

# Characterization in F. NYAMNJOH's the Disillusioned African and Married but Available

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## Abstract

The main purpose of this analysis is to study characterization in the two selected novels written by F. Nyamnjuh: *The Disillusioned African* and *Married But Available*. The analysis of characters through literary techniques where Davis' PAIRS and Fowler's Componential Approach were used, led to successful results. The main characters were given priority. Additional information provided through a componential analysis of the minor characters was also part of the research. The reason why the researcher takes on this subject is that he found no papers dealing with characterization jointly using PAIRS and componential analysis on F. Nyamnjuh's works.

**Keywords:** Characterization, The disillusioned African (TDA), Married But Available (MBA), PAIRS, Componential Analysis.

## 1. Introduction

The description of character's appearance, behavior, interests, ways of speaking and other mannerisms are all part of characterization. Every story must have certain characteristics, or elements. Without these elements, a literary work would cease to make sense or serve a purpose. Cuddon (1999) defines character as any person, animal or figure represented in a literary work. There are many types of characters existing in literature. The main characters are those having the greatest effects on the plot or those mostly affected by what happens in a story. There are many ways of categorizing main characters in a story: protagonist or antagonist, dynamic or static, round or flat characters, etc.

Two novels are under analysis in this article. These stories would be nothing without the created characters within them. Characters give the story a purpose, a reason for us to care about what happens. We might admire well-structured prose, or an intricately woven plot, but if the characters within it do not draw the reader into the story, everything else is of little importance. Characters are the single most important aspect of any work of fiction. Therefore, the processes used to develop and shape these characters are the most important for any author of fiction to master.

Some researches and studies have been carried out about themes in the two novels under analysis. My particular concern is to analyze how characters contribute to the portrayal of themes. In addition, the protagonists in these two novels are students traveling from native environment to a new world: Charles, an African goes to Europe to study Philosophy; Lily Loveless, a European, goes to Africa to research on sexual relations and marriage in the contemporary African society.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the novels, *The Disillusioned African* and *Married But Available*, using characterization analysis and to show how meaning is constructed through interplay of different characters. To foster academic discourse concerning characters and characterization analysis of a novel through the study of *The Disillusioned African* and *Married But Available*.

The paper will try to answer the following research questions:

- What is character and characterization?
- What are the major characters portrayed in the novels?
- How do these characters, including minor characters enhance meaning and themes?

The scope of this study is to sharpen awareness of how characters contribute to the understanding of the main concerns in a narrative. It will be useful not only to the students but also to teachers, lecturers and other researchers in the areas of text analysis and text interpretation, especially in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language. The significance is that the study of characters (major and minor) is relevant for the teaching and learning of literature, and for developing the learner's analytical ability. This study may help students of literature who want to better understand about characterization and how writers use various characterization techniques to enhance the construction of meaning.

The author of the two novels under analysis in this paper is Francis NYAMNJOH. He was born in 1961 at Bum, Cameroon. He attended the University of Yaoundé I and holds of Bachelor's (1984) and Master's (1985) degrees from that university and a Ph.D. (1990) from the University of Leicester, United Kingdom. He joined the University of Cape Town, South Africa in August 2009 as Professor of Social Anthropology. He has taught Sociology, Anthropology and Communication Studies at universities in Cameroon and Botswana. He is presently Chair of the Editorial Board of the South African Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press since January 2011 (Kangsen, 2007). His contemporary writings are based on the ethnographic fiction. He poses ethnographic fiction as depicting mobile Africans and their relationships to the places and people they encounter.

The two novels present the relationship and influence between africanity and modernity in terms of impact of the contact between these binaries on African living during the era of technological innovation and digital revolution. The impact is that africanity is affected by modernity. *The Disillusioned African* takes place between Africa and Europe. The dual between Mimboland (Africa) and Muzunguland (Europe) in search for how modernity has or is affecting Africa is then the concern in *Married but Available*. The bulk of information from both novels evokes the question on the availability of Africans to embrace and live modernity.

### 1. Methodology

Literary analysis based on close reading of the novels as primary sources of data was used. In addition, secondary sources comprising relevant literature on characters and characterization was also used for collecting data. To analyze and interpret the collected information, I used characterization through two techniques: Davis' PAIRS and Fowler's Componential Analysis. These techniques were the most appropriate to achieve successfully. The acronym, PAIRS, can help you recall the five methods of characterization: Physical description, Action, Inner thoughts, Reactions and Speech. Characterization in literature is the process authors use to develop characters and create images of the characters for the audience.

### 2. Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

According to Juanita (2011), characterization can be tricky to tackle methodologically, in part because it has been under-theorized. The study of narrative has been systematized in Narratology, the use of sources has been theorized by intertextuality, but a coherent and standardized method for the study of character has not yet been established (Billaut, 1996).

Various tools and techniques for analysis, however, have been produced and it is useful to come at these characters in as many ways as possible. There have been ancient explorations of character, such as those found in Theophrastus' collections of ethical types or Aristotle's evaluative analyses of character (Juanita, 2011). These ancient theories of characterization are not my focus in this research.

Juanita (2011) stated the some modern techniques of characterization like Greimas' actant model, Fowler's componential analysis and Hochman's comparative taxonomy offer helpful and practical approaches. Furthermore, Juanita (2011) confirmed, in her doctoral thesis that Frow, Rimón-Kenan, and Harvey have also provided interesting theoretical discussions and pragmatic suggestions for investigation of characters.

Davis (2008) distinguished two types of characterizations: direct characterization and indirect characterization. With the direct approach, the author tells us what he or she wants us to know about the character. With indirect characterization, the author shows us things about the character to help us have an understanding of the character's personality and effect on other characters. Davis furthermore divided the character analysis in three perspectives: identify the type of character (s) the narrative is dealing with; describe the character (s) and discuss the conflict in the story, particularly in regards to the character's place in it.

### 3. Characters and Characterization

Characterization in Literature refers the step- by- step process wherein an author introduces and then describes a character. The character can be described directly by the author or indirectly through the actions, thoughts and speech (Cuddon, 1999). It is therefore the way in which authors convey information about their characters. Nearly every story has at least one protagonist. A protagonist is a main character who generates the action of a story and engages the reader's interest and empathy. The protagonist is often a hero or heroine. An antagonist is a character who opposes the protagonist.

Dynamic versus static characters are related to development: a protagonist is usually a dynamic character. Static characters on the other hand do not change throughout the course of the story, they show contrast to dynamic ones, refusing to grow and remaining in one place or mentally. Round characters versus flat are also related to development. They are realistic and complex and show true depth of personality (Chiwengo, 1990). They require more attention by the reader; they can make surprising decisions or puzzling ones. To sum up, characters are the driving force behind stories, both major characters and minor ones, and authors use them to broadcast their most important messages. In order to make the story moving and interesting, characters need to seem real. Writers should provide details that make characters individual and particular.

### 2. Five Methods of Characterization in Literature

**Physical description** - the character's physical appearance is described. For example, characters might be described as tall, thin, fat, pretty, etc. We might be told the color of hair, or something about the clothing of the character. How the character dresses might reveal something about the character. Does the character wear old, dirty clothing, or stylish, expensive clothing?

**Action** (attitude/behavior) - What the character does or tells us a lot about him/her, as well as how the character behaves and his or her attitude. Is the character a good person or a bad person? Is the character helpful to others or selfish?

**Inner thoughts** - things about their personalities and feelings, which sometimes helps us understand the character's actions.

**Reactions** - Effect on others or what the other characters say and feel about this character. We learn about the relationships among the characters. How does the character make the other characters feel? Do they feel scared, happy, or confused? This helps the reader have a better understanding of all the characters.

**Speech** - What the character says provides a great deal of insight for the reader. The character might speak in a shy, quiet manner or in a nervous manner. The character might speak intelligently or in a rude manner.

## 2.1. Characterization Techniques

The Davis approach, PAIRS was used to denote the characterization features of characters, (major and minor) to point out similarities and difference between Charles and Lily Loveless. Charles is the protagonist in *The Disillusioned African* and Lily Loveless is the protagonist in *Married But Available*. To identify and point out similarities and difference among both main and minor characters in the two novels under analysis, Fowler's Componential Analysis was used.

## 2.2. Davis' PAIRS Characterization: main characters

### Charles

He is the protagonist in *The Disillusioned African*. African student-cum-philosopher wondering between Africa and Europe: "...you must remember that I'm a philosopher, and as such, devote most of my time to philomeditations. Only in this way, I hope, can you avoid asking silly questions..." (TDA, 9). He decides to fly overseas for studying African philosophy at Cromwell College: "for I'm more inclined to believe that you downed too much beer the night before than could allow you out of bed in time to see off a friend on his way to amass authority in Philosophy" (TDA, 9). The hero of the novel is said to be naïve and curious, embarrassed by the binaries of African values and the European ones. He sets communication from Europe with his friend Muongo through letters.

- His ideas about philosophy supported by thinkers ranging from Jesus Christ himself, Julius Caesar, Machiavelli to capitalistic views as he opposed them to Marxist ones (TDA, 2-5).

- Charles presents Africa as a Dark Continent as follows:

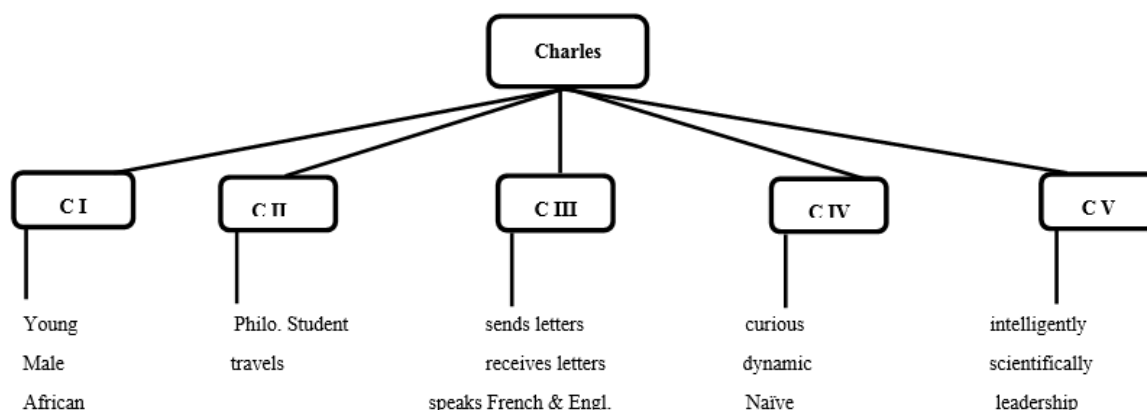
"Africa forever" was accompanied by a cartoon of Africa as a cow being milked by what looked like a black leader, under the strict supervision of a seemingly pregnant white businessman. What struck me, however, wasn't the act of milking Africa at all, but the fact that the milker wouldn't stop milking even though the cow ceased to yield! The caption added to the symbolic meaning of the title of the article: why not milk Africa forever? (TDA, 17)

The African continent still faces neo-colonialism in that African elites were just mattered about political power. They were not mattered with economic power which was largely retained by Europeans and expatriates. He furthermore presents Africa as a pyramid of three distinct classes: those without opportunity to steal either from others or from the state, a class made up with the peasants. The second class is made up with those who steal from others but find it difficult to steal from the state. The third one is made up with leaders who rule without legitimacy, steal from the state.

Charles is an aspiring philosopher with the eye of an amateur anthropologist, a man of his time with a worldview molded by a ceaseless current of historical, socio-economic and political forces. It is the collision of these forces that compel him early on in his correspondence to make this confession:

I have never read Marx. I don't intend to in the near future either, and would challenge anyone who thinks I lack legitimacy as a philosopher because I ignored dear bearded Marx! Just as one doesn't need to be literate to be intelligent, so too, one doesn't read Marx to be philosophical or critical-minded (TDA, 35).

Charles is a dynamic character. His curiosity to learn and deepen philosophy sent him to Europe and back to Cameroon disillusioned with amputated arms. It is important to mention that he is an actor of change inviting peasants and the working class to work hard in order to change the situation as union makes strength. Charles is opinionated, compassionate, bitter, idealistic, profound, funny, idealistic, wounded, pragmatic, naïve and often times outright dangerous. Kangsen Feka qualifies him as a sort of concoction of paradoxes. Yes indeed, Charles is a dangerous man; both to himself and to anyone not prudent enough to associate with him. He is the one with a canny sense of humor cascading through a world that defies his comprehension. Charles is an alien to his world, a stranger in familiar terrain.



### Lilly Loveless

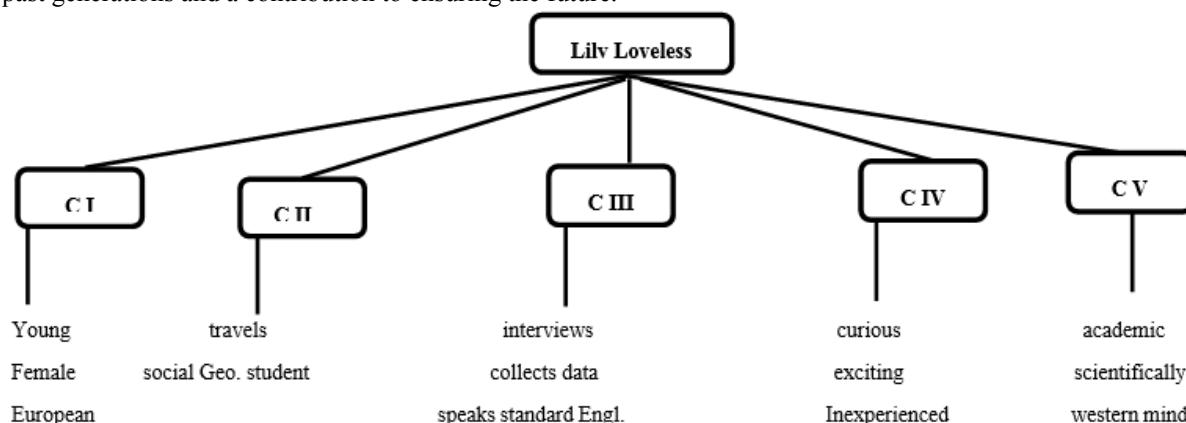
Lilly Loveless is the protagonist in *Married But Available*. She has little experience on Africa, where she is supposed to conduct her field research. She had had only two-week holiday experience of the lovely beaches of Sunsandland, one of the most exotic, exciting wonders of the tropics (MBA, 1). She is a Muzungulander (western) doctoral student in Social Geography who researches how sex shapes and is shaped by power and consumerism in Africa. She travels to Mimboland for studying the relationship between sexuality and power. Lily sets foot in Mimboland, a country under the rule of president Longstay when there is strike at the University of Mimbo. Lily Loveless spends six months of fieldwork in Mimboland interviewing informants and collecting data with her research assistant, Britney.

Lilly Loveless sat staring at her Gmail in box, on a cold winter morning in Muzunguland. Unlike other days, she had come in earliest of all the bruhville, because she was expecting an urgent email. Her co-supervisor in Livingstonetown had promised her the contact details of an African colleague at the University of Mimbo where she was seeking affiliation to do fieldwork for her PhD on “Sex, Power and Consumerism in Africa” (MBA, 1).

The name of Loveless is related to the fact that this Ph.D. student, represents women especially those who do not plan to be married soon and bear children. Furthermore, Lily Loveless’ parents are already divorced. Her father does not live with her mother together. He lives in the same city but with another woman. The modern world today is bound to the free choice for everybody to be married or not, to bear children or not. No body holds a gun to your head to bear children and to mother them as Nyamnjoh highlights in the following:

Already fertility clinics are offering women the opportunity to freeze some of their eggs for later should they change their mind about not having children (...) back in Muzunguland, she belonged to circles where the belief is strong that there’s nothing more than certain to ruin a good relationship than marriage and children (MBA, 150).

After exchanging views with her research assistant, Lily loveless agreed with the fact that in Mimboland (Africa, Cameroon) people think differently. Having children for mimbolanders is like paying debts to the parents and past generations and a contribution to ensuring the future.



**Notes:** CI: Physical description; CII: Action; CIII: Inner thoughts; CIV: Reaction; CV: Speech

### 2.3. Fowler's Componential Analysis: major and minor characters

Characters	M	F	Y	O	A	E	F	En	D	S	C	N	Ac	Ed	I	Am	Em	Sc	G	SI	20	%
Charles	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	13	65
Lily Lovel.	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	11	55
Muongo	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	11	55
Britney	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	11	55
Monique	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	09	45
Bobinga	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	11	55
Pr.Redhead	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	10	50
Dr.Lovemore	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	10	50
ThompsonX2	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	09	45	
Pres.Lonstay	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	07	35
VC	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	10	50
Average	08	03	07	04	08	03	03	11	07	04	05	04	06	08	03	08	03	07	08	02	112	50.9

**Legend:** *M*: male; *F*: female; *Y*: young; *O*: old; *A*: African; *E*: European; *F*: French; *En*: English; *D*: dynamic; *S*: static; *C*: curious; *N*: naïve; *Ac*: academic; *Ed*: educated; *I*: illiterate; *Am*: African mind; *Em*: European mind; *Sc*: scientific; *G*: generous; *SI*: selfish

**Comments:** The majority of characters in the two novels are male, young, Africans, speaking English, dynamic. The novels being written during modernization of Africa, most of characters are educated, scientific and generous. The topics in the novels are about studying philosophy at university and conducting a fieldwork for Ph. D dissertation is obvious that characters should be of this scientific world.

### 3. Characterization and the themes in *The Disillusioned African and Married But Available*

Francis Nyamnjoh, through *The Disillusioned African* and *Married But Available* expressed the following themes: modernization and africanization; leadership and bad governance as officially sponsored theft; intersection between money, sex, power and occultism and cultural binaries as paradoxes in modernization: communication and education. Satirical writing has an honorable history among Anglophone Cameroonians, whose use of language as a political instrument is as powerful as any polemicist in nineteenth century England. Readers of Nyamnjoh's previous works have grown to expect, beneath the racy, humorous style, an incisive and merciless analysis of social ills. Here is indeed a seeker after truth.

#### Conclusion

Through analysis of these two novels, we have seen that both direct and indirect characterizations are of vital importance to the development of a story. Direct characterization is used to establish the bones of a character's persona; what kind of person the reader should begin to figure out. Indirect characterization is used to solidify that initial image until it is materializes into a coherent, realistic human identity presented in the pages of the novel. By using both, an author is able to create a being that gives the reader a reason to care; a hero to cheer for, a villain to hate. We have seen that authors rely on their characters as the driving force behind their stories. Without these characters, the reader has no reason to care.

The author used protagonists: Charles in *The Disillusioned African* and Lily Loveless in *Married But Available*. Charles, is the protagonist, naïve and curious African student-cum-philosopher wandering between North and South, the rural and the urban. He travels from his African village to the sharply divided and socially cruel world of 1980s Britain. By casting aside his disillusion and the traps of servitude and victimhood, reveals his curiosity and adventure.

During six months of fieldwork in Mimboland, Lilly Loveless, a European doctoral student in Social Geography assisted by Britney, researches how sex shapes and is shaped by power and consumerism in Africa. The scene is the country of Mimboland, a very thinly disguised version of Nyamnjoh's native Cameroon.

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