

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### I.1 Background.

Walter Whitman is an American poet and a son of Long Island. He gives significant contribution to American literature. Whitman **is a** true patriot whose **poems** sing of **the praises** of **The United States** of America and **the** cause of democracy. His decade was between 1855 and 1865, which was a period of transitional era. It was the time when no movements were evoked. The poet's love of his country grew from his faith that Americans **might** reach new worldly and spiritual heights although the country was at that time was being split out. Whitman had experienced poverty in his childhood, the countless odd jobs he had held, his work **as** a carpenter, printer, schoolmaster and **journalist**, made him great **as** a person. Whitman was "able to express American's Democratic ideas into his writing"

(Prentice-Hall Literature 412). In appearance he “is studiously different to gentility and to the requirements of routine literary convention” (Conn 211), since “Whitman wanted to put a person a human being, fully and truly on record” (211). He believes that “the art of art... is simplicity” (Doren 3) by using “the language of workplace and street” (Conn 213) or language of common people with simple vocabularies, and expressions. It is called “a language experiment” (213). He believes that a simple word is needed instead of long and confusing words. Though it is simple, it is enough to encounter his ideas and was able to “draw strength from a sympathy that extended to almost every creature and person he saw” (213) and then “his techniques is unforgettable summons to the manyness of America, taking poetry where it had not gone before, recording more of private experience and of country’s reality than anyone had yet done” (214). Whitman never lost a transcendental sense of unity of all things; all of life and experience, since reality itself, as a process, a ceaseless, continuing all-embracing flow. This is the principle that underlines and explains Whitman’s rejection of the traditional ideas. This rejection created a new form of so-called “the interest of free verse” (Prentice-Hall Literature 412). He teaches and encourages other modern poets to be free with their word. This poem and language of him triggered other reviewers’ attention. It is perhaps the reason that made him the symbol of American’s poet and also the writer’s reason for choosing him.

Whitman began working on Leaves of Grass in 1848. At first, many publishers rejected his collection since they assumed that his poems were rather unusual. Later on Leaves of Grass grows with its own emotional and intellectual development since it speaks nearly about everything and never lost a transcendental sense of the unity of all things. Whitman stated in Leaves of Grass that “poetry should be simple, not

complicated and it should be dedicated to **all** person in all classes” (West 18). The poet also describes *Leaves of Grass* as an effect of an autobiography, “an attempt from first to **last**, to put **a** Person **a** human being (myself, in the latter half of the nineteenth century in **America**) freely, fully and truly on record’ (Unger 331). The arrangement, which is chronological, might help to guide the reader to know the year of the edition. “In its pattern of growth and development, *Leaves of Grass* thus enact the notion of the poetic process to Whitman’s idea of ‘poetry’” (Hook 11). Therefore the writer chooses *Leaves of Grass* to be discussed.

“When Lilac **Last** in the Dooryard Bloom’d” originally appeared in a group of poems added to “Drum-Taps”, which was Whitman’s first collection of Civil War **poems**, published in May 1865, only a month after Lincoln’s assassination on **April** 14<sup>th</sup> 1865. This poem is also regarded **as** “one of Whitman’s greatest poems” (Perkins 967) which is inspired by that particular death-- that of President Lincoln-- should have “compelled from Whitman sonic form of elegiac poetic celebration **was** more or less inevitable” (Hook 13). Lincoln’s sudden death **had** shocked the nation as well as Whitman. Whitman had always been a devotee of Lincoln, whom he regarded **as an** archetype **of** the representative democratic man, He was also regarded **as** “a representative man, not an actual man” (West 25). In “When Lilac Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d, he was creating **a** symbol and modern character of hero in his **poem**. “His hero, unlike the hero of the past epics, discovers his heroic qualities *not* in superman characteristic **but** in selfhood common to every man” (Pearce 63). Lincoln **was** considered, **as** American hero not only for Whitman but **also** for **American** people **as** well since Lincoln was well known for **his** fought **against** slavery and his struggle for democracy. “The death of Lincoln provided the occasion and the

emergent grief of an entire nation” (Harcourt 581). The poem “talks about the poet’s overwhelming love, his grief and loss of the president” (Hook 17). Lincoln’s death on April 15<sup>th</sup> explains the choice of symbols: “Venus is a conspicuous evening star, the lilacs are in bloom in Brooklyn; and the spring of the hermit thrush. But these facts are not all unessential” (Fiedelson 188). Though Lincoln is never named in the poem- he is hardly essential. This is true since the poem itself conveys the broader idea of grief for the death of a great man on whom the destiny of a nation hangs. Furthermore, he used his hero to express his wishes, sadness toward death and his nation’s grief and perhaps it might lead to optimism

The reason for choosing optimism as the writer’s topic since the writer, at glance, sees the idea of death that needs optimism to conquer it. The idea of death, “is the central theme of life, a primary characteristic of this stage of the life-style” (Zaric 216), of course is divisible into partial death or losses or separations. In Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” the problem of death is not actually what Whitman wanted to be emphasized. By finding the language of mourning Whitman also found the answer to challenge death rather than to praise death. Lincoln died in April that is springtime. Whitman said, “the weather had been characterized by dramatic changes, and some night had been superbly beautiful; the western star, Venus, in the earlier hour of evening has never been so large, so clear; it seems as if it told something, as if it held rapport indulgent with humanity, with us Americans” (Hook 13). He and perhaps some of us believe that springtime may symbolize a rebirth of nature. It means a new beginning for everything a New Hope, a new generation, new idea and so on. In other words, Lincoln’s death is not something that remains in sorrow for American but something that keeps America go

on until today. Moreover the blooming of lilacs also did symbolize the beauty of springtime where animals start to build their *nests*; trees start to grow, flowers bloom; and birds sing. In conclusion, optimism is exists in the poem.

#### 1.2. Statement of the Problem.

This poem is about Lincoln's death, a great leader who was killed by his own citizen Whitman tried to give his optimism in the **poem**. The question is how the speaker reveals **his** optimism into the poem.

#### 1.3. Purpose of the Study.

The writer **wants** to prove that actually the poet gives optimistic ideas in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" by the use of symbolism; such **as** Lilacs, Blossoms, and other symbols. In addition, the writer **is going** to prove **his** optimism ideas through tone especially tone in describing the symbols itself and his attitude toward death.

#### 1.4. Importance of the Study.

The writer would **like** to invite the reader to understand the idea of optimism through Whitman poem "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd". Actually this poem **is** dedicated to the memories and the death of American's greatest character Abraham Lincoln. Whitman's idea about optimism **as** the writer also believes is important for people to continue their life especially for American people. Therefore, **the** writer would like to invite the reader to realize that death, especially the death of Lincoln as the major theme in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd", is not

something that hold American back to sadness but on the other way mound. The poem inspires or even triggers an optimistic idea, which is needed after death. The writer also would **like** to invite the students of Faculty of Letters to read poetry more especially Walt Whitman's. Whitman as American poet also plays important role for the development of American Literature. His poem is not hard to be understood. *HC tends to use common* and daily vocabulary *in his poem*. Therefore, the writer asks the readers to **read** his works. One more thing that the writer would like to emphasize **is** that poetry can give the readers deeper understanding of seeing things better. Because of that reason the writer encourages the readers of this proposal and the students of Faculty of Letters to read to see and to understand poetry more.

#### 1.5. Scope and Limitation.

This study of Walt Whitman's optimistic idea is reveal **in** "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" **I am** going to reveal his optimistic idea **about** death through two Literary terms, which are symbolism and tone.

#### 1.6. Methodology.

To be able to gather information, **data**, biography **as** many as possible, the writer docs sonic library research. For the primary data, the writer uses the book Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman. Further data and information are taken from some criticisms that could support my thesis.

**My** study of optimistic idea on Whitman's poem "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" will **use** literary approach. It deals with some elements that play important role to understand a literary works. Since it is a poem, I will use literary

approach, which **is** applicable for poem such as by using symbolism and tone. From that approach, the writer hopes to find the answer to the statement of the problem in the previous section

### 1.7 Organization

The writer organizes this thesis into four. **At** first the writer **starts** with the introduction, which contains the background **of** the study, the scope and limitation, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the scope and limitation, the methodology, and the organization of the study. The second part of this thesis is the **review** of related literature, which digs on some theories that are going to be used in analyzing the poem. The third part **is** about the writer's analysis based on the **applied theories** in her review of related literature and the scope of limitation. Finally the last but not the least is the writer's conclusion after the writer's analysis