

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Langston Hughes is one of the most famous African – American writers in the twentieth century. Most of his works are about dreams and struggles of black people in America against segregation; however, he is optimistic that someday his dream about liberty and equality for black people in America will come true (Dickinson 320). He is one among other black American writers who explores more on the real meaning of difficulty of a life compiled with happiness and sadness, joy and frustration, and he combines it with singing and dancing in the spirit of humanity (Waldron 1435). Therefore, his works are full of respect toward African culture and people who work, scheme, and fight against

oppression (Dickinson 320). By portraying the struggles, sorrows, victories, and joys in black people's daily life; Langston Hughes builds a special bond with black readers in America and abroad through his remarkable love on his people. After slavery was banned in America, black people still experience what is called discrimination or racial mistreatment by white people, and they tend to refer black people as uneducated and backward race because most of black people are illiterate and poor. Here, Langston Hughes believes that black people actually can change their life if they want to struggle and work hard to improve themselves, and it is not based on the color of skin. Therefore, he is sure that "being black is a matter of pride" (Dickinson 322). In other words, race does not determine one's success. If he or she works hard to achieve success, he or she will gain it. Based on his own belief, he becomes so enthusiastic to popularize black literature during Harlem Renaissance through his great works such as: poetry, short stories, and novels, while the other black writers still keep quiet (Gates Jr. and McKay 1251). Harlem Renaissance is the moment when African American literature reaches its peak. Many black people are interested to be artists or read journals such as: "*The Crisis* and *Opportunity*", and Langston Hughes uses this moment to raise numerous numbers of black artists to meet the influence of "white reviewers and publishers" and to speak out for their long oppressed race through their own works (Dickinson 325). His courage has made him one of the talented speakers for black people in America. He also gives inspiration for the young black artists to express their individuality and culture without fear or shame because he

believes that people who are really ready to work hard, forget the past, and face the future will gain the victory (Dickinson 323). The Harlem Renaissance movement brings happiness and great relief for black people since the renaissance is a rebirth or an opportunity for them to enjoy their own culture for the first time (Dickinson 325). Langston Hughes becomes the representative of all black writers through his ability and efficiency, and he is the most inventive writer in the history of African American literature (Gates Jr. and McKay 1254).

One of Langston Hughes' great achievements is his novel entitled Not Without Laughter in which he writes in 1930 and actually tells about his own childhood in Kansas (Gates Jr. and McKay 1253). In Not Without Laughter, Langston Hughes wants to show how suffering the life of black people under the segregation is. Discrimination makes black people lose their chance to improve themselves to be as equal as white people because black people always become the target of white abhorrence (Dickinson 329). In this novel, Langston Hughes also describes the difference between joyful life and serious life, which is at the end serious life through hard working and self-determination will get better achievement (Dickinson 328). At first, Langston Hughes brings his main male character, Sandy, into both lives. Sandy who lives in poor condition is trying to shape and reshape his personality to change his life to a better one through the influences from people of his surrounding and his own life experiences. Hughes believes that experiences give Sandy some precious teachings and understandings about life, and his personality is shaped and reshaped through those experiences.

In Not Without Laughter, Langston Hughes also shows the reality that black people themselves are divided into two groups, the upper class and the lower class. Black people from the upper class whose living are in good condition tend to act and behave like white people, and they even build relationship only with certain groups; therefore, they avoid having relationship with black people from the lower class because they consider that black people from the lower class are uneducated, unsophisticated, and impolite. On the other hand, black people from the lower class whose living are in poor condition hate the hypocrisy that is made by black people from the upper class. Black people from the lower class believe that even though they are uneducated, unsophisticated, and impolite, they still show their real and unrestricted African culture and feel proud of it (Dickinson 323).

Sandy is a young black boy whose personality is shaped and reshaped in order to achieve a better life. During Sandy's formative years, he notices that the reality and condition of his life are difficult to face. The unfair treatment toward his race, the gap in black people themselves between the upper class people and the lower class people, the missing figure of his father, less attention from his mother, and the poor condition of his family hinder him to progress and achieve a better life. Even though these hard conditions of his life create a pressure on him, he does not give up to struggle for his survival since he has a good dream that he wants to have a better life in the future. Through his everyday experiences and the influences of people from his surrounding such as: his female family, his

aunt Tempy, and his friends, his personality finally takes shape. He realizes that no matter how hard the pressure is, a better life can be achieved if he has self determination and if he works hard to overcome every obstacle that prevent him from obtaining his dream. During the shaping and reshaping of his personality, Sandy experiences many things that can make him happy, sad, joyful, and frustrated. Therefore, the thesis writer really wants to know about the shaping and reshaping of Sandy's personality that lead him to achieve a better life.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Born as an African – American descendent, Sandy realizes that the condition of his life is not fortunate. Sandy has to face the unequal treatment from the white people and the gap among the black people themselves between the upper class people and the lower class people. From this situation and the influences of people from his surrounding, his personality is shaped and reshaped in order to achieve a better life. Therefore, the writer is curious to analyze how the shaping and reshaping of Sandy's personality lead him to achieve a better life.

## **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The thesis writer wants to reveal the shaping and reshaping of Sandy's personality that lead him to achieve a better life through his characters and conflicts.

#### 1.4 Importance of the Study

Through this study, the writer finds out that Langston Hughes, through his novel Not Without Laughter, has shown that discrimination is not one thing for black people to regret or to surrender, but discrimination is a challenge for black people to fight and show to the white society even to the world that black people also have the capability to be educated people and to progress in their life. The writer also quotes from Bell Hooks' book Killing Rage that says "racism would cease to exist if everyone would just forget about race and just see each other as human beings who are the same" (151). In other words, the writer expects the readers to respect human rights and to admit equality between one to another without making any differences on the basis of his or her skin, race, or religion since men are created equal. The writer expects the readers to look at Langston Hughes' efforts and struggles to achieve a better life for him and his race at his novel Not Without Laughter and his other works. He uses his talent as a writer to describe how beautiful black race and its culture through all his works in order to encourage black people in America to show their own culture without fear and shame and to struggle against discrimination. The readers can take one good lesson that a person is able to overcome problems if he or she has self-determination and enthusiasm in his or her life. In the end, he or she will achieve a better life. From this study, the writer also hopes the readers to realize that education is important for someone's life in order to guarantee his or her own future. Besides, the readers will know that all stories in black literature seems to

be more alive and emotional compared to white literature because black writers write their stories based on their real oppressed life in their society, and black writers tend to show more human identities in their struggle against oppression, while white writers write their stories based on philosophy and dogmas.

### **1.5 Scopes and Limitation**

The scope of this study is about the shaping and reshaping of Sandy's personality that lead him to achieve a better life. The writer focuses her analysis on the main male character, Sandy. Then, the writer discusses his characters and conflicts. Other supportive characters, such as: Sandy's grandmother, father, mother, and aunts are also discussed since they give great influences on the shaping and reshaping of Sandy's personality in order to achieve a better life.

### **1.6 Methodology**

In doing this study, the writer does library research to collect data and information related to Langston Hughes also his novel Not Without Laughter. She collects the data about the author from bio-bibliography of American famous writers and finds some critics that support her thesis. Then, she finds some books that discuss about black people in America and their oppressed life, since she is going to reveal the racial problems faced by Sandy, and those racial problems are discrimination and class cruelty among black people that influence him in shaping

and reshaping his personality in order to achieve a better life. She also uses literary theories that are characterization and conflict to support her analysis. By using the theory of characterization, the writer can show how Sandy's personality is shaped and reshaped in order to achieve a better life through what he says, thinks, and does. By using the theory of conflict, the writer can show that Sandy finally can determine his future and can have self-motivation to achieve a better life after he experiences the conflict with the practice of discrimination, with other people, and with himself. By doing these methods, the thesis writer analyzes the thesis thoroughly.

### **1.7 Organization of the Study**

The thesis writer is going to make her thesis into five chapters. The first chapter is introduction that consists of background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, importance of the study, scope and limitation, methodology, and organization of the study. The second chapter is about the review of related literature that consists of two concepts about discrimination and class cruelty among black people in America that support her analysis. She also uses literary theory about characterization and conflict to support her analysis. In the third and fourth chapter, she is going to analyze the shaping and reshaping of Sandy's personality through his characters and conflicts. The last chapter that is the fifth chapter is conclusion about the shaping and reshaping of Sandy's personality to achieve a better life.