivotal in the play, as it encapsulates themes of colonialism, dispossession, and power dynamics. Caliban's assertion highlights his view of Prospero as a colonizer who has seized his homeland. The scene delves into the complexities of colonizer and colonized relationships, with Caliban representing the indigenous inhabitant resisting the domination of an external force.

"Teeton remained nailed to the chair. He hadn't moved at all; as though his feet were

still in chains." *(Water with Berries, 233)*. This metaphor emphasizes the deep-rooted psychological impact of colonialism, suggesting that the remnants of authority continue to bind individuals long after physical emancipation.

The phrase "nailed to the chair" signifies more than mere physical stillness; it evokes a profound sense of psychological and emotional paralysis. Teeton's immobility reflects his internal struggle, shaped by the enduring legacy of colonial subjugation. The accompanying image "his feet were still in chains" serves as a powerful metaphor linking the historical realities of slavery and imperial domination to the present condition of postcolonial subjects. Although the physical instruments of oppression have disappeared, their psychological residue persists. Collectively, this metaphor encapsulates the insidious nature of colonial authority, which continues to exert control through internalized fear, cultural dislocation, and ingrained dependency. Teeton's inability to act autonomously illustrates how deeply colonial power structures infiltrate the individual psyche, long after formal emancipation.

On the other hand, in George Lamming's *Water with Berries*, the legacy of slavery is intricately woven into the characters' experiences, reflecting the enduring psychological and societal impacts of colonialism. The novel employs metaphors and character dynamics to illustrate how the remnants of slavery continue to influence the identities and relationships of the Caribbean diaspora in postcolonial Britain.

Lamming explores how the colonized internalize the perceptions and stereotypes of the colonizer:

> "She discovered some animal treachery in his secretive ways. She saw the ancestral beast which possessed his kind, a miracle of cunning and deceit, forever in hiding, dark and dangerous as the night." *(Water with Berries, 234)*

This passage reflects the dehumanizing view held by the colonizer, which the colonized may come to accept, leading to a fractured self-identity. In this moment, the Old Dowager projects deeply ingrained colonial stereotypes onto Teeton, perceiving him not as an individual but as an embodiment of racialized fears and prejudices. Her characterization of Teeton as an "ancestral beast" reflects the dehumanizing narratives historically employed to justify slavery and colonial domination. Such imagery portrays the colonized as inherently treacherous and subhuman, perpetuating a legacy of mistrust and subjugation.

This perception underscores the psychological chains that bind both colonizer and colonized, illustrating how colonial ideologies persist in shaping identities and relationships long after the end of formal colonial rule. The Old Dowager's inability to see Teeton beyond these stereotypes highlights the challenges of overcoming a history steeped in oppression and the complexities of forging genuine human connections in a postcolonial context.

Lamming's portrayal serves as a poignant critique of the enduring psychological scars left by colonialism, emphasizing the need for a conscious effort to dismantle these inherited perceptions to achieve true liberation and mutual understanding.

Lamming deliberately parallels Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, using its characters and themes as a framework to interrogate colonial history and its aftermath. The novel's characters mirror those of Shakespeare's play:

Teeton represents Prospero, the displaced figure who seeks power and control. The Painter (Tucker) and The Musician (Derek) parallel Caliban and Ariel that are the representations of colonial subjects struggling for self-expression and agency. In *Water with Berries*, George Lamming reimagines the characters from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to critique colonial power dynamics and explore

the inner conflicts of Caribbean expatriates in England. Prospero in *The Tempest* is a magician and former Duke who is exiled from his kingdom and seeks to reclaim power through manipulation and control. Similarly, Teeton is an intellectual, a writer, and a political idealist who has been exiled from his Caribbean homeland due to betrayal and failed revolutionary efforts. He is deeply absorbed in strategy, politics, and the manipulation of others, traits reminiscent of Prospero's control over the island and its inhabitants in Shakespeare's play. Teeton tries to assert control over his life and environment in England and later, through plotting revolution in his homeland, but like Prospero, he struggles with disillusionment and loss. Symbolically, Teeton reflects the colonial elite, educated, powerful, but ultimately alienated, trying to redefine their identity in a post-imperial world.

The novel critiques how race and power operate through interpersonal relationships, especially between Black Caribbean men and white English women. These relationships are fraught with tension, fetishization, and violence. The female characters often symbolize England itself, desirable but ultimately indifferent or destructive. The men's relationships with women often end in betrayal or disillusionment, mirroring the betrayal of the colonial subject by the imperial power. The climactic acts of violence against women in the novel have sparked critical debate. Some view them as problematic representations of gender and race, while others interpret them as expressions of postcolonial rage, symbolic of a revolt against imperial domination.

Sexual politics in George Lamming's *Water with Berries* is complex, controversial, and deeply symbolic. Lamming uses gender and sexual relationships not only to explore personal dynamics but also to reflect broader postcolonial tensions, especially the relationship between Black Caribbean men and white English women. These relationships are fraught with power imbalances, miscommunication, and symbolic violence, making sexuality a vehicle for broader political and racial commentary.

The white English women in the novel like Mrs. Gore-Brittain, Rachel, and others, often represent England itself or the imperial centre. They are simultaneously desired and resented. The relationships are rarely built on mutual understanding; instead, they often involve unequal power and cultural misunderstanding. These women serve as projections of the men's colonial trauma, objects of love, revenge, or rebellion. Lamming intentionally withholds emotional depth from most female characters, reflecting how colonial discourse has historically flattened and stereotyped both women and colonized men. In *Water with Berries*, sexual politics is never just personal. It operates as extensions of colonial power, race, and exile. Lamming offers a troubling but honest portrayal of how deeply colonialism distorts gender relations, desire, and intimacy. His characters' relationships with women are symbolic battlegrounds, sites where the unresolved legacies of empire erupt in betrayal, violence, and tragedy.

In George Lamming's *Water with Berries*, gender politics is intricately woven into the narrative, highlighting the intersection of colonialism, patriarchy, and personal relationships. The novel portrays how colonial power structures persist in personal relationships, highlighting the psychological and societal impacts of authority. The novel draws parallels between colonial domination and gender oppression. The male characters, influenced by colonial ideologies, often exert control over women, reflecting the patriarchal structures inherited from colonial rule. For instance, the Commandant's relationship with the Lady is emblematic of this dynamic.

"To the Commandant, the Lady is 'a colony of joys given over entirely to his care." *(Water with Berries, 65)* This metaphor underscores the objectification and possession

inherent in their relationship, mirroring the colonial mindset of ownership and control. The phrase from George Lamming's *Water with Berries*, encapsulates the intricate interplay between colonialism and gender dynamics. This metaphor portrays the Lady not merely as a romantic partner but as an extension of colonial conquest, a territory to be possessed, governed, and exploited.

The phrase "a colony of joys given over entirely to his care" from George Lamming's *Water with Berries* encapsulates the intricate interplay between colonialism and gender dynamics within the novel. This metaphor, used by the Commandant to describe his relationship with the Lady, reflects a possessive and paternalistic attitude, positioning her as a territory to be governed and enjoyed, much like a colonial possession.

Literary critic Helen Tiffin interprets this relationship as emblematic of the broader parallels between sexual politics and colonial/slave politics. She notes that the Lady, akin to the women of subjugated tribes, is "violated and abandoned to a life-in-death where she literally practises dying." The necklace the Commandant gifts her serves as a potent symbol, likened to a slave collar, signifying ownership and the lingering chains of subjugation

This dynamic underscore how colonial power structures permeate personal relationships, with the Commandant's view of the Lady reflecting an extension of imperialistic control into the intimate sphere. The metaphor not only highlights the objectification inherent in their relationship but also critiques the enduring impact of colonial ideologies on gender relations.

Through this portrayal, Lamming critiques the residual effects of colonialism on personal and societal levels, illustrating how historical systems of domination continue to shape contemporary identities and relationships. This dynamic reflects the broader themes in Lamming's work, where personal relationships are often allegories for colonial power structures. The Lady's role becomes symbolic of the colonized subject, whose identity and agency are overshadowed by the dominating presence of the colonizer. In this context, the Commandant's perception of the Lady underscores the enduring impact of colonial ideologies on interpersonal relationships, highlighting how the legacies of empire permeate even the most intimate aspects of human interaction.

"The necklace the Commandant brings her as a souvenir of his adventures is like a slave collar round her throat." *(Water with Berries, 62)*

This imagery reinforces the idea of women being bound and owned, drawing a direct line between personal relationships and the historical context of slavery and colonialism. On the surface, the necklace appears as a token of affection, a gift from the Commandant to the Lady. However, its comparison to a "slave collar" unveils a deeper, more insidious significance. Historically, slave collars were instruments of subjugation, used to assert ownership and suppress autonomy. This metaphor extends beyond personal relationships, reflecting broader colonial power structures. The Lady, much like colonized territories, is subjected to control and exploitation under the guise of care and affection. The necklace symbolizes the entrenchment of patriarchal and colonial ideologies, where gifts and gestures are tools of domination rather than genuine expressions of love. The Lady's acceptance of the necklace and by extension, her role, highlights the psychological ramifications of prolonged subjugation. It illustrates how oppressive systems can internalize control, leading individuals to acquiesce to their own subordination. The "slave collar" becomes not just a physical emblem of bondage, but a representation of internalized oppression and the complexities of navigating identity within such frameworks. Through this poignant

imagery, Lamming critiques the lingering effects of colonialism and patriarchy, emphasizing how symbols of affection can mask deeper structures of control. The necklace, emblematic of a "slave collar," encapsulates the entangled nature of personal relationships and systemic oppression, urging readers to recognize and challenge these pervasive dynamics.

Also, in both George Lamming's *Water with Berries* and William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, female characters embody the psychological struggles engendered by colonial and patriarchal systems. Their experiences reflect the multifaceted trauma of dispossession, silencing, and objectification, offering profound insights into the intersection of gender and colonialism.

Lamming's novel presents women whose lives are deeply affected by the lingering shadows of colonialism and male dominance:

I. Nicole: A young woman who becomes romantically involved with Teeton, Nicole's life ends in suicide following an abortion. Her tragic end underscores the emotional abandonment and societal neglect faced by women, reflecting the destructive impact of colonial legacies on personal relationships.

II. Randa: Teeton's wife, Randa sacrifices her body to secure his freedom, an act that leads to her own suicide. Her narrative, recounted solely through others, highlights the erasure of women's voices and the internalization of trauma resulting from both personal and political betrayals.

III. Myra: The Old Dowager's daughter, Myra is subjected to kidnapping and rape, with her trauma serving as a backdrop to the male characters' journeys. Her suffering is emblematic of the pervasive violence women endure, rendered invisible within patriarchal narratives.

IV. The Old Dowager: An aging Englishwoman, she forms a complex relationship with Teeton, oscillating between caregiver and captor. Her eventual murder by Teeton symbolizes the culmination of a toxic dynamic rooted in colonial power structures and emotional dependency.

These portrayals reflect the psychological toll of colonial and patriarchal oppression on women, illustrating how their identities and experiences are often subsumed or manipulated within broader socio-political contexts.

Shakespeare's play, while limited in its female cast, offers a critical examination of women's roles within a patriarchal and colonial framework:

I. Miranda: As Prospero's daughter, Miranda embodies innocence and obedience, her identity largely defined by her father's authority. Her lack of agency and the emphasis on her chastity reflect the societal expectations placed upon women, reducing them to symbols of purity and political currency.

II. Sycorax: Though absent from the stage, Sycorax's presence looms large. Described by Prospero as a malevolent witch, her narrative is controlled and vilified, denying her a voice. This portrayal underscores the marginalization and demonization of powerful women, particularly those associated with non-European cultures.

III. Claribel: Mentioned briefly, Claribel's marriage to the King of Tunis serves as a political alliance, highlighting how women's lives are often dictated by the machinations of male-dominated power structures.

The present study examines Water with Berries as a significant postcolonial reworking of The Tempest, focusing on the intertwined questions of colonial trauma, masculinity, gendered violence, and the instability of Caribbean identity in the metropolitan center. While the article relies primarily on close textual reading, the interpretive framework guiding the analysis draws from both postcolonial and psychoanalytic critical traditions. Postcolonial theory, particularly the work of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha, provides a conceptual basis for understanding the psychological consequences of colonial domination and the ways in which colonial history continues to shape the identities of displaced Caribbean subjects. Fanon's discussion of the psychic violence of colonialism is especially useful in explaining how the suppressed frustrations of the colonized subject may erupt in distorted forms of aggression. Within this framework, the acts of violence against women depicted in Lamming's novel are interpreted as manifestations of what may be described as postcolonial rage. However, this reading does not seek to justify or excuse misogyny. Rather, the novel reveals how colonial trauma fractures masculine identity and redirects anger toward vulnerable figures rather than toward the historical structures of imperial power that produced such alienation. The narrative thus exposes the tragic misdirection of colonial resentment, illustrating how the legacy of empire can generate destructive patterns of behavior within the postcolonial context. At the same time, this interpretation remains attentive to feminist critiques that view such acts not as symbolic resistance but as the reproduction of patriarchal violence. From this perspective, the gendered violence in the novel can be understood simultaneously as a symptom of colonial displacement and as an example of the persistence of patriarchal domination within both colonial and postcolonial social structures. Lamming's representation of these acts does not celebrate them as rebellion but instead presents them as moments of moral and psychological collapse, thereby revealing the complex and troubling intersections between colonial oppression and patriarchal authority. By combining close reading with postcolonial and psychoanalytic perspectives, the article situates the personal breakdown of characters such as Derek and Teeton within a broader historical framework shaped by empire, exile, and cultural dislocation. In doing so, the study participates in an ongoing scholarly conversation that interprets *Water with Berries* as a critical dialogue with Shakespeare's colonial allegory. Existing criticism has frequently emphasized the novel's intertextual relationship with *The Tempest* and its exploration of exile and diasporic identity; the present analysis contributes to this discussion by focusing more specifically on the relationship between colonial trauma, masculine identity, and displaced violence. Lamming relocates the dramatic tensions of Shakespeare's island to the metropolitan space of London, thereby transforming the site of colonial encounter into a landscape of psychological fragmentation where Caribbean migrants confront the enduring consequences of imperial history. The novel also presents a striking narrative absence in the limited presence of Black female characters, an absence that signals a deeper dislocation within the representation of Caribbean identity. By centering male experiences of exile and crisis while marginalizing female voices, the narrative reflects the fractured social conditions produced by colonial migration and displacement. The absence of Black women complicates the possibility of constructing a stable or unified Caribbean identity, since the male characters' sense of collective belonging remains fragile and incomplete without the grounding presence of female perspectives within the narrative. Their shared identity emerges less from cultural continuity than from a collective experience of alienation in the imperial metropolis. This absence therefore underscores the broader fragmentation of community and belonging that characterizes the novel's depiction of diaspora.

Finally, the allegorical structure of the novel further deepens its engagement with Shakespeare through the mapping of characters onto figures from *The Tempest*, particularly in the case of Teeton's association with Prospero and Derek's complex alignment with both Caliban and Ariel. Derek's position between these two Shakespearean figures complicates any straightforward allegorical reading, since he embodies both the resentment and dispossession associated with Caliban and the aspirational desire for transcendence often linked with Ariel. This doubling suggests that postcolonial identity cannot be confined to a single symbolic role but instead reflects a layered and contradictory condition shaped by the historical legacies of empire. Through this complex reworking of Shakespeare's colonial archetypes, Lamming exposes the psychological fractures produced by colonialism and challenges the binaries that structure the earlier text, ultimately presenting a vision of Caribbean identity marked by displacement, instability, and the unresolved tensions of postcolonial history.

Conclusion

In *Water with Berries*, George Lamming presents a complex and unsettling portrayal of sexual politics that intertwines personal relationships with the broader legacies of colonialism, race, and exile. Through the fraught interactions between Caribbean men and white English women, Lamming exposes how colonial power dynamics infiltrate even the most intimate human experiences. The sexual relationships in the novel are not merely emotional or physical; they are laden with historical weight, symbolic meaning, and political consequence. The white female characters often serve as allegorical stand-ins for the colonial motherland, simultaneously desired, resented, and ultimately unattainable; while the absence of Black women underscores a deeper dislocation within the diasporic Caribbean identity.

The novel's climactic acts of gendered violence, though controversial, can be read as symbolic expressions of postcolonial rage and psychological disintegration. Lamming does not offer resolution or redemption but rather compels readers to confront the damaging intersections of race, gender, and power. By reworking Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Lamming not only critiques the imperial literary canon but also reconfigures it to articulate the fractured inner worlds of the colonized subject. Ultimately, *Water with Berries* forces a reckoning with the ongoing emotional and sexual repercussions of colonial history, repercussions that continue to shape identity, agency, and human connection in the postcolonial world. The fraught and often destructive relationships between Caribbean men and white English women serve not merely as personal narratives but as deeply symbolic enactments of colonial tension and psychological dislocation. Lamming's portrayal of these dynamics reflects the lingering effects of imperialism on the male psyche, where desire, resentment, and a hunger for agency become entangled in expressions of dominance and violence. Ultimately, *Water with Berries* challenges readers to confront the uncomfortable intersections of race, gender, and power in the postcolonial world, revealing how deeply the wounds of empire continue to shape the most intimate aspects of human experience

References

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. Routledge.

Baugh, E. (1978). *Critics on Caribbean literature: Readings in literary criticism*. George Allen & Unwin.

Breiner, L. (1998). *An introduction to West Indian poetry*. Cambridge University Press.

Dash, J. M. (1998). *The other America: Caribbean literature in a new world context*. University Press of Virginia.

Gilbert, H., & Tompkins, J. (1996). *Post-colonial drama: Theory, practice, politics*. Routledge.

King, B. (1980). *The new English literatures: Cultural nationalism in a changing world*. Macmillan.

Lamming, G. (1971). *Water with berries*. Longman Caribbean.

Loomba, A. (2002). *Shakespeare, race, and colonialism*. Oxford University Press.

Parry, B. (2004). *Postcolonial studies: A materialist critique*. Routledge.

Shakespeare, W. (1998). *The tempest* (S. Orgel, Ed.). Oxford University Press.

Singh, J. G. (1996). *Colonial narratives/cultural dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the language of colonialism*. Routledge.

Tiffin, H. (1990). George Lamming and the imagination of exile. In *Decolonising fictions*. Dangaroo Press.

Vaughan, A. T., & Vaughan, V. M. (1991). *Shakespeare's Caliban: A cultural history*. Cambridge University Press.