

THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
ABDERRAHMANE MIRA UNIVERSITY OF BEJAIA
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



**Finding Light in Darkness: Sandy Rogers' Path to
Maturity and Understanding in Langston Hughes' *Not
Without Laughter* (1930)**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirement for an M.A. Degree in English
Literature and Civilization

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Academic Year: 2024 / 2025

DOVER · THRIFT · EDITIONS

LANGSTON HUGHES

Not Without Laughter



Dedication

I dedicate this work to the people who influenced me, each in their own way.

To my beloved mother, the quiet force behind every step I take. Your love is my foundation

To my brother, my safest place and my biggest blessing.

To the one whose presence brought peace to my chaos, whose kindness felt like home.

And to myself, for holding on, for trying, and for making it here. I'm proud of you.

Tinhinane KADA.

Dedication

To my beloved family, with all the gratitude my heart holds this work is for you.

- ✚ **To my mother**, you are the love that raised me, the strength that carried me, and the heart that never let me fall. Every step I have taken, every dream I have chased was because you believed in me first. Thank you for every sacrifice, every prayer, and every moment you put me before yourself.
- ✚ **To my father**, the quiet force behind every one of my steps. Without you, I would not have reached this point. Your presence shaped every success I have ever known. You gave without limits, scarified without asking, and stood by me even when I could not find my way. Your faith on me became the ground I stood on. from the depths of my heart, thank you. Always.
- ✚ **To my sister and brother**, you were my light on the hardest days. When stress took over and everything felt heavy, you were always there with laughter, with jokes, with the kind of comfort only siblings can give.
- ✚ **To the most important person in my life**, to the voice that told me I could when I believed I could not thank you for listening to my dreams as if they were already real. Thank you for your love and your patience. Thank you for the light you held for when I could not find my own. Thank you for everything seen and unseen for being the quiet voice behind this journey.
- ✚ **To my dearest best friend Ines**, whose love and support know no distance. Though oceans and borders separate us, your presence has never faded. Even from afar, you have remained closer than ever reminding me that true friendship transcends time zones and miles. Thank you for everything.

Lydia Belhocine.

Acknowledgements

The greatest thank goes to the **Almighty God** who granted us this chance to accomplish writing this humble thesis.

With deep gratitude and sincere admiration, we would like express our heartfelt thanks to our supervisor **Mr. Mourad Meziani** for his support, patience, and precious advice.

This work carries imprint of his care and insight, and we are truly honored to have learned under someone so devoted, so inspiring and so deeply human. Thank you for walking this path with us.

We also would like to thank the examiners **Dr. Fadila Kaci** and **Mr. Mehdi Yousfi** for their efforts while reading and examining our work.

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Abstract

This dissertation entitled *Finding Light in Darkness: Sandy Rogers' Path to Maturity and Understanding in Langston Hughes' Not without Laughter (1930)*, undertakes an analysis of the protagonist Sandy who navigates the racial and social challenges in early 20th century America. Through the lens of the literary theory New Historicism, this work explores the interrelationship between literature and historical context. It aims also at showing how Hughes constructs a narrative of growth rooted in the realities of race, class and family. This present work analyzes Sandy's moving journey into Maturity and Understanding, revealing how he emerges from hardship with quiet strength, shaped by the trials of his world and the enduring wisdom of those who raised him.

Keywords: Langston Hughes, new historicism, racism, segregation, the great migration, maturity and understanding, not without laughter.

General Introduction

General introduction:

“In all my life, I have never been free. I have never been able to do anything with freedom, except in the field of writing.”

Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, 1993.

The Harlem Renaissance is a cultural and artistic movement that took place in the 1920s, based in Harlem, New York. It was a time when African American artists, writers, poets, musicians, and intellectuals gained fame recognition for their talents and efforts. This movement celebrated Black culture and identity challenging racial stereotypes and promoting Black pride. The Harlem Renaissance had a lasting impact on American culture and history and the global appreciation of African American contributions to the arts in general.

During times of social transformation, African American Literature engages into reflecting the realities of Black life in America. As the nation went from the end of slavery and segregation to the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, black authors used literature to document the reality of the American society and the Black's pursuit of freedom.

Within African American literature, coming-of-age narratives investigate how young black protagonists develop a sense of self-discovery in a world marked by inequality. Through their journeys, readers gain insight into how historical and cultural forces shape the lives of black youth and influence the way they see themselves. These narratives go beyond just growing older, they are about feeling confusion, frustration, pride and hope all at once. In

many cases, the characters' growth is not only personal but also shaped by the world around them and the reality of being Black in America.

James Mercer Langston Hughes (1901-1967) is an American writer and an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance. He made the African American experience the subject of his writings that ranged from poetry, and plays to novels and newspaper columns. In 1930, Hughes published his first semi-autobiographical novel *Not Without Laughter* that is set against the backdrop of the Harlem Renaissance. The novel highlights the rich culture and history of African Americans, blending moments of hardship with laughter.

Through Sandy Rogers' journey, Hughes' novel offers a nuanced illustration of a black young man's quest for self-discovery who inherits the whole of his people's history. Through listening, learning and questioning, he has been caught between two worldviews. On one side, he was influenced by the older generation represented by his Grandmother Aunt Hager who was for him a source of endurance and religious faith. On the other side, the younger generation affected him as well especially through his relationship with his mother Annjee who taught him courage and the seek freedom.

Much ink has been spilled on *Not Without Laughter*, Langston Hughes' seminal coming-of-age novel, as scholars and critics have long been drawn to its poignant depiction of African American life in early twentieth-century America.

Among the critical works that draws attention to Hughes' novel, Rajenda Prasad Bhatt's article "Hughes *Not Without Laughter*: A Saga of Motherhood, Racism, and Gender Subjugation"(2020). Bhatt explores the novel's engagement with issues of race, gender, and identity. It focuses mainly on the role of motherhood as a symbol of resilience and moral authority and how it shapes the life of the protagonist Sandy Rogers. At the heart of this argument, Bhatt's examination of Black motherhood serves as both a site of oppression

and a source of strength and he contends that oral tradition and education remain vital instruments of empowerment. This study emphasizes how Hughes defends African American identity, dignity, and self-worth while criticizing racial injustice and patriarchal conventions.

In his article “The ‘Ancestor’ Figure in Langston Hughes’ *Not Without Laughter*: Anticipation of Feminist Theoretical Accounts in Male Representations,” (2017) Babacar Dieng shifts attention from the well-studied contributions of Black women novelists to the often-overlooked role of Black male writers in shaping images of Black womanhood. Dieng argues that by developing the character of Aunt Hager, who combines traditional maternal traits with moral courage and cultural wisdom, Langston Hughes moves beyond the typical "mammy" cliché. Inspired by Barbara Christian’s study "Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition", Dieng positions Aunt Hager in a larger literary and historical framework arguing that Hughes challenges older portrayals of Black Women through her character.

In “Post Slavery and the Plight of Black Americans: Analysis of Langston Hughes’ *Not Without Laughter*”(2021), Christopher Neube and Alice Dhilwayo offer a comprehensive analysis of the lives of Black Americans in the post slavery period. They started to give us a small background about the African Americans who had to work for whites to earn their living. They seek to highlight the impact of racism and discrimination on the characters especially Sandy and how he was forced to work because of economic circumstances. The authors believe that although legal slavery ended, systemic racism and institutional discrimination continued to oppress Black Americans.

In the article “Done Made Us Leave Our Home”: Langston Hughes’s *Not Without Laughter* Unifying Image and Three Dimensions “(1960), R.Baxter Miller examines “*Not Without Laughter*” through the central unifying image of displacement. The writer argues that this displacement is not only physical, but also emotional, social, and cultural. For the

physical displacement, the novel reflects the racial and the class struggle when the characters moved in search of better opportunities like during the Great Migration. The author believes that Hughes portrays social displacement through the ongoing struggle of the characters to find belonging and dignity in a divided society. As he sees that in the novel, Hughes reveals emotional displacement especially through Sandy's inner conflict as he questions where he truly belongs, and he often feels caught between what his family wants for him and what he wants for himself.

In an attempt to interpret Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter*, the suitable literary theory that can be used is the New Historicism theory introduced by Stephen Greenblatt. This theory focuses on the connection between literature and history. New Historicists argue that literature both reflects and participates in the historical forces of its era and that not work of literature exists in isolation.

The aim of our study is to examine the way the social and historical struggles of the early 20th C in *Not Without Laughter* affected the character of Sandy Rogers. Through the lens of New Historicism, we will analyze how his experiences across two different generations shape his path toward maturity and understanding. We will also see how the historical, cultural, and social forces influenced Sandy's personal growth and identity formation.

In order to address the problem of our research we will answer a set of questions:

- How did the social and cultural context in which the story was set influence Sandy's personal growth and choices?
- How did his relationships with his relatives shape his journey towards maturity?

- How did Hughes use Sandy's internal struggle to explore questions of identity and race?
- How did different characters in *Not Without Laughter* react to racism,

This work is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter is theoretical, and it introduces New Historicism as a literary theory defining its key concepts and its historical background. It also discusses Racism and segregation in early 20th century America showing how it shaped the African American experience.

The second chapter is practical and analyzes Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter* through the lens of New Historicism. It focuses on Sandy Rogers' journey towards maturity and understanding, examining how racism, family, and generational differences influence his personal growth.

Chapter One

Theoretical and Historical Approaches to *Not Without Laughter*

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to introduce the readers to the theory of New Historicism as a lens for understanding how literature engages, reflects and reshapes the historical realities. To establish this prescriptive, the chapter first explores the key principles of New Historicism to show the reciprocal relationship between texts and history. Following this, it shifts to the historical and social background of the twentieth century America. Throughout this chapter, our attention will be turned to the Great Migration as a transition period in African American history and its impacts on Black communities. Finally, this chapter extends to the persistent realities of racism and segregation during that era, shedding light on the systemic barriers that persisted even as African Americans sought new opportunities in northern cities.

I . New Historicism: Historical Context

New Historicism emphasizes on the historical and cultural context in which a text is produced. It emerged as a literary critical movement in the early 1980s, during a time of political and social change in the history of the United States. Stephen Greenblatt first introduced the term «New Historicism» in the introduction to *The Power of Forms and the English Renaissance* (1982). He used it to suggest a new approach to studying the Renaissance focusing on how literary texts are connected to the social, economic, and political forces of their time.

”New Historicists pay more attention to the conflict and contradictions in suspense, and they take the marginal events and figures the same way with the main stream. Instead of praising the existent aesthetics, new historicists focus more on the exploring of the formation process of the ideology and the material bases.”(Lyu 1076)

New historicists see history as central to any and all texts; they attempt to situate artistic texts both as products of historical context and as a means to understand cultural and intellectual history. They look at literature alongside other cultural products of a particular historical period to illustrate how concepts, attitude, and ideologies operated across a broader cultural spectrum that is not exclusively literary. New historicists also acknowledge that their own criticism contains biases that derive from their historical position and ideology.

This approach is based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. It acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's times and circumstances, but that the critic's response to that work is also influenced by their environment, beliefs, and prejudices, it follows the idea that, as times change, so will our understanding of great literature. It treats texts as historical artefacts that emerge among particular social, intellectual, and economic circumstances to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and intellectual history of a period.

Coates argues that even if New Historicism has started out as a methodology, it has since moved into a movement about itself (267) New Historicism may have started as just a way of studying literature but over time it has grown into something much bigger, a movement that focuses on its own methods and ideas. "Although New Historicism in its beginnings was clearly intended as an answer to the still reigning formalism of New Criticism" (Berghahn 143) The emergence of New Historicism is mainly seen as a response to the limitations of earlier literary theories such as Formalism, Traditional Historicism and New Criticism. While these literary theories focus on the idea that a literary work exist freely without depending on its author, historical context or its audience, New Historicism in another hand emphasizes on the reciprocal relationship between literature and history and

how power relations, social norms and cultural practices are reflected and contested in literary texts.

I . The Core Concepts of New Historicism

One of the fundamental principles of New Historicism is Self-Positioning; it refers to the fact that a critic or historian cannot be completely objective when analyzing a text. This reminds authors that they are not completely neutral and their analysis is shaped by history, just as the text itself. Due to that, writers can be aware of their own biases, in order to make their analysis more honest and reflective. It also shows that there is no single correct interpretation of a text which means reading change based on who is analyzing it and when.

“Moreover, according to new historicists, everything is shaped by social institutions. Society dictates its unwritten laws for its members. In other words, each individual subjected to and manipulated by the prevailing social codes which represent the general and cultural truths of a certain era, and thus, mark its history.”(Chilla 64) Closely linked to Self-Positioning is the concept of Subjectivity also referred as selfhood. It is the idea that individuals including authors, characters and even historians are shaped by their historical and cultural contexts. It challenges the notion of an independent, objective self and instead sees people as products of the discourses and power structures of their time.

Historical Analysis explores the connections between literary texts and the historical context in which they were produced. New Historicists perceive it as a complex interplay of discourses, ideologies, and power dynamics that both influence and are influenced by literature. It allows readers to gain a better understanding of a text by becoming familiar with the period in which the literary work takes place and when it was written. In the article "Historical Analysis: Using the Past to Design the Future" S. Wyche, P. Sengers, and R.E. Grinter argue that historians often rely on this method to explore and explain how different

social behaviours and patterns have developed over time. (38) This concept requires looking beyond the literary work itself to include historical documents such as newspapers, letters, and political writings, examining how they are related to the literary work itself.

“ The Literary text as a site of history is a manifestation of struggle and resistance; of a conflict of power between the oppressor and the oppressed, the powerful and the powerless”(A.Ramadan 29) New Historicism does not view power as if it is controlled only by rulers or institutions. It also views it as something that spreads through language, culture, and daily life and shapes how people think and act. It exists everywhere, influencing ideas, beliefs, and social structures. New Historicists study how power appears in literature—whether a text supports, challenges, or has a mixed relationship with dominant ideas. They also explore how writers, historical figures, and readers are affected by power, questioning traditional ideas about authorship, authority, and history.

II . The Socio-historical Context

II .1. The Great Migration (1910-1970)

The Great Migration also called "The Black Migration" took place in the first three-quarters of the twentieth-century and remains a significant part of American history both socially and economically. It is a mass movement of more than 4 millions of Black Americans who were being pushed out from the Rural South and pulled toward the Urban North and West cities. It is one of the largest domestic migrations in human history making it a turning point reshaping cities and influencing major historical events.

It occurred in two main phases coinciding with the participation of the U.S with both World Wars; The First Great Migration (1910-1940) had over 1.6 million Southern Black Americans relocate themselves in the northern and Midwestern cities like Chicago, New York, and Pittsburgh. The Second Great Migration (1940-1970) is considered as the sequel of

the first wave and remains larger in scale and impact. “Out-migration from the South was strongest during the 1940s, with a Black emigration rate of almost 15%, but remained high until the late 1960s “(Calderon 9) Although both migrations had an important impact on the lives of Black Americans, the Second Migration had an even greater effect as it was driven by World War II era.

At first, northern factories preferred to hire immigrants from Europe, but after the impacts left by the WW I they stopped coming resulting a higher demand for workers and they began to employ more African Americans. By these “Pull factors”, they had more working opportunities which encouraged them to leave their homes seeking for a better life and more economic mobility.

As the "Pull Factors" in the north helped in promoting this great movement, the "Push Factors" in the south also had a significant influence on its direction .The harsh conditions in the south made life unbearable for African Americans mainly through racism that was enforced by Jim Crows laws. They maintained segregation and systemic oppression ensuring that Black communities remained socially and economically disadvantaged. In Addition, Organization such as Ku Klux Klan terrorized Black citizens by spreading racial violence such as physical harassment and intimidation deepening their sense of fear and insecurity.

II .2 The Impacts of the Great Migration on African Americans

Many African Americans began to build a new place for themselves in public life. They were motivated to leave the south by the push and pull factors which resulted to housing tensions. Black residents ended up creating their own cities within big cities, fostering the growth of a new, urban, Black culture. The most prominent example was Harlem in New York City, an all-white neighbourhood that by the 1920s housed some 200,000 Black people. As there are other major cities that have seen a surge in Black

population like Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles. As a result they became predominately Black, like Washington, D.C that earned the nickname Chocolate City. Thus in purely demographic terms, the Great Migration produced a dramatic geographic redistribution of the African American population. This demographic shift led to better economic and social opportunities and an escape for racial violence in the south

The Great Migration transformed many specific aspects of American culture. The cultural movement Harlem Renaissance emerged as a direct result of this Black migration. Once a well-known, upper-class, all-white neighbourhood was transformed into a dense, a culturally-rich town that was filled with black culture. It was seen as a golden age in African-American culture. Authors, artists and musicians of the Harlem Renaissance left an infinite mark on the realization and recognition of well-respected African- American culture. The Black migrants and their children changed the sound of the blues music that they brought from the south. Another variable that made northern life attractive was the raise of the personal freedom. The migrants felt after leaving the South more free to express themselves celebrating their black identity.

The major demographic shift of Black communities was accompanied by a transformative of American's political landscape. The migrants gained access to voting rights that was largely suppressed in the South due to Jim Crow laws. It led also to the election of Black politicians in urban areas, which helped increase the representation in local and national government. Ultimately, it has also pushed the United States towards a more just and equitable society, as millions of African Americans left the oppressive conditions of Jim Crow to gain a greater access to education and jobs.

Most immigrants were a mixture of farmers, domestic servants, day labourers, and industrial workers. During this period, the earnings of black men grew faster than those of

white men nationwide, for example, an average black worker in the north earned nearly three times as much as an average black worker in the south. However the economic gain was not the sole reason behind this migration. Up to the time, Afro-American children rarely advanced past the sixth grade in the South because Black schools received less money from southern legislatures, which pushed the government to place pressure on parents to put their children to work rather than have them further their education.

This was a hard experience for Black women too. They found themselves in a position where they often would work in town for domestic servants, and then they would return home to be greeted by a long list of household tasks. “While white women could be found in clerical offices or at perfume counters, black women worked in the hog head, bone, and hair departments of packinghouses”(Curtice 418) These hardworking black women were responsible in both house and fieldwork and the white women were less employed outside of the home. They even sent their laundry to black washerwomen who work tirelessly to earn their breads and gain their lives.

III. Racism and Segregation as Historical Constructs: Theoretical Exploration

“The term “racism” is often used in a loose and unreflective way to describe the hostile or negative feelings of one ethnic group or “people” toward another and the actions resulting from such attitudes.” (M.Frederickson 1) Racism is not just a prejudice or race-based discrimination—it is a system of practice, ideology, and power that generates and maintains racial hierarchies. The U.S in the 20th century was marked by systemic racism that shaped the experiences of Black Americans.

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. In his speech “I Have a Dream”, declared: « I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a Nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their Character". The inequalities that Black people and other communities of color experienced came from long-standing policies that have treated them unfairly for centuries.

These laws and rules made it harder for them to access life opportunities, simply because of their skin color and origins.

"The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not." (Baldwin) In the 20th century American Black students were taught in a way that limited their ability to think freely. Instead of encouraging independent thought, the American educational system reinforced racism; History courses and lessons were led by whites who took over power leaving blacks without voices.

“That there is a distinct attempt being made in some quarters to exclude Negroes from Northern colleges and universities, no well-informed observer will deny. In the Boston public school system a few white teachers, who hardly act on their own initiative, are becoming increasingly bolder in their efforts to discourage colored students from going to the college preparatory high schools and to white colleges” (Logan 65)

Even if the North was often perceived as more progressive than the south, racial discrimination in the educational system is there. It made it difficult for African Americans to receive an education equal to that of white students. Noltemeyer and Mujic argue that Black students were often taught in separate schools that lacked adequate resources and quality compared to those attended by white students. (6) This practice was particularly damaging because education was one of the few paths that would help them achieve equality. This ended up reinforcing the feeling of inferiority and exclusion as many African American students experienced low self-esteem, frustration, and lack of motivation.

Similarly, Black communities were restricted from Higher Education. Many colleges and universities refused to admit colored people and limited their access to any kind of stable career opportunities, even public schools for Black students were underfunded, lacked teachers, and received fewer resources compared to white schools. These schools lacked proper facilities and struggled to provide adequate learning materials such as textbooks and libraries. This educational inequality reinforced poverty and social exclusion for black communities making it even more difficult for them to achieve any kind of professional and economic advancement.

Due to the limited access to quality of education, Black individuals were left with no choice but to accept low-paying jobs. Many white employers refused to hire Black workers for skilled positions limiting them to jobs like domestic work and factory labor. Even skilled Black professionals, doctors, and lawyers found doors slammed in their faces forced instead into low-paying jobs.

“Most black women worked then for the same reasons that they work now-not because they wanted to but because they had to due to the low earnings of their black men when compared to the earnings of white men. Then as now, fewer black families than white had a choice about women working outside the home.”(Bremner 10)

Most of them were forced to work only in domestic jobs such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare for the white families. Often being required to work from early morning until late at night without any safety. These jobs were physically damaging, psychologically exhausting and financially unrewarding.

Conclusion

Our first chapter introduced the literary theory New Historicism focusing on its historical background and aspects. It has also looked into how the historical events of The

Great Migration alongside to racism and segregation marked a turning point to the experiences of African Americans. In the next chapter, we will dig into applying the aspects of the literary theory analyzed before on Langston Hughes' novel *Not Without Laughter*. As well, we will examine how the historical events of the 20th c influenced the novel's characters mainly the protagonist providing better clarity of its themes and message.

Chapter Two

A New Historicist reading of Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter*

Introduction

Through the lens of New Historicism, this chapter provides the biography of Langston Hughes to show the influence of his personal experiences and ideological beliefs on the fictional world he created in his novel *Not Without Laughter*. This following chapter aims to uncover the limitations placed on the black identity including racism and segregation. By centring our analysis on the character Sandy Rogers, we will examine how these limitations subtly carved his path toward self-understanding and maturity

I . Langston Hughes: A Brief Summary

Many writers decided to pronounce words to bring voice to the story of the African American descent. Along with Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay and several other African American writers, Langston Hughes remains the greatest well-known figure of the Harlem Renaissance. He is considered as his people's poet; he used his creativity to turn the Blacks negative experiences into words that can be heard by all. Born on February 1, 1902 in Joplin, Missouri ; Hughes was primarily raised by his Grandmother after his parents' divorce who since his childhood taught him to love his heritage, culture and mainly himself as a Black American individual.

His contribution to the Harlem Renaissance does not stop at just few lines of poetry; similarly he reflects the Black experience in America through novels, plays, short stories, essays, autobiographies and newspapers columns. Hughes captured the African Americans' struggles and triumphs through themes like Pride and Identity quest, Double Consciousness, Oppression and Racism and The American Dream.

His writing career began as early as his childhood years when he contributed to his school newspaper. In 1921, while still a young man, he gained a national reputation when his poem *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* was published in the NAACP's official journal. Some years later, he published his first book of poems, *The Weary Blues* (1926), fusing jazz rhythms with

strong racial identity themes. Following his literary success, he published *Fine Clothes to the Jew* in 1927, consolidating his reputation as a bold and innovative poet. Following his graduation from Lincoln University, he wrote his first novel, *Not Without Laughter* (1929), a coming-of-age novel that explored race and class. Spreading his wings, Hughes published his first collection of short stories, *The Ways of White Folks*, in 1934, with scathing social commentary on Black and white America.

II . About the Novel

Published in 1930, *Not Without Laughter* is a semi-biographical fictional novel in which Langston Hughes drew his inspiration from his own childhood and the experiences he went through in the Midwest African American community.

The story follows the coming-of-age of Sandy Rogers, a bright observant boy's journey from childhood and adolescence to manhood. It waves together themes of racism, self-discovery and African identity. The protagonist's journey of transformation is driven by the tragedies and the complexities he faced in his life with the contrasting influences of his family members.

One of the characters who inspired Sandy the most is his grandmother who everyone refers to as Aunt Hager. She was the heart and the moral centre of the family, strong, faithful, and a religious woman who believes in the power of patience, and Christian values to overcome hardship. She is a washerwoman who worked every day of her life to the last. She was more than a grandma to Sandy; she was the one who truly formed him into the quite, highly observant child and teenager he becomes.

Another person who influences him a lot was his mother Annjee. She faces hard time with her job as a domestic just in order to provide for her son Sandy. However her heart and mind are always elsewhere, thinking how to join her husband Jimboy who was most of the

time absent. He never stays in one place for long, always drifting from town to town in search of work and music. For Annjee he was the love she waits for, the man she dreams will finally settle down and takes care of the family.

His two Aunts Tempy and Harriet, together with their different and contrasting influence helped Sandy to understand both the value of education and the importance of staying true to his identity. Through Tempy he learned discipline and ambition because she lived a middle class life and always distanced herself from her working class Black roots. Through Harriet he learned to be proud of his culture, to stand up against injustice and to express his emotions freely because she was always obsessed with change and refused to accept the limitations that society expects from her as a Black woman.

At the heart of it all is Sandy, quietly observing these different paths. He was a dreamy-eyed boy who had largely grown to his present age under the dominant influence of women; his mother Annjee, his aunt Harriett and his grandmother Aunt Hager, since his father Jimboy had been so seldom home.

III. Plot summary

The novel begins with a powerful cyclone that destroys the porch from the house of Aunt Hager. Though the family survives the storm, the years that follow deepen their conflicts that led to their destruction. Starting with Harriet who once was living under the strict guidance of her deeply religious mother, is now rejecting her Christianity, and insisting on quitting school and job. She begins sneaking into town, staying out all night, and desire for more freedom.

Meanwhile, Annjee, at the start of the novel, was a quiet mother who works hard to survive, she was working as a house cleaner for a white family. However, she was tied to her

husband, Jimboy, who was most of the time absent. When Jimboy leaves in search for work and better conditions, she remains behind; waiting for his letters and dreaming of the day they will reunite.

As time passes, her feelings force her to make difficult choices. She left her only son, Sandy, behind with his grandma and moved north to join her husband.

From the beginning, Aunt Hager did not like Jimboy since she always regarded him as a lazy man who does little to support her daughter and grandson. Every time Jimboy returns home to see his family, Aunt Hager feels not pleased; however, Annjee, Harriet, and Sandy always feel excited because he brings much joy and happiness with the blues he plays on the guitar and the music he shares with them. Hager considered all this music and dancing as sinful, but Harriet enjoys the evenings when Jimboy shares his talent since she loved music and dance as much as Jimboy.

His aunt Harriett, on the other hand, had left home to reject her mother's strict religious values; she was in Kansas City living her independent life that she always dreamed for.

When Aunt Hager passed away, Sandy felt as he lost the only person who had ever made him feel truly safe, she left him alone in a world that suddenly felt colder. He was forced to move in with his aunt Tempy since his mother was in the north with Jimboy, they left him behind with his grandma; she even was not present for her mother's last breath.

Sandy had to face the death of his grandma alone. Later, he had no other choice than to live with his aunt Tempy. At first, he struggled to connect with her, feeling distant from her strict and refined world. Over time, he began to understand her intentions, and a quiet

bond grew between them. Thanks to her, he learned Standard English; he was introduced to great literature along with writings of W.E.B Dubois.

Tempy had high hopes for Sandy, built on hard work and self discipline, but those hopes quietly faded when love stole his attention, leaving his dreams of a brilliant future gently undone for a period of time.

In the end, Sandy stood at the edge of a new world, no longer the uncertain boy of Kansas but a young man shaped by dreams and discipline. When Annjee moved to live in Chicago, she urged her son who was living with her sister Tempy to join her – a city life he had once dreamed of. However, Sandy refused the proposal because he committed finishing his education despite financial uncertainty. With time, Aunt Harriett rose to fame as a blues singer, lightening her own path of freedom and self-expression. Her success inspired Sandy to believe in possibilities beyond the worn streets of his hometown. She helped his dream to come true since she encourages him to step into a new life beyond the small-town struggles he has known.

IV. Conceptual Application of New Historicism on *Not Without Laughter*

IV.1 Self-positioning

In New Historicism, the historical forces that surround the text shape both authors and their characters. A great example of this is *Not Without Laughter* in which the character Sandy serves as a reflection of the childhood of Langston Hughes. He writes from the prescriptive of the Harlem Renaissance as an author. By revisiting his Midwestern childhood through fiction, he presents himself both as product of that historical moment and as a critical voice challenging the dominant narratives about Black life.

Langston Hughes grew up in a racially segregated America during the early 20th century. His grandmother, Mary Langston, raised him after his parents' divorce. He was considering her as a symbol of strength, resilience, and black pride. She was his own and only source of inspiration and all her influence can be seen in *Not Without Laughter* through the character of Aunt Hager who, like Mary Langston was the strongest life guide of Sandy.

“Through my grandmother’s stories always life moved, moved heroically toward an end. Nobody ever cried in my grandmother’s stories. They worked, schemed, or fought. But no crying,” (Hughes)

“When my grandmother died, I didn’t cry, either. Something about my grandmother’s stories (without her ever having said so) taught me the uselessness of crying about anything.” (Hughes)

Both of them became the only caregivers for their grandsons during their early years in Kansas. Since both have experienced racial injustice, they refused to let it define them. It is shown in the novel through the personality of Aunt Hager, she always encourages Sandy her grandson to respond to racism with dignity and perseverance.

For both Langston Hughes and his fictional counterpart, education was more than just learning but they consider it as a path to freedom, they saw knowledge as a way to rise above the limitations they were facing in the American society.

Sandy Rogers consider education as a doorway to a world beyond struggle, and as a ladder to a brighter future just as years before a young Langston Hughes did; he always believed that knowledge could be his escape. Through Sandy, he reflected his own belief that education is a key to break all the societal struggles. This is why Hughes chose to shape

Sandy into a character that deeply treasures education, even in the face of hardship, could be a powerful path to freedom.

“Sandy’s range of reading increased, too, when his aunt found a job for him that winter in Mr. Prentiss’s gift-card- and painting shop.” (175)

“Then it was that books began to happen to me, and I began to believe in nothing but books and the wonderful world in books where if people suffered, they suffered in beautiful language, not in monosyllables, as we did in Kansas.” (Hughes)

Sandy’s journey is a mirror of Langston Hughes’ own inner struggle to find purpose, identity and belonging. Through Sandy, the author explores the emotional and social challenges of growing up Black in a segregated America. Hughes lived in a time when racial segregation and discrimination were present in the American society that later on helped him explore his personal values, his cultural background, his social roles and his own life purpose. It was as a process of discovering who he is, what he believes in and where he belongs in this world after he had faced exclusion from different opportunities as a black man, despite his intelligence and talent.

Just as the novel ends with the struggles of Sandy facing an uncertain future, unsure of the path he should take in his life, we are reminded that his journey is far from over. He is still trying to search for himself and his own place in the world. This open ending does not mean a lack of closure, but rather shows the reality of an ongoing and an unfinished journey. Like Sandy, Hughes was still discovering himself, still finding his way, and still searching for where he truly belonged in a world that did not always welcome him and refuse to make space for him. In this way, Sandy becomes more than a fictional character; he represents a voice for the author’s unfinished journey.

IV.2 Subjectivity:

Langston Hughes in this novel challenges the idea of an independent self. The characters see the world through the lens of their own experience, shaped by history and culture, each of them experience history differently. New historicists believe that history is not a single, universal truth but rather it is shaped by personal circumstances.

Subjectivity in the novel is seen through the way history is experienced personally, for example each character has a different understanding of what it means to succeed as a black person in the 20th century America. We have Aunt Hager who represents an older generation that believes in religious faith, morality and perseverance as a key to advance in life and gain a position in the society. She works tirelessly, her hands worn from endless washing because she sees hard work and good character as the only way to overcome her struggles.

“After soaking all night, the garments were rubbed through the suds in the morning; and in the afternoon the colored articles were on the line while the white pieces were boiling seriously in a large tin boiler on the kitchen-stove.”
(26)

Aunt Hager does not believe that the true path to success came only from hard work, but also the strong religious faith and guiding beliefs. Which is emerged through specific passages in the novel especially her frequent use of Christian prayer and expressions such as “Lawd help us, Jesus!” and “God have mercy on ma daughter.” (30) “Good God” (115) “Have mercy on thid chile! Help her an’ save her all from hell-fire! Change her heart, Jesus!” in every hard situation she faces.

“Harriett, honey, I wants you to be good,” the old woman stammered. The words came pitiful and low- not a command any longer- as she faced her

terribly alive young daughter in the ruffles blue dress and the red silk stockings.” I just want you to grow up decent, Chile. I don’t want you runnin’ to Willer Grove with them boys It ain’t no place fo’ you in the night time an’ you know it. You’s mammy’s baby girl. She wants you to be, good, honey, and follow Jesus, that’s all.”

Meanwhile, we have Tempy who turns her back on her working-class Black origins because she sees her past as a burden and the white middle class as a way and a ticket to success unlike her mother. To Tempy success is not about hard work or heritage, it is about leaving the past and step further into a world where whiteness is a measure of success. She has always believed that survival means transformation.

“Tempy thought, up to the level of white people dress like white people, talk like white people, think like white people.” (171)

“Tempy’s friends were all people of standing in the darker world doctors, school teachers, a dentist, a lawyer, a hairdresser. And she moved among these friends as importantly as Mrs. Barr-Grant had moved among a similar group in the white race.” (172)

“After her marriage she was even more ashamed of her family connections a little sister running wild, and another sister married for the sake of love.” (172)

As we have Jimboy who completely took a different way, he sees life not as a path to stability but as a journey of freedom. A restless travelling musician and labourer, he flies from place to place, to search for adventure and art rather than working and succeed. He reflects the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance, where Black artists and intellectuals sought to redefine success beyond economic survival.

“Jimboy was home. All the neighbourhood could hear his rich low baritone voice giving birth to the blues.” (33)

Hughes makes it clear that everyone sees the world differently. In the world of his characters, we come to see that identity is never something fixed or objective instead, it is deeply shaped by history, culture, and the personal challenges we face.

IV.3 Historical Analysis

Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter* serves as both a literary work and a historical document that offers a profound insight of the historical realities of the 20th century America. Throughout the story, Hughes portrays ordinary African American life focusing mainly on the impact of The Great Migration, racial segregation, and economic struggles left upon Black communities.

One of the main historical realities that we can find in the novel is the impacts of the Great Migration. “Colored men couldn’t get many jobs in Staton” (Hughes 22) Just as many African Americans left their homes in the rural South seeking for better opportunities in the North and Midwest, Jimboy the protagonist's father is seen in the novel constantly moving out from his hometown in search for a work and a stable position.

In addition to migration, the protagonist throughout the novel frequently faces injustice of racial discrimination particularly in education and employment. From a young age, he comes to understand his position as a Black individual making him different from white people and the racial discrimination he had to struggle with and the harsh situations he had to accept living just to survive.

Economic hardships like poverty and job instability shaped the lives and the experiences of Sandy's Family much like many Black families during that era. Jimboy's

difficulty finding a stable work reflect the economic struggles faced by black men and their exclusion from labor forcing them into hard and less paid jobs. Similarly, Annjee's financial situation pushed her leaving her son behind her seeking for a better job elsewhere that highlights the sacrifices Black parents had to make to survive their harsh realities.

IV. 4 Power

While history often records the power of those who rule, Hughes turns his attention to the power of those who endure. In *Not Without Laughter*, power is not just a force of domination and oppression, it is about who gets to dream, who is allowed to belong, and who must fight to be heard.

Power in this novel is seen in a way in which the characters negotiate, challenge and reshape it in their own way. As the story folds, we see Harriet, one of Sandy's aunts, challenges the societal norms and traditional way of living expected from women in her community choosing to create a career in singing blues, a genre often seen as a way of rebellion. She uses Art as a form of self-expression, a way to express her emotions, struggles, and desires. As women in her position were rarely encouraged to pursue such careers, she follows her passion, seeking her independence and proving that power can come from self-expression.

“You ain’t gwine a step this evening!” Hager shouted, “Don’t you hear me?”

“O, no,” said Harriett coolly in a tone that cut like knives. “You’re the one that says I’m not going__ *but I am!*”(32)

While Harriet finds power in self-expression, Tempy seeks it through social status and stability. Unlike her family, Tempy took a way out of her identity as a Black individual, refusing her community's cultural traditions seeking social mobility aligning with the white

middle class. She is a modern person who values education, proper speech, and a refined lifestyle. She believes that success comes from fitting into white society and that her roots as an African American remain a barrier to progress. Tempy's choices show how some individuals navigate power by conforming rather than resisting, she believes that assimilation will bring acceptance and opportunity.

“Several times the mistress had remarked to her maid: “You’re so smart and such a good, clean, quick little worker, Tempy, that it’s too bad you aren’t white.” And Tempy had taken this to heart, not as an insult, but as a compliment.” (170)

Just as not all power is about control and that sometimes it is about guidance and love, Aunt Hager does not seek power through rebellion and assimilation but instead she finds it in faith, kindness, and resilience. Through her use of her moral and religious beliefs, she becomes the heart and her grandson's world teaching him the values of hard work and dignity and shaping his identity through wisdom. Her position proves that power is not always oppressive but it can also be transformative.

“... honey, when you gets old, you knows they ain’t no sense in gettin’ mad an’ sourin’ yo’ soul with hatin’ peoples. White folks is white folks, an’ colored folks is colored, an’ neither one of’em is bad as t’ other make out. For mighty nigh seventy years I been knowin’ both of’em, an’ I ain’t never had no room in ma heart to hate neither white nor colored. When you start hatin’ people, you gets uglier that they is_ an’ I ain’t never had to time for ugliness, ‘cause that’s where de devil comes in__ in ugliness” (126)

V. The Socio-Historical Representation of Racism and Segregation in *Not Without Laughter*:

Through the experiences and struggles of the character Sandy Rogers and his family, Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter* offers a deep sight on the harsh realities of the early 20th Century America; an unequal state where education, work, and identity are all defined by race.

“He wondered sometimes whether if he washed and washed his face and hands, he would ever be white. Someone has told him once that blackness was only skin-deep” (Hughes 122)

This passage from the novel shows how Sandy Rogers alongside with others grows up in a society that portrays Whiteness as superior while Blackness is associated with inferiority. The idea that "blackness was only skin-deep" suggests a false hope that if he could just wash away his skin color, he might be accepted or treated better.

As for Black Americans education is seen as a beacon of hope, the novel breaks this hope revealing how systemic racism in schools, lack of resources and limited access to higher education kept Black students to receive the same quality education as their white peers. “She just put us in the back because we’re niggers” (Hughes 89) In this passage, Sandy Rogers and other black friends face a situation in school where they are placed at the back of the classroom by their teacher while all the white ones were sitting in the front.

It is seen as an act of discrimination that reflects how racism and segregation is set in everyday situations even when it comes to institutions meant to provide education and self-growth. Being positioned at the back of the classroom symbolizes marginalization faced by Black students who were often treated as less deserving of a good quality education. This

experience impacts Sandy's perception of the environment he lives in; he realizes that no matter how intelligent or smart he is, only the color of his skin can determine how he is treated.

Racism and Segregation in *Not Without Laughter* is not only seen through education, but it also remains a lived experience that shapes the daily lives of the Black characters. Passages like "This party's for white kids" (139) and "I told you little darkies this wasn't your party" (139) clearly demonstrates the social exclusion that denies Black individuals having access to public spaces simply because of their race.

These situations shed light on how segregation is not only based on laws, but it is also seen in everyday interactions making colored people feel unwelcomed. The characters of this novel also face a certain kind of verbal abuse and racial slurs which is seen in "Aw, go on, you little clay-colored nigger, you look too much like mustard to my anyhow!" (81) and "Shut up, you impudent little black wench!" (56) These offensive words directly attack Black Individuals' identity especially children like Sandy and his black friends who are still forming their personality questioning their worth and sometimes even wondering if life would be easier if they were white.

Despite the demeaning words, racial inequality, and social exclusion, Sandy finds strength through the love and guidance of his family especially Hager who helped him in shaping his identity. She teaches him the importance of dignity, self-respect, and resilience to face all kind of racism. Through Sandy's journey, Hughes not only exposes the cruelty the racial world he lives in but also highlights the importance of self-acceptance and the fight for equality.

In this novel, Hughes tries to show how racial segregation in jobs keeps African Americans struggling in low-paying and unstable work while dreaming of a brighter future. This is shown through the experiences of different characters; Aunt Hager, Annjee, Jimboy, Harriett, and even Sandy.

“Hager’s home now was like a steam laundry. The kitchen was always hung with lines of clothes to dry, and in the late afternoon and evenings, the ironing board was spread from the table to a chair-back in the middle of the floor. All of the old customers were sending their clothes to Hager again during the winter. And since Annjee was sick, bringing no money into the house on Saturdays, the old woman had even taken an extra washing to do.” (Hughes 94)

Throughout the story black women work tirelessly to support their family, for instance, we have Aunt Hager who believes in hard work and perseverance, but her job as a washerwoman barely provides enough to support her family. The real weight of the struggling of Aunt Hager is not just in her work, but it is in the way it invades every part of her life. As we can see her home that is meant to be a place of rest, is instead transformed into a steamy, overcrowded workplace, which is always filled with damp clothes.

Similarly, Annjee spent her days scrubbing floors to white families. She may have hoped that her hard work would earn her respect and some human kindness, but the reality was cold, she was just as a tool and a nameless servant of her white employers. She received no gratitude, only orders, no smiles, only silence or sharp commands. Her presence was expected, her voice ignored, and her exhaustion was never noticed. Day after day, she served white families who treated her with the same cold distance.

“Annjee,” the mistress said sharply, “I wish you wouldn’t put quite so much onion in your sauce for the steak. I’ve mentioned it to you several times before, and you know very well we don’t like it.”

“And do please be careful that our drinking water is cold before meals are served. . You were certainly careless tonight. You must think more about what you are doing, Annjee.” (Hughes 46)

This scene reveals not only the harsh reality that Annjee faces every day at work, but also how it affects even children because after what happened Sandy was very angry. He heard his lovely mother answering with “Yes m’am”(46) and that was all without doing anything to save her or to defend her, which later on helped him to understand many things.

In a world where the color of one’s skin determines the weight of one’s job and the worth of one’s worth, it was not only women who carried the heavy burden of racism and unfair treatment in work, however men like Jimboy and Sandy struggled every day. They worked hard in difficult jobs, often for little pay and with no respect, simply because they were black.

“It was Sandy’s duty to clean these spittoons. Every evening that winter after school he came in the back door of the hotel, put his books in the closet where he kept his brooms and cleaning rags.” (Hughes 148)

“at the hotel Sandy’s hours on duty were long, and his legs and back ached with weariness from standing straight in one spot all the time, opening and closing the bronze door of the elevator” (Hughes 209)

These two passages show how sandy work tirelessly for long hours to survive but also we have some other passages that show that even if he was mistreated during these exhausted hours of work, he always does it with love.

“Then took the spittoons, emptied their slimy contents into the alley, rinsed them out, and polished them until they shone as brightly as if they were made of gold. Except for the stench of emptying them, Sandy rather liked the job.”
(148)

Even though he poured his heart into his work, he gave his best in every task, but no matter how well he worked, he was still treated unfairly because of his race. In this world even perfection couldn't protect you and save you from discrimination as it is shown here .

“Sandy finished polishing the shoes and put the cloths inside his wooden box and stood up waiting for his pay, but the speaker did not notice the colored boy until he had finished his tale and laughed heartily with the other men. Then he looked at Sandy. “Say, little coon, let's see you hit a step for the boys! . . . Down where I live, folks, all our niggers can dance! . . . Come on, boy, snap it up!” (153)

The command of this white man was not just offensive, it was a reminder of how racism turns people into objects, with just few words, he succeeded to hurt Sandy and to strip away his dignity. He treated him like a joke as if Sandy's worth was only to serve him and his own entertainment.

VI. Navigating Identity: Historic Forces in Sandy's Path to Understanding and Maturity:

VI.1 Understanding

Hughes' *Not Without Laughter* embarks us in Sandy's journey from boyhood to adolescence and maturity. Yet before he matures, Sandy learns to understand making sense of the world he lives in, a world full of contradictions and injustices. His evolving awareness was far from being instant, it was slowly shaped by the observations he made and the experiences he endures which in a way formed his identity.

One of the most powerful indirect lessons Sandy learns is about race and identity. It starts when Sandy's awareness hits mainly on how Black people are treated differently understanding the harsh reality of being a "Black" in America. From a very young age, he notices how Black families, like his own, often live in poverty and do not have the same rights and respect as white people.

For instance, when he goes into town and sees that its main parts are "for white folks only," and always referring to Black individuals as "niggers", "blacky", or "colored" he realizes and become aware of the unequal world he lives in. He starts to understand that his race affects how people treat or see him even when he has done nothing wrong.

Far from the world outside, Sandy also learns a lot from his family at home, especially from his grandmother who is very religious and believes that being a good polite person is the best way to live and to prove who he really is. She believes that "If you live right, the Lord will make a way" and from this she guides Sandy to go to church, work hard, and show respect even in the non-equal environment they live in.

While his grandmother played a significant role in shaping his early values, a range of other influences, including his Aunt Harriet, also helped in his understanding. She is a young and rebellious woman who does not always follow the rules and navigating her own path far from religion and the expectations of the society around her. Just like most Black people: she wants freedom. She sings in clubs and does not believe that suffering quietly will ever make life better.

“Two big colored boys in red uniforms where patting time, while another girl sat on a box, her back towards the peeping youngsters staring at from under the edge of the tent . As the girl who was dancing whirled about, Sandy saw that it was Harriett.” (74)

As Sandy grows watching the arguments between Hager and Harriet he feels confused at first, but later he begins to understand that both women are trying to do what they believe is right. Through his family, he learns that people can have different values and still care deeply about their ones and it does not change who they really are. He watched how everyone lived and what they expected from him but deep down, he did not want to be like them. Instead, he wanted to be himself building a life of his own

“Not like Jimboy,” Sandy countered against himself, “Not like like my father, always wanting to go somewhere. I’d get as tired of travelling all the time, as i do of running this elevator up and down, day after day. . . . I’m more like Harriett___ not wanting to do something for myself, by myself. . . . Free. . . . I want a house to live in, too, when i’m older—like Tempy’s and Mr. Siles’s. . . . But I wouldn’t want to be like Tempy’s friends___ or her husband, dull and colorless, putting all his money away in a white bank, ashamed of colored people.” (210)

Another main part of Sandy's path toward understanding is education and self-expression. Since childhood, he has shown a deep love for reading and learning, which remain for him a window through which he sees new possibilities, wanting to reach more than others expect from him. This is seen when he chooses to stay in school, even though many of his friends drop out to work and help their families. He believes that knowledge is the keyway out of poverty, hoping for a better future.

“At night he read, or sometimes went to the movies with Buster but Tempy kept him home as much as she could. Occasionally he saw Willie-Mae, who was keeping company with the second cook Wright's Hotel. And sometimes he saw Jimmy Lane, who was a bell-hop now and hang out with a sporty crowd in the rear room of Cudge Windsor's pool hall.”

At one point, Sandy begins to dream about writing and learning more about the world, both inside and outside the American borders. This is hinted at when he becomes curious about distant places and different ways of living, imagining a life beyond Stanton. Sure; Learning helps him see injustice more clearly, but it also gives him the tools to dream of change in the way that he does not only learn facts but also, he learns how to think, how to reflect, and how to understand life on a deeper level.

VI.2 Maturity:

The more Sandy sees and experiences, the less simple the world becomes. At the heart of this entire world, Sandy starts to ask harder questions, make conscious choices, and take emotional responsibility. This maturity does not come from age alone, but also from the way, he begins to think. Taking responsibility for oneself or others is a major sign of maturity and we can see that when Sandy starts to make choices about his future, his education and how to support his family.

After the death of Aunt Hager, he started to make choices about his future and up until that point, mature adults mostly influenced him, he observed their values, and learning from them all the time. "He'd stop going to the pool hall so much and stay home at night and study." (Hughes 193) Once Aunt Hager, his strongest moral guide, is gone, he started to think more independently about the person he wants to become and the kind of life he wants to lead.

He started to give more interests to his own studies and even offered a job to help finance them. "It was then that the boy began to read books other than the ones he had had to study for his lessons." (174). He was determined to continue, inspiring to achieve higher learning like his role models Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington.

"So he went through them all, looking at the pictures of prominent Negroes and reading about racial activities all over the country, and about racial wrongs in the South. In every issue he found, too, stirring and beautifully written editorials about the frustrated of black race, and hidden beauties in the Negro soul. A man called Du Bois wrote them". (175)

Sandy's engagement with literature far beyond his years shows his intellectual maturity. He used it not just for knowledge, but also for understanding the struggles around him. Rather than being satisfied with surface-level education, Sandy is drawn to the emotional and philosophical depths of what he reads. Sometimes, it is in the quiet turning of pages that a boy begins to become a man. "Thus Sandy spent much of his first year with Tempy deep in novels too mature for a fourteen-year-old boy. But Tempy was very proud of her studious young nephew."(176)

The books he read became mirrors and windows; mirrors that reflected his own struggles, and windows that opened onto worlds of possibility and challenge. As Sandy looked through those windows, he began to see life not just as it was, but as it could be. He begins to think about marriage not as a romantic and a childish dream, but as a serious life decision. He wondered what it means to marry, what kind of women he would choose, and whether love alone is enough in a world where survival is difficult for a Black man.

“But how could you marry early when you had no money and no home to which to take a wife, Sandy wondered. And who were evil companions. Neither Aunt Hager nor Annjee had ever said anything to Sandy about love in its bodily sense; Jimboy had gone away too soon to talk with him; and Tempy and her husband were too proper to discuss such subjects.” (187)

Thinking about marriage was one thing, but living through disappointment gave Sandy the wisdom that dreams alone can never teach. For Sandy before he could understand what it meant to marry, he learned what is meant to hurt. His experience with Pansetta, filled with manipulation and betrayal, forces him to confront the complexity of romantic relationships. At first her beauty and attention excite him which is something very normal for someone on the edge of adulthood. However, this excitement quickly turns confusing and painful. Pansetta’s kindness, sweet words and smiles turns into games, leaving Sandy lost and hurt. “The hotel boys had money, and once or twice he saw her talking with Jimmy Lane.” (194)

This experience is not just about rejection; it is his first encounter with emotional vulnerability. And in that vulnerability, something shifts. Instead of reacting with anger or

falling into self-pity, Sandy begins to reflect. He has not followed the orders of anyone even his Aunt Tempy who had always been there to guide and advise him.

“The next day after school he walked nearly home with Pansetta as usual, although he was still thinking of what Tempy had said, but he hadn’t decided to obey his aunt yet.” (193)

For the first time, Sandy begins to trust his own judgment over the voices that once guided him. His growing maturity is revealed when he begins to sense that his relationship with Pansetta is not what he first imagines. Rather than continuing to chase after her, he quietly pulls back just as any mature man does. His realization that this relationship is not the kind of love or attention that will help him grow shows his deeper emotional awareness.

“During the sunny spring days that follow, Sandy did not walk home with her any more after school. Having to go to work earlier was the excuse he gave, but at first Pansetta seemed worried and puzzles.” (194)

After the emotional disappointment, he does not let the experience define him. Instead, he accepted and continued on his path. This quiet, internal personality without drama or complaint shows the emotional growth far beyond his age. He chooses to let go and focus on becoming the kind of man he wants to be.

“Maybe he could go to Chicago next summer if he began to save his money now. He wanted to see the big city, where the buildings were like towers, the trains ran overhead, and the lake was like a sea.” (193)

The breakup does not break him; instead, it motivates him to seek something meaningful. Chicago, then, becomes a symbol of maturity and self-determination. He realizes that the world he has known with its expectations and disappointments are too small for the person he wants to become. By thinking seriously about leaving into the unknown, Sandy shows that he is not only dreaming of a better life, but also preparing to act on those dreams to come true.

“At first she didn’t know him among the stream of people coming from the train. Perhaps, unconsciously, she was looking for the little boy she left in Stanton; but Sandy was taller than Annjee.” (202)

“He was looking out of windows at the blocks of dirty grey warehouses lining the streets through which they were passing. He hadn’t expected the great city to be monotonous and ugly like this and he was vaguely disappointed.” (202)

That heartbreak was only part of the story; other deeper reasons were also leading Sandy towards maturity. He begins to feel the weight of his family’s struggles, especially his mother’s sacrifices and hard work far away from home. “Dear Sandy: Have just come home from work and am very tired but thought I would write you this letter right now while I had time and wasn’t sleepy.” (198)

The letter from Annjee, offering Sandy a job was an invitation to step into adulthood and a moment in his journey toward maturity. Accepting it meant taking responsibility, not only for himself but also for his family. He wanted to help his mother who works tirelessly alone without her husband. He began to realize how hard she had worked for him, and for the first time, he wanted to ease that burden and share the weight she had carried alone for so

long. By doing so, he took the role of an active participant of his life, rather than a passive observer.

“Yet he knew that his mother was making very little money serving more or less as an apprentice in the hairdressing shop, trying to learn the trade. And of he quit work, how would he live?” (210)

At first, Sandy’s journey to Chicago was not a choice made for him, but a decision born out of necessity. It was a responsibility placed upon him to support his struggling mother. This marked the beginning of a life that was anything but easy; he worked long, exhausting hours in a hotel, and sacrificing his own comfort to contribute to his family’s survival “At the hotel Sandy’s hours on duty were long.” (209)

However, over time, his experiences in the city began to shape a deeper self-awareness. He realized that the path he was on, was good and noble, but it was not a life he could continue. His decision to quit his job and return to his studies was not simply an escapee from hardship; it was a sign of growth. ““I’ve got to get out of this,” Sandy thought. “It’s an awful job.”” (209)

““Yes! I can!” he said. “I’m going to study!” He thought about Booker Washington sleeping under the wooden pavements at Richmond because he had had no place to stay on is way to Hampton in search of an education he thought about Frederick Douglass a fugitive save, owning not even himself, and yet a student “ if they could study, I can, too!” when school opens, I’m going to quit this job Maybe I can get another one at night or in the late afternoon, but it doesn’t matter, I’m going back to my classes in September.”(210)

In choosing education over hardship, in thinking not only of his present duties but of the person he wished to become, Sandy was no longer a boy simply reacting to life, but a young man shaping his own path.

After all the loss, the silence, the long days of work, the loneliness, and the quiet strength he had to build within himself, Sandy did not grow older, he grew deeper and wiser. He became not only a major in age, but in soul, ready to carry the weight of his future.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have demonstrated that Langston Hughes' novel is a reflection of everything he went through. Moreover, we have examined the impacts of racial struggles on the characters particularly on its protagonist showing how it influenced his journey toward self-discovery and awareness. By applying the literary theory New Historicism, we have explored that this novel goes beyond just being a coming-of-age narrative but a powerful historical document that proves the greater impact it had on the African American community.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion:

Langston Hughes' literary work reads as a commitment to the burden of African American experiences as his major work *Not Without Laughter* revisits the traumatic moments in the black history and life during the Harlem Renaissance. He has voiced their struggles of racism, segregation, and identity desiring self-determination. His novel is not only a reflection of the past, but also a message of hope. It reminds us the importance of family, community and cultural pride. In this way, *Not Without Laughter* remains a powerful and lasting commemoration to the African American journey and spirit.

The present work has studied the personal growth of a young African American boy, Sandy, whose childhood journey becomes the lens through which the reader understands the struggles, values, and transformations of several generations. It has underlined how this character not only survives the weight of inherited hardships but also observes and learns from the lives of those around him as each represents a different response to the harsh reality they lived in. His story becomes a symbol of awareness and a hope for change

The first chapter is the foundation, and the second chapter brought life to it through concrete examples from the novel. Together, they helped us understand how Sandy Rogers' growth is not just personal; it speaks for a whole generation of African American youngsters navigating their identity, dignity and survival. It is a journey of people moving from silence toward self-worth, from survival toward freedom. In this way, our work confirms that Hughes' novel is not only a story of a boy, but a powerful symbol of transformation, cultural memory and quiet resistance.

“The dark does not destroy the light; it defines it. It’s our fear of the dark that casts our joy into shadows.”

-Brene Brown-

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Résumé

Cette thèse, intitulée « Trouver la lumière dans l'obscurité : le chemin de Sandy Rogers vers la maturité et la compréhension dans *Not Without Laughter* (1930) de Langston Hughes, analyse le personnage principal, Sandy, qui navigue entre les défis raciaux et sociaux de l'Amérique au début du XXe siècle. À travers le prisme de la théorie littéraire du Nouvel Historicisme, cet ouvrage explore les liens entre la littérature et son contexte historique. Il vise également à montrer comment Hughes construit un récit de croissance ancré dans les réalités de la race, de la classe sociale et de la famille. Ce travail analyse le parcours émouvant de Sandy vers la maturité et la compréhension, révélant comment il émerge des épreuves avec une force tranquille, façonné par les épreuves de son monde et la sagesse inébranlable de ceux qui l'ont élevé.

ملخص

هذه الأطروحة، بعنوان «العثور على النور في الظلام: طريق ساندي روجرز نحو النضج والفهم في رواية "ليس بدون (للكاتب لانغستون هيويز، تحليل الشخصية الرئيسية، ساندي، التي تنتقل بين التحديات العرقية والاجتماعية 1930 ضحك") في أمريكا في أوائل القرن العشرين. من خلال عدسة نظرية الأدب الجديدة التاريخية، يستكشف هذا العمل الروابط بين الأدب وسياقه التاريخي. يهدف أيضًا إلى إظهار كيف يبني هيويز سردًا للنمو متجذرًا في واقع العرق والطبقة الاجتماعية والعائلة. يحلل هذا العمل المسار المؤثر لساندي نحو النضج والفهم، كاشفًا كيف يخرج من المحن بقوة هائلة، مشكلًا. بتجارب عالمة وحكمة أولئك الذين ربوه

