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**From Identity Denial to Racial Uplift
Celebrating the Harlem Renaissance in Langston Hughes'
Not Without Laughter 1930**

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Literature and Interdisciplinary Approaches**

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Dedication

*I dedicate this work to my beloved mother
for her unconditional love and support.*

To the memory of my father.

To my siblings and family.

To my close friends who encouraged me.

Acknowledgments

I thank Allah for giving me the strength , the audacity and the endurance to realize this work.

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Abstract

The Institution of slavery, played an important role in the building of America thanks to those Africans brought to the American shores in order to enrich the economy of the colonies. Though slavery was later on abolished, many Africans born in America found themselves caught up within the bonds of a white supremacist society which had little mercy for them. Indeed whites managed some procedure to maintain the black population oppressed. For that particular reason, African-Americans were seeking to break free from the white supremacy by uplifting their race artistically and intellectually through songs, arts, literature and politics. One of the most important movements intended to reevaluate the status of African Americans is known as the Harlem Renaissance. The latter which emerged in New York, more precisely Harlem, spread all over the American society in order to bring all sorts of reforms that would participate in the rebirth of the African folklore and uplift the blacks from the white stereotypes and ideologies. This research aims at first to shed light on the historical background of that movement and on the period that preceded it. Second, it takes the novel "Not Without Laughter" of Langston Hughes as an example of what was happening at that era. It will include the study of the representation of Harlem Renaissance in that novel, how it was depicted by the author and how blacks were excluded from the American society.

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General Introduction

After the abolition of slavery many forms of segregation were witnessed by African Americans. The Jim Crow era with the one drop rule for example worked to perpetuate the supremacy of white people over the non-whites, namely, those with African origins. Opportunities for better status remained for many of them a mere dream because of their skin color and because of the white policies. Many barriers were imposed on blacks as a restriction, preventing them from having their equal social rights with the whites. As a consequence, the black population's identity faded with the white ideals and stereotypes.

Identity is very vital in the identification of individual within their ethnic groups. African Americans were seeking to create an identity of their own, very distinct from the white one. Their self-determination and racial consciousness assisted their attempt for achieving political, cultural and social integration. The refusal and rejection of segregation carried out their transitional status from objects to respectable human beings.

With the beginning of the 20th century the US society witnessed the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance which was a huge movement meant to break free from the white supremacy and claim for more rights, it was also an artistic and literary movement that raised the cultural awakening of the black intellectuals. Lasting roughly from the 1910s through the mid-1930s, the period is considered a golden age in African American culture, manifesting in literature, music, stage performance and art, reinforcing the link of black peoples with their heritage by imposing a new African American Identity.

The Harlem Renaissance was a particularly vibrant time for African American writers and African American literature has played a vital role in the history and culture of the United States. Langston Hughes is one of those writers to whom Racism was the main target of polemics. He used his poetry to address issues such as segregation, racial injustice and the lack of self-esteem among black people. In his novel *Not Without Laughter*, Langston Hughes was referring explicitly to his personal experiences prior to moving to New York as well as to the rural experiences of thousands of other African Americans who participated in the Great Migration. His objective was to represent complex social concerns in his writing.

This research paper aims to come to an awareness of how Langston Hughes has portrayed the sad and the beautiful realities of black life in his novel “Not Without Laughter” published in 1930 and to demonstrate the link between writings at that time and the events that were taking place.

Therefore, I will examine the concept of racial segregation and the concept of negritude. I will also analyze how African-American literature served in the cultural awakening of the black population. Hence, this research is going to respond set of questions, How could African Americans reconceptualize “the Negro” apart from the white stereotypes? , How did the Harlem renaissance serve in cultural awakening and consciousness?, How the concerns of the black population were depicted in the selected novel?, Had the writings of that time influenced people to get rid of the white supremacy?

My hypotheses are that Langston Hughes promoted the racial ideals of his community through his novel by narrating the experiences he dealt with, African-American intellectuals and writers of the Harlem Renaissance era were seeking for the reclamation of their true image and finally , the Harlem Renaissance inspired Negritude, it responded to the alienated position of blacks in history. The movement asserted an identity for black people in the USA that was their own.

The present study will be mainly based on the thematic analysis of how the African descents tried to assimilate within the American society and how they requested for more freedom to prove their identity as they demonstrate intellectually through writing. The material sources will be collected from both primary and secondary data. The primary data is derived from Hughes’ selected narrative, “Not Without Laughter”. And The secondary data will be gathered from other sources as books, articles and letters.

The work is divided into three chapters . The first chapter deals with the African-Americans journey from their denial of their own identity to the racial uplift thanks to the Harlem Renaissance movement. The second chapter will be devoted to Langston Hughes life , works with the plot summary of the chosen novel, list of characters and major themes. The third chapter will include an analysis of the novel , based on the findings of the previous

chapter . It will also examine the evolution of the main character and how he was influenced by the events.

Chapter one
Historical Background

I.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review the period after slave abolition focusing on the racial obstacle that African Americans were facing, namely, the denial of their identity and achievements as blacks in different aspects of life including :art, poetry, literature and jazz music and see to what extent the Harlem Renaissance helped them to gain some sort of recognition and comfort .

I.2 Identity loss and white Supremacy

Although blacks were no more enslaved after the emancipation, oppression, segregation and discrimination were still part of their daily life. The American society witnessed some changing phases that issued identity crisis and identity loss within the black nation that was struggling between being black on the one hand and being American on the other hand.

I.2.1 Identity

Eric T. Olson 2019 states that personal identity “ usually refers to properties to which we feel a special sense of attachment or ownership. Someone’s personal identity in this sense consists of those properties she takes to ‘define her as a person’ or ‘make her the person she is’, and which distinguish her from others. To have an ‘identity crisis’ is to become unsure of what one’s most characteristic properties are—of what sort of person, in some deep and fundamental sense, one is.”

Susan Schneider in her book “Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence” , 2016 states that:

“This ‘personal identity’ contrasts with ethnic or national identity, which consists roughly of the ethnic group or nation one takes oneself to belong to and the importance one attaches to this.”(70)

Racial identity is one’s understanding of the differences that occur between a within-group and other groups with a different racial background. It is a collective identity that is combined by the perspectives of an individual with regarded to his own racial group and the common racial heritage and culture.

I.2.2 Stereotypes

Oppression and discrimination were applied by the white people who represented the dominant race in the American territory, as a result blacks lost their self-affirmation, they simply accepted and took the white ideologies and stereotypes as standards and models to be followed. Since they were perplexed and confused because of the memory of slavery and the notion of “white is right” and “black is wrong”, many of their values and beliefs were absorbed including the recognition of their own race. Their main concern was how to assimilate with those standards and how to be accepted by the white supremacy.

Stereotype threat is based on a need to represent oneself and one’s group in a positive manner. The effect emerges when individuals from a minority group are placed in a situation where they have the possibility to confirm or be judged according to negative cultural stereotypes. The result is often decreased performance outcomes (Aronson & Aronson,1995).

I.2.3 Invisibility

The term invisibility is linked to identity loss ,generally used in black literature to describe the living conditions of African-Americans at that time . Invisibility is about how a person is neglected , ignored and even rejected by his entourage due to racism and prejudice. Black people’s individual human identity was denied , their performances , capacities and abilities were not taken into consideration by the dominant superior white society. Todd M. Lieber in his book “American Quarterly”,1972, defines invisibility as the situation of a group stripped of its native culture and forced to adhere to alien standards and values while its own cultural qualities were ignored.

The social conditions presented a very limited room for the improvement of the black community in America. This made them question themselves about the vision of their own future, where do they fit in society? It was the continuity of the journey that has already started long before , the transition from slavery to freedom and from freedom to personhood.

I.2.4 Consciousness

One of the stages that blacks in America went through during the transition is the stage of double consciousness, which forced them to view themselves from both their own perspective and from the white society perspective. It made them aware of the society's divisions since they felt their "two-ness" as Americans and as Negroes. They wanted to be both without being oppressed and discriminated by the supremacists. This was a big step towards reaching self-consciousness and attaining the better version of a black person living in America.

Double consciousness is a term describing the internal conflict experienced by subordinated groups in an oppressive society. It was coined by William Edward Burghardt Du Bois with reference to African American "double consciousness", including his own, and published in the auto ethnographic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. The term originally referred to the psychological challenge of "always looking at one's self through the eyes" of a racist white society, and "measuring oneself by the means of a nation that looked back in contempt". The term also referred to Du Bois's experiences of reconciling his African heritage with an upbringing in a European-dominated society.

In his book "The Souls of Black Folk", 1903, Du Bois describes double consciousness as follows:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.(2-3).

With the emergence of black consciousness in America, individuals from African descent started to be proud of their black heritage. They preferred to be called African-Americans instead of Negroes. That is what made them realize that the fact of being

subordinated to the white dominant society is no longer acceptable , so they began refusing the implied denial of their race and thus identity.

Steve Biko while addressing at a Black Theology seminar in Pietermaritzburg,28 august 1971 said that Black Consciousness is in essence the realization by the Black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression - the blackness of their skin and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the normal which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realization that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black consciousness therefore takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life.(The African Philosophy Reader,1998, p.360).

I.3 The Harlem Renaissance

I.3.1 Background

The dream of fuller participation in the American society that Afro-Americans had , vanished because of the white supremacy and its strict racial segregation rules with the addition of hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan , especially in the South. As a result, by the turn of the 20th century many African Americans migrated from the South to the North seeking for a tolerant environment. This was known as the Great Migration.

Harlem was one of the most chosen destinations , it gathered some of the greatest figures and minds that represented the Afro-American community by revealing how it felt to live among Caucasians and how it felt to undergo their prejudices and imposed rules that limited the performance and the consideration of black people. The period of the Harlem Renaissance also known as the Negro Renaissance was a creative boom for African Americans artists, writers and musicians . During this era racial pride was reinforced and

civil and political rights of the colored skin community were on the right path to be asserted as well as shaping and determining a new identity as free persons with the complete awareness of the notion of dualism and twoness.

In his landmark essay “ The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”, Langston Hughes , one of the representative of this era proclaims :

We young Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful and ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow , strong as we know how, and we stand on the top of the mountain, free within ourselves.(Cantor 29).

I.3.2The Harlem Renaissance and Civil Rights Movements

The Harlem Renaissance was a golden age in African American history , as blacks used arts to make their voice heard . It led notably to political activism with the foundation of many civil rights movements that aimed to secure equality between dark-skinned people and the white people. The movement was a rebellion to get full liberation for black Americans , the conduct of this movement made them discover a new sense of autonomy , black power , unification and social integration . All of this served their cause against racial discrimination.

In his “Letter From Birmingham Jail” Martin Luther King Jr’s states,

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial “outside agitator” idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.(1963).

The Harlem Renaissance participated mainly in the cultural awakening of the black population. It encompassed literature, jazz, opera, dance and painting in which the sad and beautiful realities of black life were portrayed. This contributed in promoting the racial ideals to the community in order to assert an identity for black people in the USA that was their own .

Alain Locke in his anthology of fiction, poetry, and essays on African and African-American art and literature entitled “The New Negro: An Interpretation” (1925) explains:

Negro life is not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is finding a new soul. There is a fresh spiritual and cultural focusing. We have, as the heralding sign, an unusual outburst of creative expression. There is a renewed race-spirit that consciously and proudly sets itself apart. Justifiably then, we speak of the offerings of this book embodying these ripening forces as culled from the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance.(p.27).

Among the Renaissance’s most significant contributors were intellectuals W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Arthur Scomburg , Cyril Briggs, and Walter Francis White; electrifying performers Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson; writers and poets Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Claude Mckay, Effie Lee Newsome, Countee Cullen; visual artists Aaron Douglas and Augusta Savage; and an extraordinary list of legendary musicians, including Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Eubie Blake, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Ivie Anderson, Josephine Baker, Fats Waller, Jelly Roll Morton, and countless others.

I.3.3 Music and Art

The 1920’s were the era of Jazz, a type of music played in the night clubs, where many people came to entertain themselves , specially the whites who wanted to experience the black culture . The most famous club was the Cotton Club that gave fame to many performers such as : Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington. The white audience was a proof of the acknowledgement of the black culture.

In the 1940’s , black jazz musicians started calling each other “man” because they were usually called “boy” by everybody else. *In Ben L.Martin book “Political Science*

Quarterly”, he said “ Names can be more than tags; they can convey powerful imagery” (Ben L.Martin, 1991, p.83)

Many opportunities for stage work were given to black actors thanks to the Harlem Renaissance . Most importantly , the foundation of Apollo theatre in 1913 in New York city gave many chances for black performers to rise and shine . Paul Robeson, an actor, singer, writer, activist and more was one of the main figures , as he believed that in order to make progress in a white-dominated society and to overcome segregation and racism , art is the most outstanding way to achieve it .

I.2.4Literature

During the period of the Harlem Renaissance, there was a boom in African American literature with the appearance of many writers and poets who were no longer ashamed to express their black pride and how it felt to be a skin-colored individual in a white society. They expressed themselves through narratives, poems , articles and essays. As Princeton University professor Albert J. Raboteau has said, all African-American study "speaks to the deeper meaning of the African-American presence in this nation. This presence has always been a test case of the nation's claims to freedom, democracy, equality, the inclusiveness of all.” (A Rip in the Tent: Teaching African American Literature. 32).

Their writings and depiction of black life participated in changing the negative vision of the whites towards black people and even the vision of black people towards themselves . The white population noticed and acknowledged the literature and culture of African Americans and some of them have received the highest awards like, Toni Morrison who got a Nobel Prize in 1993. James Weldon Johnson, an American author, politician, poet, and a civil right activist, said in his book “The Messages Of God's Trombones” reviewed by Carroll, Anne that:”

The final measure of the greatness of peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and the art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior.(Johnson 9)

These achievements participated to the improvement of writers' lives since they were able to access easily news papers , magazines and publishing houses. One of the magazines was The Crisis magazine , an official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The news paper of Marcus Garvey “ Negro World “ was also one of them.

I.4 Conclusion

Despite the attempts of the white supremacy to diminish the value of black people as free thinking individuals and to shrink their rights as American citizens , African Americans could cross those imposed barriers thanks to the Harlem Renaissance that gave them self-esteem and pride about their black heritage . The artistic movement that was taking place during that era made them succeed to reach the highest positions and to get the attention of white people as they influenced the American society.

Chapter Two

**Langston Hughes and Not
Without Laughter**

II.1 Introduction:

In this chapter, I will talk about the novelist Langston Hughes and his novel *Not Without Laughter*. I will first introduce the author (life, works ,relation with the Harlem Renaissance and then move to a presentation of the story including the plot summary , characters and the major themes.

II.2 About the Author

His full name is James Mercer Langston Hughes ,born on February 01, 1901 in Joplin Missouri. His paternal great-grand father was a slave owner and his paternal great-grand mother was an enslaved African. When it comes to his maternal grand mother, she had African American ,French , English and native American descent. In 1896 she married Charles Henry Langston who also had a complex African-American ancestry. He was politically active and he participated in the abolition cause.

After their marriage , they had a daughter named Caroline who later on married James Nathaniel Hughes. Their marriage led to the birth of Langston Hughes, know now as a great figure in literature. After the divorce of his parents, he lived with his maternal grand-mother in Lawrence ,Kansas. She instilled in him the racial pride. Then he moved to Lincoln, Illinois , to live with his mother and her new husband. His first writings were during his childhood, when he wrote for the newspaper of his school in Cleveland. During this period he wrote his first piece pf Jazz poetry entitled “When Sue Wears Red”.

He spent a year in Mexico with his father and a year in Columbia university. In 1922, he was more interested in Harlem than his studies , so he decided to stop attending Columbia University . His decision was also because of racial prejudice. He worked in many small jobs and lived for a while in Paris and in England where he was part of the Black Expatriate Community.

In 1924, he returned back to America, more precisely Harlem in New York . In 1926, he joined Lincoln University and graduated three years later. He died in 1967.

His writings were unique at that time. He made the decision of aiming at the true particularly depiction of black people . His poetry was accessible and comprehended by all the categories of society , not only the intellectual one as his writings included how black people talked and the jazz and blues music they played. He presented the African-American culture in all of its beauty . Ashley Kannan , in "What was Langston Hughes' poetic contribution?" eNotes Editorial, 3 Dec. 2010 states that:

"I would say that Hughes' greatest and largest contribution to poetry is to bring voice to those who were silenced by the cultural majority. Hughes' poetry is especially powerful because it speaks for people of color in a nation and in a time where they were not heard."

In 1925, his poem "The Weary Blues" won first prize in the Opportunity magazine literary competition and it was published in 1926. His first publication was in 1921 , which is a poem "The Negro speaks of Rivers" published in the official magazine of the National Association for The advancement of Colored People. In 1926 , he also participated in the creation of the short-lived magazine Fire!! That was established in New York alongside with Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Aaron Douglas, John P. Davis, Richard Bruce Nugent, Gwendolyn Bennett, Lewis Grandison Alexander and Countee Cullen, His next volume of poetry "Fine Clothes to the Jew" was published in 1927.

After he graduated from Lincoln University in 1929 , he published his first novel "Not Without Laughter" that was very successful .In 1932, he collaborated with Ellen Winter , in order to celebrate the work of Caroline Decker by writing a pageant . In 1934 , after he had traveled around the world, he published his first collection of short stories "The Ways of White Folks". In 1936, he published "Let America Be America Again" , which was his most famous poem. He wrote two volumes of autobiography , "I Wonder as I Wander" in 1934 and "The Big Sea" in 1940. In addition to the previous works , he wrote many short stories, novels, poetry , playwrights and operas.

Langston Hughes revived the cultural nationalism ,racial consciousness and upraised self-esteem . His artistic scripts enhanced the racial pride in the African-American population , because they had to be proud of what they, their culture and of their complexity as humans. He was a source of inspiration for the black artists, specially writers since he

evoked in them the notion of consciousness . Among these writers there is Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire, including Senghor, Césaire, and other Francophone writers of Africa and of African descent from the Caribbean, such as René Maran from Martinique and Léon Damas from French Guiana in South America. Furthermore, he was also a source of inspiration to the Negritude Movement in France.

II.3 About the novel

Contrary to other black writers , Langston Hughes didn't depict only the bright and glamorous part of the black existence. He never neglected poverty, on the contrary he portrayed the lower classes and their ghetto environment.

In not without Laughter, he tackled the question of the black racial identity in America. The book was published in 1930 with the end of the Harlem Renaissance. He also attempted to uncover the difficulties of being skin colored. He spoke about discrimination and oppression. He also added to his work black musical forms , including blues and jazz. The novel concentrates on the life in small town Stanton. It is a semi biographical work as the characters and the setting were inspired from Hughes's childhood as he writes in his autobiographical book *The Big Sea* ,1940 :

“I created around myself what seemed to me a family more typical of Negro life in Kansas than my own had been. I gave myself aunts that I didn't have, modeled after other children's aunts whom. But I put in a real cyclone that had known my grandmother's front porch away. And I added dances and songs that I remembered.”(67)

As the author exposes the life of a young black protagonist, he also exposes the possibilities that are open to him in a small Mid-Western town.

II.4 The Story

Langston Hughes's novel is about the young protagonist Sandy Rogers who is African-American. It depicts the struggles that African-American people were facing in the Midwest.

The novel starts with the family's survival during the cyclone that hit the house of Hager Williams, Sandy's grandmother. The years that followed witnessed a lot of conflicts in the family that led to its destruction. Harriet, the youngest daughter of Hager rejected her mother's strict parenting, especially her Christianity. She insisted on leaving her school education and quitting her job.

Annjee, the second daughter of Hager and the mother of Sandy is facing a hard time with her job as a domestic. She wanted to join her husband Jimboy who was always absent. He was constantly in search of work until he writes to his family from Kansas, telling them that he is returning home after he injured his back.

Hager is not pleased by the news, because she regarded him as lazy and irresponsible over her daughter and his son. But Annjee, Harriet and Sandy are very happy. His return brought much joy in the house with the blues and dancing that he performs. Hager considered it as sinful. While Harriet was very entertained by it, because she was also talented.

Sandy first saw the challenges that African-Americans were confronted to when the employer of his mother was blaming her in front of him. One evening, he heard his family discussions about their experiences with racism which left him with reflection. Harriet was very bothered by racism and hated white people.

Harriet's obsession with change caused her a big trouble with her mother after she spent the night out with her boyfriend and Sandy. Soon after she joined a traveling carnival that came to town. Sandy, learns a lesson about integrity when he lied about spending his church offering on candy, which made his father rebuke him. With the beginning of the fifth grade, Sandy was forced to sit in the back, because the front rows were for the white children only.

He was let down when he discovered that he father had left again without saying goodbye. Things gets more complicated when winter arrives . His mother was sick with the flu and only his grandmother Hager was paying the charges with the extra charge of the trip of Harriet in order to get back home. Sandy realized that they are a poor family contrary to the white families who had more privileges.

The family was very worried about Harriet. Her new appearance didn't reveal much about how she survived. She left home again and moved to the bad part of town with her friend. Annjee also left to be with her husband Jim boy in Detroit. Sandy had only his grandmother to take care of him and instill in him the good principles.

While he was growing up , he learned a lot of lessons. He acquired how to exchange conversations with men in the barbershop where he was working. He faced racism for the first time when he was attempting to entrench a new amusement park with other African-American children . He also had to be by his grandmother side when Harriet and her friend were arrested for prostitution. Sandy also worked for a while in a hotel ,but the conditions of his work made him quit the job , as he was attacked by a southern guest who was racist .

When Hager died , he had to move in with his aunt Tempy . She was a rich woman and she was ashamed of her roots. She had an important role in his education. Thanks to her he learned standard English, he was introduced to great literature along with writings of W.E.B.DuBois ,and he also had a challenging curriculum at high school. But the plan of brilliant future that Tempy had for Sandy faded away ,because he felt in love and was not longer concentrating on his self -improving program.

Annjee moved to Chicago without Jimboy who enrolled to be part of the World War 1 . She asked Sandy to join her since he always dreamed of a city life . He refused her proposal and saw that he had to continue his education ,yet he didn't know how to finance it and maintain his work as an elevator attendant .

Annjee was not along with his plan, but fortunately his aunt Harriet who became a celebrated blues performer helped him to accomplish his dream and supported him .

Sandy's life switched from a poor Kansas boy to a young man with a large potential trying to make his way in the big city.

II.5 Characters

1. Sandy Rogers

The protagonist of the novel goes from a little boy to a young promising man. He is an only child raised mainly by women. Even though he faces a lot of struggles, he decides to pursue his dream and accomplish his goal of education by taking into consideration his life experiences to forge his own path, away from the expectations of his family. He had his own definition of freedom.

2. Hager Williams

Also known as "Aunt Hager". The mother of three girls and the grandmother of Sandy. She worked as a laundress to take care of her family. She is a faithful woman with a lot of values such as honesty and hardworking. She has great expectations concerning her grandson Sandy. Her efforts to maintain her family made her neglect herself and later it caused her death. Sandy and her had a very strong bond of love and discipline. She also had a forgiving attitude towards the whites.

3. Harriet Williams

She is the youngest daughter of Hager. She is a talented person, she could sing and dance. She rebelled against her mother's discipline and she also hated racism that was in Kansas. Despite the limited options available for her, somehow she was able to create a career for herself as a celebrated blues singer.

3. Annjelica Rogers

Annjee is the eldest daughter of Hager and she is the mother of Sandy. She works as a domestic for white people. Her vision about life was only limited to the present. She was so obsessed with the idea of joining her husband that she sometimes neglected Sandy.

4. Tempy Siles

She is Hager's middle daughter. She could escape the poverty in which she was raised and became an affluent woman and earned the respect of the whites. She played a major role in the education of Sandy after Hager's death. She was a supporter of the ideology of racial uplift. She believed that all African-Americans same at her position should advance the race and to well represent the rest of the African Americans.

5. Jimboy Rogers

He is Annjee's husband and Sandy's father. He wasn't always present and he was incapable of supporting his family. He is also a talented musician and knows much about popular and folk music from African-American culture.

6. Madame de Carter

Another nearby resident to the Williams family. She always tries to impress her neighbors with her elevated speech. Her generosity and her participation in a benevolent fraternal organization made her important within her community. As a consequence of her participation ,she joined the Great Migration.

7. Pansetta Young

She is a charming girl with whom Sandy had a crush . Their relationship got disturbed by Tempy who thought that she would trap him . She later on had a romantic and sexual relationship with Jimmy Lane.

II.6 Major Themes

1. Coming of Age

The novel depicts the transformation of Sandy from a little child to an experienced and well informed man . His transformation is triggered by the struggles in his life, his ambitions and self-determination and the lessons that he learned.

In the beginning of the novel , Sandy is an innocent boy who accepts what is imposed on him by the adults of his entourage. He had so many questions about the differences

between his life and the life of the white community , he was a very thoughtful boy. He was also aware that the secrets of the women that were surrounding him shouldn't be revealed, which is atypical for a child.

His understanding of himself began to be very deep . He first understood the importance of integrity when he was censured by Hager and Jimboy because he was caught in a lie. Then he understood how racism and poverty could affect his life when he didn't receive the Golden Flyer for a Christmas gift and he had to pretend that he liked the gift in order not to hurt his family's feelings. He also understood more about sexuality and had a growing knowledge of sex when he began to work in the barbershop and Drummer's Hotel.

He became a grownup person and mature when he preferred to continue his education rather than moving to Chicago with his mother.

2.Race and Racism

The characters in Not Without Laughter as African-American are subjected to racism. Hager was born into slavery and then gained her freedom with the emancipation, yet she didn't hate the whites . She was always tolerant with them despite the mistreatment that she was receiving.

Annjee was much like her mother . She passively accepted racism without fighting back. Although she was aware of the racial inequality ,she didn't do anything to change the situation. She moved away from Stanton looking for more opportunities.

Contrary to her mother and sister, Harriet was very harassed by inequality and racism. She hated the white rejection and the limited opportunities that were available for her . She made her path to become a famous blues singer.

Sandy's willingness on self-improvement made him embrace his African-American culture . He is what is known as The New Negro .

3. The Great Migration

Langston Hughes's work focuses more on the life of African-Americans before the period of the Harlem Renaissance . The massive urban movement from rural areas to the

big cities which is known as the Great Migration contributed in the creation of the Harlem Renaissance . It was portrayed in the novel when the characters moved from Stanton to Chicago seeking for better opportunities and running away from racism and segregation.

4.Music and African-American Identity

African-American music influenced the writing of Langston Hughes. As it represents the African American identity . Blues and jazz lyrics were noticed in passages in the novel.

Negro spirituals also appear in the novel when Hager shares her stories about the plantation and life after the Civil War. The stories helped Sandy to know more about his background as an African-American .

The younger African-Americans were very inspired by the blues and ragtime . They Express their need to more freedom by singing and sometimes dancing , like Harriet and Jimboy.

5.Gender and Identity

Jimboy who is frequently away to escape the family's responsibility and racism is his vision about black masculinity. But he failed to accomplish his role as the Male of the family and this made Hager considered him as irresponsible and not virile enough .

Annjee also couldn't accomplish her feminine role as a mother since she was very occupied by her job. But she shows a modern version of femininity when she did the Great Migration .

Hager was the matriarch of the family. She did everything to support her family especially with the hard labor . She was very loyal in her servitude to the white people and to her own family . She was called aunt Hager and this means that she was respected by both whites and blacks.

Harriet decides to become a prostitute to desperately fulfill her desire for autonomy as a female. She couldn't succeed in doing so until she became a well know artist.

Sandy who witnessed the struggle of his family to determine themselves as men and women, is him self finding it difficult to determine what he wants to be. He learned about

masculinity through the ideals given to him by his family especially Hager and Tempy. And he also learned about it alone when he was working in the barbershop and the Drummer's hotel.

II. 7 Conclusion:

Langston Hughes is a great novelist as he broke the boundaries with his writings which made him a well known figure of the Harlem Renaissance. His work depicts the real living conditions of the African-Americans. In this chapter, I have spoken about his life , works and provided an analysis of the concerned novel including the plot summary, a list of characters and major themes .

Chapter three

Exploring the Harlem Renaissance characteristics in Not without Laughter

III.1 Introduction:

Through the reading of Langston Hughes's novel, one can notice that it depicts many aspects of the Harlem Renaissance era. This chapter will deal with the representation of that particular era within the events that took place in *Not Without Laughter*. I will also shed light on the protagonist's evolution and how he was influenced by the events.

III.2 The Representation of Harlem Renaissance in the Novel

III.2.1 The Jazz Age

Black cultural creativity flourished during the Harlem Renaissance within African-Americans, more precisely the "black" form of music was called the Jazz Age. Its beginning went along with the writings at that time. It was the expression of the reclamation of identity and the reference to the Black American past. It enabled the African-Americans to express their emotions in a way that was prohibited in the supremacist world. Some of the content in *Not Without Laughter* was shaped by this cultural creativity. The theme of Blues music was constantly repeated in the structure of the novel.

In the following passage, Langston Hughes uses lyrics and onomatopoeia to illustrate the sound of the instruments. He also demonstrates how Blues is related to the black identity.

"Four homeless, plug-ugly niggers, that's all they were, playing mean old loveless blues in a hot, crowded little dancehall in a Kansas town on Friday night. Playing the heart out of loneliness with a wide-mouthed leader, who sang everybody's troubles until they became his own. The improvising piano, the whanging banjo, the throbbing bass drum, the hard-hearted little snare-drum, the brassy cornet that laughed, 'Whaw-whaw-whaw [...] Whaw!' were the waves in this lonesome sea of harmony from which Benbow's melancholy voice rose." (Chapter 8, Page 68)

In another passage , we can see how Jimboy serves as a mentor to his son Sandy when he teaches him how to listen to the blues and how to recognize a talented performer . It reveals the importance of music to Jimboy as he can see him self as an African-American.

“Then a man with a banjo in his hands began to play, but until then the show had been lifeless. 'Listen to him,' Jimboy said, punching Sandy. 'He's good!' The piece he was picking was full of intricate runs and trills long drawn out, then suddenly slipping into tantalizing rhythms. It ended with a vibrant whang!—and the audience yelled for more. As an encore, he played a blues and sang innumerable verses [...] And to Sandy it seemed like the saddest music in the world—but the white people around him laughed.” (Chapter 9, Pages 76-77)

Jimboy is a talented blues guitarist, he introduced his family to the blues and they were very influenced by it , most especially, Harriet . Her talent to sing and dance helped her to achieve her journey by becoming a famous Jazz singer .

III.2.2 The Great Migration

It is one of the origins of the Harlem Renaissance. Because job opportunities were opened up in northern factories, millions of African-Americans migrated from the South to the North. Its representation in Not Without Laughter spanned a lot more than a trip from the South to the North . Many of them considered great cities as social, political and personal progress . Cities were seen as a chance for better expression and self-determination. It was depicted in the novel as follow:

"This going away was a new thought, and the dark, strong-bodied young woman at the table suddenly began to dream of the cities she had never seen to which Jimboy would lead her.”(Chapter 3, Page 23)

This quote shows that even women such as Annjee , expressed their desire to move to the big cities and full-fill their dream. Because the majority who benefited from the Great Migration were mainly men.

In the coming quote , Sandy when moving from the rural to the urban area , he realizes that the higher expectations about the city life were not that high. It depicts his first sight of the city and his disappointment about it .

“He hadn’t expected the great city to be monotonous and ugly like this and he was vaguely disappointed. No towers, no dreams come true! Where were the thrilling visions of grandeur he had held? Hidden in the dusty streets? Hidden in the long, hot alleys through which he could see at a distance the tracks of the elevated trains?” (Chapter 28, Page 202)

III.2.3 Racial Division

The most outstanding image of the twentieth century is the colored race and the white race. This division that is based on skin color , regularly reminded the African-American of their position in the white supremacist world. It was mostly due to the legislation laws in the south , that they had to endure discrimination in many public accommodation facilities , such as waiting rooms , public means of transportation ...

Racial division was applied even in schools. In the novel it is explicitly remarked when Sandy was asked by his teacher to change his sit and move to the back of the classroom , in order to leave the front rows available for the white children only. Even though he was an innocent child , he felt the sting on racism. The whole scene demonstrates the gendered dimensions of racism and social division.

“Now,’ said the teacher, ‘you three colored children take the seats behind Albert. You girls take the first two, and you,’ pointing to Sandy, ‘take the last one.’”(Chapter 11, Page 88)

At the same time that Sandy was growing up , he became more aware of the reality of the world that is surrounding him. He could see the unfairness of the world simply by comparing the material comforts whites have and the fact that African-Americans couldn’t afford those materials , because they were not allowed to work in higher position that could enable them to do so , as a result they remained poor.

“Next door at the Johnson’s all was dark and quiet, but across the street, where white folks lived, the lights were burning brightly and a big Christmas tree with all its candles aglow stood in the large bay window while a woman loaded it with toys.” (Chapter 13, Page 107)

In addition , another passage in the novel illustrates the crucial discrimination . As the owners of the amusement park decided to bar African-American children from benefiting of the free opening day of the park. Sandy was desperately trying to make sense of their decision and of the widespread discrimination when he was talking to his grand mother Hager:

“I guess Kansas is getting like the South, isn’t it, ma?” Sandy said to his grandmother as they came out on the porch that evening after supper. ‘They don’t like us here either, do they?’ But Aunt Hager gave him no answer.”(Chapter 18, Pages 128-29)

III.2.4 Duality

It is the internal conflict within the African-American race. Black people were totally aware of their blackness, how they were seen by the white society and their citizenship as Americans.

In the novel ,Tempy somehow had that sense of duality , but she also believed that black people should uplift their race and behave in a good way , in order to make African6americans more respectable people. She thought that colored people need to come up in the world , to be at the same level with the whites by dressing, talking and thinking like them. In that way , black people would no longer be called “Niggers”.

Like noticed in the next quote , when it comes to Sandy , he was also aware of his duality . As he grows up and faces life difficulties , he knows that because of his skin color , he is expected to remain in the bottom .

“‘Being colored is like being born in the basement of life, with the door to the light locked and barred—and the white folks live upstairs. They don’t want us up there with them” (Chapter 26, Page 189).

Harriet also had knowledge about her twoness , but she refuses to be duped into passive acceptance of racism. Her militancy toward racism represents the generation born right after slavery. She expressed her hatred to the whites when she states that they are predisposed to run the world , while the only thing that black folks are expected to do is to work and grin and take off their hats. Contrary to her mother Hager , who has learned to accommodate racism.

III.2 The Protagonist’s Evolution Analysis

Sandy Rogers, the main character in the novel is a child that had an early adolescence which made him capable of assuming autonomy in his life. The tensions and conflicts of his family turned him into a conscious person . His coming of age was shaped by his relationship with his family and by the imposed dominance of race , class and culture. His exposure to the blues is major part of his understanding of the black culture and of the working class .

His father serves as a monitor to him when it comes to music . He also instructs his morality and presents an example of what Sandy does not want to be as a grownup person. The observation of his father's and the rejection of his behavior helped him to determine that he will have a stable home and a large family.

The outside forces put a pressure on him ,as he understands the cruelty of racism that he have to face from his childhood to his adulthood. As he matures he is more knowledgeable about the depths of poverty and it's link with his race and he develops a sense of the feelings of others. The big Hopes of his grandmother and her closeness with him have encouraged Sandy to overcome the difficulties with self-determination and self-esteem .

His journey outside of his home also teaches him a lot of lessons, for instance in the barbershop he acquired the codes of black masculinity. He also learned the value of hard work and that it pays.

With Tempy's control , he is shaped into a young man who is conscious about how to be a respectable black person with many values that will help him in the future.

He became more aware of his possibilities as an African-American when he is introduced to W.E.B. DuBois writings.

In the last scene , Harriet offers her financial help to Sandy which provides him with the possibility to escape the life of a black emigrant to the city. Now , he has the potential for the future and it is clear that he will accomplish his goals.

III.3 Conclusion

Not Without Laughter is a great masterpiece of the modern novelist Langston Hughes. The novel reveals the author's concern about what it means to be American and African. In this chapter, I have investigated some key aspects of the period such as the Jazz Age ,the Great Migration, racial division, and duality in order to show the extent to which these events have helped redefining the African American individual during the period termed the Harlem Renaissance.

General Conclusion

African-Americans have been living in a constant struggle with the white society and their perpetual quest for identity has been at the heart of every single attempt meant to gain more rights. Thanks to their commitment to redefine themselves they were able to change history and to remodel the image of black people from objects to subjects. The Harlem Renaissance was part of the process, as it had a major role in reshaping the cultural identity and in achieving the racial pride through arts, poetries, literature and music.

Black Americans uplifted their race by defying important obstacles. This was demonstrated when they were able to reach higher positions in society in numerous fields, such as, politics, sports, music, literature and art. African-Americans imposed themselves and exposed their intellectual and artistic abilities and capacities that were not recognized by the whites.

Literature is the mirror of society, since it reflects its beauty and ugliness. Langston Hughes's work entitled "Not Without Laughter" depicts the life of black population in America. The author uncovered the difficulties faced by African-Americans just because of their skin color.

Through the analytic reading of *Not Without Laughter*, it is noticed that the themes granted in the book are representative of what black family members had to endure in the period that came after slavery, as the characters' stories display the social division during that time. Sandy Rogers, the protagonist of the novel is a young child that acquires life experiences and learns more about his own race and the white's objectification of people who are dark skinned like him. His mother Annjee and Grandmother Hager are both representatives of the working class, typical of how a black person should behave in a white supremacist society.

Langston Hughes linked his story with the Harlem Renaissance evolution by picturing the life style of the characters and their thoughts such as how each character viewed segregation and racial division, how some of them chose to migrate to Chicago in order to escape racism and other evolution and overcoming despite the racial obstacles and

boundaries. Thus the literary text *Not Without Laughter* reflects the restrictions and racial division in the American society.

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