

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

All of us need something to make us happy, like something funny, interesting and beautiful. All can be seen in the film, television, or literary works.

Literature is a kind of art. It is closely related to human life, because literature is the work of human being enjoyed by human being. In its widest sense, literature is anything written to express thought, feeling, and attitude toward life.

Jones Jr. (1968: 1) says as follows:

Literature is simply another way we can experience. The world around us through our imaginations, feeling, and thought. Literature, in its broadest sense, includes all written materials. It means that literature fall into history book, philosophical work, short stories, novels, poems, and plays.

Literature gives pleasure and information too. Furthermore, literature can be a picture of social life. Hence, reader will get the lesson of moral values or other values within literature. Furthermore, Hudson (1965: 10) says in the following:

Literature is a vital record of what seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It thus fundamentally and expression of life through the medium of language.

There are three genres of literature, namely poetry, prose and play or drama. All of them have their own beauty. Poetry also differs from prose in another obvious way, namely in its shape and form. The basic unit of structure for prose is the paragraph, which varies in length and loosely designed; while the unit structure for a poem is the line and strictly marked stanza, which gives the poem a definite pattern. Furthermore, in poetry there are some devices that make it interesting to enjoy. In play or drama there are actors who represent the characters.

Poetry is considered to be an elusive genre. It is hard to catch the meaning in any available words (Sansom, 1960: 8). J. Donald Adams says in the *New York Times Book Review* that poetry is "the greatest of the literary arts".

Poetry is an effective tool in helping man to convey his emotion in the moment of "confusion and despair" (Sansom, 1960: 8). It stirs him so deeply and maintains him to be aware of "beauty and the joy of being alive". Herbert Spencer in his essay *Origin and function of Music* strengthens this statement. He states that poetry is like a speech, which contains of the better expression of emotional ideas (Sansom, 1960: 6).

When someone has difficulties in understanding poetry, perhaps it is caused by his or her own perception in reading a certain poem. He or she may consider a poem as a kind of writing or a conversation in a different form. While actually poetry is not an interpretation of events, ideas, feelings in a form of logic, but it is a "state of experiencing", as Monaco and Briggs (1974: xxvii). A poem is

not merely an opinion. When people deal with a poem, it is not matter of our agreement or disagreement, but the "experience". They experience the poem, not only with beautiful words, something that they refer to the second. In other words, poetry does not concern only with beauty, philosophical thought or persuasion, but more with the experience (Perrine, 1956: 9). Also, since poetry concerns with the figurative language, it surely suggests more than it says; and because it deals with attitude, rather than with information, poetry gets an emotional strength and the intense awareness greater than that of most prose (Custer, 1964: 5). Another fact shows that poetry can make people see and understand the aspects of life, of the world, since poetry gives them the numerous interpretations and meanings.

Smith Berger and Cole (1931: 8) say as follows:

In other words, prose can tell us about the world, but poetry makes us feel and see and understand the world. Because of its very definiteness prose aims at an interpretation, at the meaning of the world; but poetry gives us numerous interpretations and meanings.

Based on those statements above, the writer inspires to choose poetry for his thesis; moreover the thesis writer also agrees that the language in poetry is extraordinary and creative. In this study, the thesis writer attempts to discuss one of the literary works of an American Poet. Walt Whitman, the decade between 1855 and 1865 was a period of transition era. In this era there were not any new movements developed. Almost all literary activities that occurred in that era were somehow related to the Civil War. People who directly or indirectly involved with

the Civil War wrote many of remarkable speeches, songs, letters, memoirs and journals. Nevertheless, the wartime period did produce one of “the most important influential poets” in the history of American Literature. While the country was being split away by war, Whitman was declaring the principles upon which country was founded by expressing American Democratic Ideals in his poetry (Prentice-Hall Literature, 1991: 412). According to Whitman (1970: 5), a poet’s spirit should respond to his country’s spirit and should be measured equally with people-especially the common people. Whitman extols individual identity and liberty in *Leaves of Grass*, the collection of his poetry-was unconventional in its subject matter and its apparent free form. This collection is considered to be the most influential volume of verse in American Literary History. Whitman, in writing his literary works, especially his poems in the *Leaves of Grass*, states that “poetry should be simple, not complicated, and it should be dedicated to all persons in all classes”. Meanwhile West (1968: 18) says in the following:

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was a slender volume, composed of only a few poems and a preface. The preface stated its author’s belief that poetry should be simple, not complicated; that it should be dedicated to all persons and all classes; and most of all, that American art should be a new art, a direct imitation of the new life that America represented.

No wonder that he wrote his poems in the simple way like ordinary speech so that everybody from every class can easily understand them, as Hook (1983: 12) says in the following:

This is fundamental principle that underlies and explains Whitman rejection of the traditional form and structures of nineteenth-century poetry; such forms and structures are at odds with the notion of poetry as process; they impose rigidity and completeness upon the reality which is in fact constantly unfolding.

According to the *American Experience Book* by Prentice-Hall Literature (1991: 412), the new type of poetry is created by Whitman, and it is a type of poetry in which traditional poetic forms are excluded in the interest of free verse, as it is quoted below:

A number of notable speeches, songs, letters, memoirs, and journals were written by people who were directly or indirectly involved with the Civil War. At the same time, a new type of poetry was created by Walt Whitman a type of poetry in which traditional poetic forms were abandoned in favor of free verse.

Hart (1965: 919) says as follows:

He himself compared his poetry with the “liquid, billowy waves”, and some of its most distinctive features are the use of repetition, parallelism, rhetorical mannerisms, and the employment of order of words instead of the foot as unit of rhythm, to create forms later called free verse.

Whitman even compares his poetry with “the liquid, billowy waves”. The distinctive features that exist in his poem are the use of repetition, parallelism, rhetorical mannerisms and the employment of the phrase (Hart, 1965: 919). George Perkins and Barbara Perkins (1956: 897), says as follows: “symphonically, associating themes and melodies” with great freedom and suggestiveness. The diction, the liberal use figurative language and symbol, and the essentially

dramatic method are marked as belonging to the great tradition poetry. Concerning with this verse, Whitman teaches the modern poet to show their freedom to create something new, something that they cannot express before. He encourages them to release their freedom. Smith Berger and Cole (1931: 143) say as in the following: "poets to come, for example, he prophesies the free verse movement and vigorously states his optimistic attitude toward the new poetry". The simple form and language in Whitman's poem causes the existing of attention from reviewers. Included among the responses was a famous letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson, who praised Whitman for his brave thought and greeted him at the beginning of a great career (Luckett, 1982: 3064) says as follows:

When the first edition of the poems appeared, Whitman received little money but some attention from reviewers. Included among the responses was a famous letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson, who praised Whitman for his brave thought and greeted him at the beginning of a great career.

In Walt Whitman's poetry, the typical thing that always appears is the use of nature in each poem. The bird-songs in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd", the poem that will be discussed in this thesis is considered as remarkable lyrics. The sea is the subject of many fine passages in his poems. The sea for Whitman represents "the womb of life" and its wet churning reflects the embrace of lovers. Moreover, the sea was the superior "hieroglyphic" of death, the final mystery of existence (Conn, 1989: 215).

One of Whitman's poems, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is chosen to be discussed in this thesis since the poem is regarded as one of Whitman's greatest poems. George Perkins and Barbara Perkins (1956: 967) say in the following:

"When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is one of four elegies entitled "Memories of President Lincoln", which were added, after Lincoln's death, to later issues of *Drum-Taps* (1865). It is generally regarded as one of Whitman's greatest poems.

The poem was inspired by Lincoln's assassination. Lincoln's sudden death obviously shocked the nation and made him in the people's mind a martyr to the cause of American nationalism in justice. In this poem, Whitman raised his grief over the immediate event to a universal statement about the significance of death in general. Inge (1987: 375) says as follows:

Lincoln's sudden death visibly shocked the nation and made him in the minds of the people a martyr to the cause of American nationalism and justice. As such he became the subject of a vast number of poems over the years by such writers as James Russell Lowell, Edward Arlington Robinson, Vachel Lindsay, and Carl Sanburg. But the most important poem occasioned by Lincoln's assassination was composed by Walt Whitman, who raised his grief over the immediate event to a universal statement about the significance of death in general.

Although the poem is an elegy, it is most surely a celebratory poem. In this case Whitman found an inclusive subject and an exact object for his "Mature Emotion", as West (1968: 25) says in the following:

“When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” is most obviously a celebratory poem, even though an elegy, and such poetry has not been in vogue in America since Whitman’s day. It is not a superior poem because it is celebratory, but because of its craftsmanship and of the rightness of its concept. In it Whitman discovered a subject that called forth his full energy and at the same time provided him with an object for his mature emotions both more inclusive and more exact than he had found before.

Furthermore Hook (1983: 12) says as follows:

“When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” originally appeared in a group of poems added to *Drum Taps*, which was Whitman’s first collection’s of civil war poems, published in May 1865, only a month after Lincoln’s assassination on 14 April 1865.

The poems provided an excitable climax for the theme of the entire volume in its adoration of the president, who-for Whitman, represents a bright example of “democratic comradeship and love for humanity”. George Perkins and Barbara Perkins (1956: 899) say as follows:

“When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” written for the second issue of this book, after the assassination of Lincoln that April, provided a passionate climax for the theme of the entire volume in its veneration of the president, who represented for Whitman a shining example of democratic comradeship and love for humanity.

The important thing is that, the poem, Lincoln’s death gives a new, more specific individual establishment for images and ideas to set in progress. Hook (1983: 15) says as follows: “What is dear is that, in “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” the death of Lincoln provides a new, more specific and individual basis for images and ideas that out of the cradle endlessly rocking “had already helped

to set in motion". Furthermore Whitman's experiences with war, with the death of Lincoln and his own suffering helped to shape his thinking. Conn (1989: 215), states that "for Whitman, death was the meeting place of ecstasy and annihilation, and it became in a hundred variations the major theme of his poetry.

The poem generally talks about the poet's over whelming love and his grief and loss for the president, Hook (1983: 17) says as follows:

The star, that is, which is Lincoln, and the lilacs, which is the poet's overpowering love for the president, for a time compel his mourning, his rendering his powerful sense of grief and loss, even though it already coexists with the reconciling, harmonizing knowledge which the song of the hermit thrush means.

Meanwhile, the *American Experience* book, explains that Whitman had developed a deep sense (Prentice-Hall Literature, 1991: 415). Beside that, Hook (1983: 13) says as follows: "Whitman had always been a devotee of Lincoln, whom he regarded as an archetype of a representative democratic man. Lincoln was well known as a brave man who fought for justice against the slavery. All nations respected his efforts in his struggle for democracy. In this thesis, the writer assumes that it will be interesting if Lincoln is described through a poet's view. Although it was clearly seen that subject of this poem is Lincoln, Lincoln was never named in the poem. He was considered as a representative man, not the actual man (West, 1968: 25). The entire plot of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom's" depends on the three principal symbols of star, lilacs, and

hermit thrush, which are constantly varied in application in the poem (Brown, 1953: 187).

In addition, the poet also uses imagery to show how the whole country, including nature and the people, is mourning as the coffin passes. There are three kinds of imagery used in this poem; imagery of smell, sight and hearing. According Hook (1983: 11) says in the following:

In these concluding stanzas Whitman is reluctantly relinquishing his hold on his poem, releasing its central images of lilac, star, and bird from the visionary process that has woven them together in mournful and rapturous demoralization of the death of President Lincoln.

Whitman was not only releasing those frequent images, but also keeping them. He made the star, the lilac and the hermit thrush to come the main points of the procession. The joining of the nature's aspects in showing his admiration to the president seems to dominate the poem.

1.2. The Reason of Choosing the Title

In this thesis, the writer chooses poetry as the subject of analysis. The reason for choosing poetry as the subject of analysis is due to the fact that poetry is a popular form of literature. By reading the poetry, the writer can improve and enrich his experience of life. In poetry, a criticism of life under the condition fixed such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of life will be found. So it is an interesting work to read and to analyze. To complete this study, the writer chooses a poem written by Walt Whitman with entitle, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom's". This poetry is characterized by depth of feeling, like all real lyric poets, he preferred to express his personal experience in his own form.

If we hear the word "death", the picture of sadness and fear always appear in our mind. More over if it deals with the death of someone that we admire or love, we might regret it and of course feel a deep grief in our hearts. Yet we realize that we have to accept the reality and move on with ours lives. Like Whitman, the death of President Lincoln, the person that he adores, is not something that should be followed by sadness. He indeed at first regrets the tragic event, but then he shows his feeling in a different way. He comes to a realization that death is not always followed by sadness. He expresses all his emotions by writing the poem dedicated to Lincoln. That is why the thesis writer is curious to

know Whitman's attitude towards death relating to the death of President Lincoln through the poem "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd".

1.3. The Problems of the Study

In order to avoid the discussion becomes broader, it is important to limit the problems and try to get detailed information about the Whitman's poem entitled When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd. Here the thesis writer has some problems, as follows:

1. What does the poem tell us?
2. What are the significant events in the poem?
3. What is the Whitman's attitude towards death of Lincoln?

1.4. The Aims of Study

Writing this thesis has several purposes. The thesis writer wants to discuss a poem written by Walt Whitman, in order:

1. To know the content of the poem.
2. To know the significant events in the poem.
3. To know the Whitman's attitude towards death of Lincoln.

1.5. The scope of the study

The scope of discussion in this thesis is Walt Whitman's poem entitled "When Lilacs last in the Dooryard Bloom'd". The writer limits the discussion by analyzing only the devices that Whitman uses in order to show his attitude towards death relating to the death of President Lincoln. The reason of this kind of limitation is in order that the writer is able to do the analysis of the main topic of this thesis.