

A STUDY OF SUICIDE IN WILLA CATHER'S MY ANTONIA

A MASTER'S PROJECT

BY

KHATTIYANEE KLINMALAI

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in English

at Srinakharinwirot University

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AN ABSTRACT

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Advisor Committee: Dr. Supaporn Yimwilai, Asst. Prof. Penny Diskaprakai,
Dr. Nitaya Suksaeresup.

This research aimed to investigate the causes of Mr. Shimerda's suicide and people's reactions toward his death in Willa Cather's My Antonia. To do so, the theories on suicidal causes related to mental illness such as depression, a loss of pleasure that a person has longed for or nostalgia, a loss of the beloved, and a sense of hopelessness were employed to analyze the text.

The results revealed that mental illness was the main cause of Mr. Shimerda's death. His suicide developed from depression, nostalgia, loss of beloved friends, and hopelessness. This was due to the emotional retreat, the instability of his mind, as well as severe life experience.

Mr. Shimerda's suicide brought shame and sadness to his family and friends. In Christians' viewpoint, taking one's own life was regarded as a great sin against God, so his body was not allowed to be buried in the Catholic graveyard.

การศึกษากาการฆ่าตัวตายในเรื่อง My Antonia ของวิลล่า แคเธอร์

บทคัดย่อ

โดย

ชัตติยานี กลิ่นมาลัย

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา

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งานวิจัยฉบับนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อค้นหาสาเหตุการฆ่าตัวตายของ Mr. Shimerda และปฏิกิริยาของบุคคลรอบข้างที่มีต่อการฆ่าตัวตายในเรื่อง *My Antonia* ของวิลล่า แคเธอร์ งานวิจัยครั้งนี้ ใช้ทฤษฎีสาเหตุการฆ่าตัวตายที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการเจ็บป่วยทางจิต ได้แก่ โรคซึมเศร้า การสูญเสียความสุขที่เคยได้พบในอดีตหรือการโหยหาอดีต การสูญเสียบุคคลอันเป็นที่รัก และความหมดหวังในชีวิต เพื่อมาวิเคราะห์เนื้อเรื่อง

ผลจากการวิจัยพบว่า การเจ็บป่วยทางจิตเป็นสาเหตุสำคัญในการฆ่าตัวตายของ Mr. Shimerda ซึ่งพัฒนาจากโรคซึมเศร้า การโหยหาอดีต การสูญเสียเพื่อนผู้เป็นที่รัก และความหมดหวังในชีวิต เนื่องจากเขามีสภาพอารมณ์ถดถอย จิตใจแปรปรวน ตลอดจนเผชิญกับปัญหาชีวิตที่เจ็บปวด

การฆ่าตัวตายของ Mr. Shimerda นำความละอาย และความโศกเศร้ามาสู่ครอบครัว ตลอดจนบุคคลรอบข้าง ในมุมมองคริสตศาสนิกชน การตายของเขาถือว่าเป็นบาปใหญ่ที่จะเมตตากรุณาของพระเจ้า ซึ่งศพของเขาจะไม่ได้รับอนุญาตให้ฝังในสุสานของชาวคริสต์ยืน

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Against all the injuries of life, I have the refuge of death” – Seneca.

“There is but one only truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.

Judging whether or not live is worth living amount to considering the fundamental question philosophy.”

(Joseph L. White, The Troubled Adolescent, 144)

The society today shapes people’s mind and changes their lives in the destructive ways. Since the period of the Industrial Revolution, there has been a lot of advanced technology such as cell phone, automobile, and computer. These things have brought the convenience to their lives. On the other side, technology causes changes in the industrial society: people are competitive, immoral, and selfish. Thus, there are many social problems that affect both people’s lives and mind. One of these problems which are crucial and controversial is suicide which brings sadness and blame to the family and people left behind the suicidal person.

Suicide is seen in daily events and reported that it is the most top-ranking cause of death which happens in many countries (Retterstol 2). Whether it is in the western or eastern parts of the world, the suicidal perspectives are different. According to Davis Sue, there have been certain factors which play important roles on suicide such as age, gender, race, occupation, religious belief and etc. For example, in the countries influenced by strong

religious taboos, the suicide will be low or hardly seen. This is because it brings punishment and shame to the family of those who committed suicide. This case is opposed to the countries in which people believe that suicide is a way to sacrifice and please God. Thus, suicidal rate is relatively high (367-369).

Suicide is assumed to be the final choice for desperated people who cannot find the solution for their life problems. It is a good way to end or to escape such problems rather than to survive for a shameful life. In some sense, suicide act is not a good 'way out'. It depends on the degree of seriousness of the problem and people's decision. Problems like getting bad grades or teachers' blaming are not as serious as parent's death or bankruptcy. Young people, for example, assume that the blames of bad grades bring a tremendous shame to them. So, they choose suicide to escape from people around them.

Suicide is presented in literature as a main or secondary theme in many literary works. The authors are most likely to show a result of people's failure or the values of certain belief. For example, the poem "Richard Cory," written by Edward Arlington Robinson, illustrates the value of money and judgment of people's appearance. According to Whittaker, people should not judge others by only the appearance, wealth, and happiness. Although Richard seems to be happy and wealthy, his inward feelings are very weak and deviant (524). So, he kills himself at the end of the poem. Kate Chopin's The Awakening also illustrates suicide resulted from psychological disorder and marriage failure. Thus, suicide is a way to escape life problems. Arthur Miller's Death of A Salesman illustrates another cause of suicide resulting from mental illness and business failure. In addition, Rebecca Harding Davis's Life in the Iron Mill reveals suicide resulting from the alienation of desperado who is in jail (Changprasert 36-41).

Similarly, Willa Cather's writing shows the suicide which results from mental illness and life problems. She is known among the critics and writers in the first half of the twentieth century as a writer who portrays the frontier life (Altieri 2-4). Since she was raised in Nebraska farm as a girl who experienced a harsh life, many of her works concentrate on life adventure as in O Pioneers! and The Song of the Lark. Similarly, her famous work, My Antonia, reflects many aspects of immigrant's harsh life in the prairie, their relationships as a kinship system with local people as well as their life problems with other people around them.

In My Antonia, Cather presents many characters who encounter the hardship in the frontier. A protagonist named Antonia is strong and enduring. In "Woman, Nature, and Identity", Wannaporn Petchdee studies the character of Antonia Shimerda in many aspects such as her identity and woman role comparing to men and her ambition and relationship to nature to conquer the hardship of life. The study reveals an important point that although Antonia is oppressed, with her strong ambitious mind and enduring qualities she can confront and overcome difficulties in life. She can have her own farm, a lovely family and a happy life at the end of the story. Likewise, the study of Carol Leavitt Aliteri in "Willa Cather's My Antonia: the Happiness and the Curse" emphasizes the struggle and triumph over difficulties in life at the frontier. Antonia's harmony to nature and adjustment to new environment reinforce her to cope with and overcome the harshness and wilderness of the frontier life. With those things in mind, she lives her life happily; at the same time, she is gradually mature and becomes the leader of the family. At the end, she is the only one who has a successful life whereas other people failed. This indeed shows her unique and flexible personalities.

Clearly, many studies concentrate on the success of Antonia confronting the problems and surviving in the harsh condition at the frontier. However, there are many characters who fail in the story. One of these characters is Mr. Shimerda, Antonia's father, who suffers from mental illness and severe life problems. Because of his old age and maladaptive behaviors, he cannot survive at the frontier as Antonia does. This is an interesting aspect that should be studied: the failure to cope with difficulties in life. Such failure can lead to suicide. Thus, the researcher would like to study the case of Mr. Shimerda's suicide resulting from mental illness.

The purpose of this study is to show how mental illness causes Mr. Shimerda to commit suicide. The importance of this study will entail the understanding of suicide resulting from mental illness and life problems at the frontier.

In terms of social merit, this study can apply to the current situations on suicide. It can be used to help prevent and protect people who have high risk to commit suicide such as students, children, laborers, and workers.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, the researcher aims to answer these following questions:

1. What are the causes of Mr. Shimerda's suicide?
2. What are people's reactions towards Mr. Shimerda's suicide?

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on analyzing the suicide of Mr. Shimerda in My Antonia.

Procedures of the Study

1. Studied the related literature.
 - 1.1 The background on suicide.
 - 1.2 Theories on suicidal causes.
 - 1.3 The religious perspectives.
 - 1.4 Research on suicide.
2. Analyzed My Antonia.
 - 2.1 The personality, appearance, and everyday life of Mr. Shimerda throughout the story.
 - 2.2 The important incidents and causes of Mr. Shimerda's suicide.
 - 2.3 The important incidents and causes related to mental illness.
 - 2.4 Mental illness related to suicide.
 - 2.5 The reactions that people have toward Mr. Shimerda's suicide.
3. Concluded and discussed the result.
4. Suggested interesting topics for further studies.

Significance of the Study

1. The study will help readers appreciate Willa Cather's works.
2. The study will help readers understand the causes and the risk factors of suicide.
3. The study can be a guideline for analyzing behaviors and emotion of a suicidal person.
4. The study can help readers better understand the suicidal situation in the society today so that proper precaution can be taken before the suicide is committed.

Definition of Terms

“Mental illness” is an unstable condition of human mind that causes a form of deviant behaviors. It arises when people’s behaviors, thoughts as well as feelings are deviant from the social expectations and norms.

“Suicide” is an act of killing oneself by planning in advance and using the severe methods such as shooting, hanging, and drowning etc. to bring the sudden and fatal death. An aim of this fatal death is to escape from the serious life problem.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter is an overview of the related literature including background on suicide, theories on suicidal causes, religious perspectives as well as research on suicide.

Background on Suicide

The word 'suicide' was firstly used in the seventeenth century in England with the attempt to find an appropriate definition. Its meaning was compared to a word *felo de se* (murder of self) which referred to 'a self-destructive act by a mentally sound individual.' Suicide, on the contrary, was regarded as 'a self-destructive act by a mentally unsound individual.' However, the definition of suicide was changed in the mid of the nineteenth century. Many researchers studied suicide in terms of a mentally sound individual. They tended to find the causes of suicide related to psychological factors in various points such as insanity, rage, and passion. In the early twentieth century, the suicidal causes were studied in many aspects such as social factors, social and psychological approaches, and naturalistic approaches (Lettieri 14-16).

In the present day, the definition of suicide is different from the previous days. It is defined as an individual act aimed at ending life with severe methods such as shooting, drowning, and hanging etc. which cause the fatal and sudden death. It is based on the assumption that people cannot endure the serious experiences in life such as physical pain, incurable disease, depression, and financial problems. As a result, the suicide is a single

option for them to end such problems. Suicide has a pattern of behaviors starting from suicidal thoughts, suicidal messages, attempted suicide, and accomplished suicide (Rotterstol 4). In other words, suicide thoughts are the ideas about ending lives, which can be seen through the suicidal messages. These messages indeed related to suicidal behaviors or symptoms which can be observed. Attempted suicide is the situation that people try to kill themselves, but it merely causes injury, not death. Accomplished suicide, on the contrary, is the outcome that people achieve in killing themselves after they have planned and tried for several times.

Theories on Suicidal Causes

There are many research on the causes of suicide in the present day. Researchers generally study in two aspects; namely, psychological and social conditions. The psychological conditions involve important symptoms of mental illness and severe inner feelings of the suicidal person. The social conditions, however, relate to the environmental variables affecting the mind of suicidal person. It is considered that psychological factors greatly influence suicidal causes. This is because they can explain the mental and emotional state of human behavior.

Many suicidal causes are mainly related to mental illness. The most common of this illness is depression. It is a long-lasting sad mood that does not get better or cannot get rid of. It is the feeling of dispersion, loss, waste, as well as imprisonment in bitterness and isolation (Rowe 8). The symptoms of this illness can be seen from behaviors, emotion, as well as facial expressions. The most common symptoms are the feeling of desperate, the

withdrawal from social activities and family members, the loss of interest in hobbies and jobs, as well as the feeling of emptiness in lives. According to Kacharat, people who commit suicide will deal with the very depressed condition. These dilemmas may result from the loss of their beloved, the end of relationship, the problems of finding a new place to live, and financial problems etc. It is reported that the depression condition is directly related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that makes them feel very weak both physically and mentally (77-78). Finally, this can lead to suicide.

Depression can be found in all ages, but it is quite dangerous among elderly people. At this age, the emotional development of the elderly is limited and degraded, so their personality becomes very weak both physically and mentally. According to Smyer and Qualls, the personality disorder is assumed to play an important role on depression traits since it can forecast the stability of mental health (170). From this point, certain situations that greatly affect the elderly's mental health such as moving to a new place or the change of the way of life can put a big burden on the unstable-minded elderly. It is difficult for them to adapt themselves when they firstly move to a new place. If they cannot adapt themselves or cannot communicate with other people, they will keep themselves alone and feel very depressed and lonely (Caruso 1).

The second cause of suicide is a loss of pleasure or interests in activities that people previously enjoy or long for. This feeling is related to the immigration to a new place where people are not familiar with. People feel nostalgic, being lonely and longing for what they did in the past such as the childhood memory as well as the happy moments of life. The feeling of nostalgia can be observed through the personality and emotion. In terms of personality, nostalgic people normally do something very slowly since they do not have

enough encouragement or energy to do their jobs. In terms of emotion, they feel inactive, inattentive, and absent-minded in doing the activities. Most of their time will be mainly used in thinking about the past lives even though they are alone or interact with the others. This is because they normally spend their time alone, thinking about the past. They think that a new environment is not a place for them, so they are not interested in anything (Caruso 2).

The death of a beloved person can be a cause of suicide. The person can be the one who is important to suicidal people such as spouse, parents, children, and friends. The loss of the beloved can affect life and feeling of the close person (Birren 77). The feeling of losing can cause people feel melancholy, keeping themselves in a big moment of grief. Grief, however, produces the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors relating to the situations that cause distress. The ability to handle this undesired condition is important in which it depends on the mental stability and the degree of grief and pain. This makes the reactions of people different from one to another. In normal sense, they may only think about the activities and the moment they spend doing the activities together in the past. According to Michael Baskin-Jones, grief can make people very hard to concentrate on daily tasks or sometimes they may find their minds 'drifting to think about all things that have happened' (2). It will remind them all the time when they stay together. In either case, they may be shocked for a while, get mad, and finally become less intense within a few weeks. In some cases, there may have self-blame and self-injury (Rudinger 44).

Another cause of suicide is the feeling of hopelessness. According to Farren, hopelessness is the feeling of discouragement and despair in which people expect nothing, attempt little in something, or take an inappropriate action (25). In other words, hopeless people feel desperated toward something in their lives, thinking that it is worthless to go on

or to live on. These people may have difficulty in life in which they cannot find the solutions or any person to help. They may feel disappointed because of failing to meet the achievement or goals in their lives. As a result, the feeling of hopelessness is assumed to be a reinforced factor for people to commit suicide. This is true in case that whenever people feel deeply hopeless; people will see everything in life in a totally negative way and expect to get the worst outcome for his problems. Furthermore, hopelessness directly affects people's appearance and behavior; they feel feeble and think aimlessly (Suttitanakul 8). In serious cases, this can lead to a final decision in life or a dangerous and inappropriate action such as suicide.

As discussed above, the causes of suicide are mainly related to mental illness including depression, feeling of nostalgia, the loss of the beloved, and the feeling of hopelessness. Therefore, the researcher proposes to study suicide in Cather's My Antonia. The researcher would like to argue that Mr. Shimerda's suicide is caused by the mental illness.

Religious Perspectives on Suicide

Suicide is prohibited in many religions. In Hinduism, the suicide is forbidden and sanctioned by the religious people, especially in India. However, the practice such as starving or fasting to death pioneered by Mahatama Grandhi is common in India today. In Buddhism, the suicide is considered as an unacceptable behavior since it breaks the Buddhist's teaching. It is said that human must endure the sufferings in life and does not destroy their own lives. In Islam, it is a great sin if people kill themselves no matter which methods they use. It is

reported that suicidal people will not receive the smell of the heaven after the rebirth, and they will be punished in hell forever by the same methods they use. (Retterstol 10-13).

In Christianity's perspective, a suicidal person will be accused of a betrayal to God as well as an outsider among Christianity. The Bible says that suicide is wrong. Whether a suicidal person is Roman Catholic or Protestants, this action is highly considered as an offense against God's creation and property since He creates man. Our lives belong to God and thus only God can give and take them (Pojman 78).

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which* is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”

(John Drury, The New Testament: The Authorized or King James Version, Corinthians 6:19-20, 273)

The souls of the violators will be unhappy and will be punished in the hell forever. It is the unforgivable sin in which the body of the suicidal person will not be allowed to be buried in the sacred graveyard and will not be treated by priests as consecrated as it should be (Phipps 2).

In this study, the researcher will apply the Christianity's perspective to analyze the reactions of Christian people toward Mr. Shimerda's suicide in My Antonia.

Research on Suicide

There are studies about suicide in various aspects and perspectives.

In “Case Study of Suicide Attempted Persons in Wang Lung Mai Village, Hang Dong Sub-District, Hod District, Chiang Mai Province,” Nuttawut Jaichomcheun studies the factors that have an influence on eight people who attempted to commit suicide from January 1998 to December 1999. The research findings reveal that there are similar factors that cause them to commit suicide; that is, loss of parents, broken families, lack of love and warmth, personality change, being depressive and sad, and lack of self-confidence. The minor factors of committing suicide are alcoholism, drug addiction, and HIV infection.

The study of Monthira Loetphanit in “A Study of Variables Related to Suicide Attempts in Patients Admitted to Government Hospitals in the Central Region,” shows different aspects from the study of Nuttawut Jaichomcheun. Her study focuses on the variables related to suicide attempts such as personal variables, family variables, and surrounding variables. The results show personal variables are very crucial; it appears that adult males who are uneducated and have lower income have higher risk than adult women. Other personal variables are problems in marriage, work, relationship to other people, physical illness, and finance.

In “Stress Coping Styles and Social Support of Suicide Attempters,” Maturin Kamwongpin examines the stress, coping style and social supports of suicide attempters. In this study, Kamwongpin surveys the suicide attempters in Sanpathong and Sansai Hospital in Chiang Mai. The results of the study conclude that the patients have lower rate of stress, and their coping strategies are the use of emotive and confrontive style. Also, the patients seek social support from their relatives or family members, parents, spouse, and monk or priest.

In “Sources of Stress and Ways of Coping among Suicide Attempters,” Prathum Sukme examines the sources of stress and how suicide attempters use the coping strategies to

overcome it. Sukme points out that there are many sources of stress such as environment, finance, personal and social factors, and family. In the study, Sukme finds that three common coping strategies are used: self-control, escape-avoidance, and seeking social support.

In “Understanding Suicidality: Suicide Risk, Sex Differences and Views of Suicide Attempters,” Katarina Joanna Skogman investigates the suicide risk, sex difference and views of suicide attempters in Sweden. The results show that the risk factor of suicide is depression whereas men and women have similar trend to commit suicide. The causes or motives of suicide among men are economic problems and unemployment; women’s causes are loneliness, psychiatric, and interpersonal problems. However, their similar motive of committing suicide is to escape from pain, especially mental illness.

There are also studies on elderly suicide. In “Longer Life – Better Life? Studies on Mortality, Morbidity, and Quality of Life among Elderly People,” Katarina Wihelmsen studies different points of views on mortality, morbidity, and life quality among the elderly people as well as the factors leading to suicide of the elderly. The results reveal that the elderly consider good health, strong social relationship with people, and activities as the quality of their lives. Wehelsmson concludes that family disruption, severe physical and mental illness, loneliness, and depression are risk factors for the elderly to commit suicide, especially depression.

In “Physical Illness and Suicide among the Elderly,” Hude Quan examines the demographic factors, methods, places as well as leaving notes of the elderly who commit suicide. The findings conclude that males tend to use gun rather than women (43.8% vs. 3.7%) with the problems of physical illness and the loss of closed person. However, most of the male elderly live in the rural area and are less likely to leave notes. Finally, Quan

summarizes that elderly people normally have chronic disease such as heart disease, cancer as well as physical illness which later lead them to commit suicide.

However, there are a few studies on suicide of adolescents. For example, in “Adolescent Constructions of the Meaning of Suicide,” Jennifer Alloway studies the understanding and meaning of adolescents in terms of beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. The results reveal that the adolescent suicide often deals with self-pride such as lack of respect, identity development, acceptance and rejection of their friends, their inability to bear on severe situations.

In “Risk Factors Associated with Adolescent Suicide Attempting,” Elliot Steven Abramowitz studies the risk factors that lead to adolescent suicide by dividing the subjects into control and uncontrolled groups. Then, Abramowitz employs the predisposing (social) and intrapsychic (psychological) factors to study the two groups. The results of this study conclude that suicidal thoughts, depression, family and school problems, and low social and economic status are risk factors of committing suicide.

The studies discussed above focus on general views and various aspects of suicide such as the risk factors of adolescent and elderly suicide in terms of demographic, psychological, and surrounding factors. The most common risk factors of these two groups are depression, broken family, and poor relationship with other people.

In the area of literature, there are a few studies on suicide. In “Gender Politics and Isolation in Kate Chopin’s “The Awakening” and Tennessee Williams’ “A Streetcar Named Desire,” Rae Sally Vaughn compares the oppression of female protagonists who fight for their own freedom from the control of their husbands. Vaughn criticizes that two characters

use different ways to escape. Edna Pontellier chooses suicide to escape pain whereas Blanche Dubois comes to insanity.

However, the researcher did not find any studies on suicide as presented in Willa Cather's My Antonia. Therefore, the researcher would like to study about the suicide in this novel.

CHAPTER 3

AN ANALYSIS OF SUICIDE IN MY ANTONIA

In this chapter, the theories of suicide discussed in Chapter 2 are applied to analyze the suicide of Mr. Shimerda in Willa Cather's My Antonia. The researcher also employs Christians' perspectives to analyze people's reaction toward Mr. Shimerda's suicide.

The Causes of Suicide

Mr. Shimerda is the father of Antonia, a female protagonist in Willa Cather's My Antonia. He is an old man who suffers from mental and physical illness. He moves away from his homeland, Bohemia, to find a good opportunity for his children in America. Unfortunately, he cannot adapt himself and faces many serious life experiences in a new place. This finally leads him to commit suicide.

In this part, the researcher will analyze and discuss the suicidal causes of Mr. Shimerda based on the theories on suicidal causes mentioned in Chapter 2. There are four main causes: depression, a loss of pleasure or interest in activities, a loss of loved person, and a feeling of hopelessness.

Firstly and importantly, it is considered that an obvious cause of Mr. Shimerda's suicide is depression which he cannot get rid of. It is expressed through his manner which Jim describes when he first met Mr. Shimerda. He is an old man whose outward figure is very neat; at the same time, it is full of sadness and weakness. His body, eyes, and manner imply oldness and mystery.

He wore no hat, and his thick, iron-grey hair was brushed straight back from his forehead...and make him look like the old portraits I remembered in Virginia. He was tall and slender, and his thin shoulders stooped...His eyes were melancholy... His face looked like ashes--like something from which all the warmth and light had died out (18).

This shows Mr. Shimerda's weak character and oldness, which gradually becomes withdrawn and causes depression. According to Sivaporn Kacharat's "Depressed Man, Dangerous Life," depression can affect a person with weak personality both physically and mentally. In a serious case, it can lead that person to commit suicide. For Mr. Shimerda, depression makes his character very weak both physically and mentally. His appearance can tell that he has kept sad feeling for all his life. He is a 'fragile man' which can be seen from his figure 'tall, slender, and stooped.' In the same way, Smyer and Qualls' Aging and Mental Health summarizes that the personality disorder affects depression traits since it can tell the stability of mental health and coping strategies. Mr. Shimerda's appearance is very strange; he is a thin man who has stooped shoulders. This personality disorder makes him feel weak, uncomfortable, and difficult to move. The uncomfortable feeling bothers his mind, causing the mental instability and mental illness called depression. It is long lasting, and he cannot get rid of.

Mr. Shimerda's depression can be observed by Jim Burdens throughout the story. In The Experience of Depression, Dorothy Rowe states that depression is long lasting, and it can be seen through people's behavior, emotion, and facial expression. Whenever Mr. Shimerda calls his daughters --both Antonia and Yulka, Jim always describes Mr. Shimerda's feeling through his voice in that it is full of sadness and desperate as in "I heard a mournful

voice calling, An-tonia, An-tonia..." (20) and in "The old man held the lantern calling his daughters in a low and despairing voice, Yulka...Antonia!" (50). Next, Jim explains Mr. Shimerda's lifeless behavior when he comes to pick Antonia in the evening, "He was walking slowly, dragging his feet along as if he had no purpose" (28). Then, Jim feels very strange about Mr. Shimerda's behavior after he gives a gun to him as seen in "The old man's smile, as he listened, was so full of sadness, of pity for thing, that I never afterwards forgot it" (29). Mr. Shimerda's appearance and motion can show his inner feeling --the depression which has long been accumulated. It is expressed through his behavior, emotion, and facial expression.

However, there are many factors that cause Mr. Shimerda's depression. Most of which result from the change of the way of life, his introverted personality, problem of communication, as well as poverty.

According to Smyer and Qualls, the certain situation that affects the elderly mental health is the change of the way of life. Mr. Shimerda is a music player in his hometown, but in a new place he is not. He does not want to play it at all. This can be seen that most of his life is bounded with playing music; it is the only thing that makes people and himself feel very happy and lively in his hometown. When he moves to the new place where he cannot play music, he feels that his way of life totally changes. The important thing in life is missing; that is, the melody and the laughing faces of people. This event reminds him of the moment of happiness in the old country and consequently makes him feel very sad and lifeless. "His eyes were melancholy... His face looked like ashes--like something from which all the warmth and light had died out" (18). The word 'melancholy,' 'ashes,' and 'the warmth and light had died out' imply his unhappy life. The warmth and light here stand for

‘Mr. Shimerda’s happy life’ which is burnt out and leaves nothing but ‘ashes’ -- ‘sadness.’ In other words, his happy life gradually fades away, so he feels lifeless, calm, and hopeless.

The personality of Mr. Shimerda can also be a cause of depression. He is very weak, solitary, unsociable, and passive which correlates to the personality type of Carl Jung called “introversion.” This personality type has been cited and studied by many researchers. Based on Jung’s theory, Nicholas S. Dicaprio points out that a person who has this personality tends to be shy, quiet, calm, and pays attention only in himself rather than the environment outside (473-474). For Mr. Shimerda, his personality and oldness makes him look calm and quiet as well as strange. In this sense, it is difficult for Jim and other friends to understand Mr. Shimerda’s inner feeling. Furthermore, Mr. Shimerda feels very shy to talk to people when he meets them. He never smiles or says a word to Jim and Mrs. Burden when they come to visit his family at the first time. The Burdens try to make friend to the Shimerdas, but only Mrs. Shimerda and her children give a warm welcome to the Burdens. Mr. Shimerda just comes to see them.

As we approached the Shimerda’s dwelling,...a woman and a girl of fourteen ran out and looked up at us hopefully. A little girl trailed along behind them...The oldest son, Ambrosch, came out of the cave and stood besides his mother. At that moment the father came out of the hole in the bank...he looked calm, somehow, and skilled...Everything about his old man was in keeping with his dignified manner (17-18).

Another interesting aspect about the introverted personality is that a person will be unsociable. This personality type will attend his personal life, spending his time alone, and having his own personal activities. As a result, he will not interest in the world outside and

lack of companionship and friendship to the other people (Bischof 129). Like Mr. Shimerda, he normally spends his time alone, having his own world. He is very free from people and society. Without engaging with people, he has poor or no interpersonal relations with his family members as well as his friends. He hardly talks to Mrs. Shimerda and his children. Even worse, he never interacts with the Burdens and other friends even he is in the party or in other situations. In this sense, he feels very solitary, and this makes him lost and feels depressed.

In addition, Mr. Shimerda's depression can result from the problem that he cannot communicate with other people in the new society. According to Caruso, most immigrants have difficulties in adapting themselves to a new environment or making friends with people. For Mr. Shimerda, the fact that he cannot communicate with neighboring friends and people makes him feel very irritated, uncomfortable, and depressed. When he cannot speak their language, he cannot share ideas or tell his life problems to anybody. He never talks to anybody else except one situation in that he wants Jim to teach English to Antonia. This case at first brings difficulty for him because he cannot speak English. Therefore, he realizes the importance of English and tries to tell Jim to teach English to Antonia. At this point, he shows a book to Jim and tries to say, "Te-e-ach, te-e-ach my An-tonia!" (20). It seems that it is difficult for him to make Jim understand his purpose by using broken speech and a book to communicate. This indeed discourages him not want to talk to anybody since he thinks that it takes time to convey idea, and it is difficult to make listener understand the same point.

Not only can the communication be a cause of Mr. Shimerda's depression, but poverty is also another problem of Mr. Shimerda. Although he can earn money for the family in his hometown, in this new place he cannot. He does not even find a good job to earn

money. He has money to buy his own land and farm, but he does not know how to work on the farm.

... but the father was old and frail and knew nothing about farming. He was a weaver by trade; had been a skilled workman on tapestries and upholstery materials. He had brought his fiddle with him, which wouldn't be of much use here, though he used to pick up money by it at home (16).

This shows that being a musician in his hometown can earn money for his family. In this new country, the skill of playing music is worthless and cannot help him get money. The new place is very tough and full of hardship in life.

Another interesting point about poverty is that Mr. Shimerda cannot be a good leader of the family. In "Woman, Nature, and Identity," Wannaporn Petchdee mentions that because of his oldness and weakness, Mr. Shimerda cannot be a good leader of the family. He cannot decide what to do to his family as well as to solve the family problems such as finding a place to live. During the first months, his family has to live with Krajiek, their interpreter, in a small, poor, and dirty condition --'badger hole or dogout.' It is made of

...nothing but rough red hillocks, and draws with shelving banks and long roots hanging out where the earth had crumbled away...I saw a sort of shed, thatched with the same wine-coloured grass that grew everywhere. Near it tilted a shattered windmill frame, that had no wheel...I saw a door and window sunk deep in the draw-bank (16-17).

Although they live in very poor condition, they have to pay money and sell oxen and horses to Krajiek. In this point, Mr. Shimerda knows that Krajiek cheats them. However, Mr. Shimerda does nothing or does not even make agreement with Krajiek. He allows Krajiek to

take advantage of his family. This shows the sign of irresponsibility and lack of leadership of Mr. Shimerda. As a result, it makes him feel very shameful, guilty, and depressed.

Secondly, the cause of Mr. Shimerda's suicide is a loss of pleasure or interest in activities that once he enjoys or longs for. It is a nostalgic feeling which always happens among the immigrants. Mr. Shimerda, a Bohemia immigrant, feels much bounded to his native land where he enjoys playing music with his friends. This can be seen from Antonia's feeling toward his father, "My papa sad for old country. He not look good. He never make music anymore. At home he play violin all the time; for wedding and for dance." (59). It is seen that nostalgia causes Mr. Shimerda feel very lonely, thinking about the happiness of playing music for people. The sentence 'He never make music anymore' implies that he does not want to play music because he thinks of a moment of happiness, melody and laughing faces of his friends which he cannot find in a new place. As a result, he has never played music even though Antonia asks him to play, "When I beg for him, he said no." However, he also thinks about his old friends. "He cry for leave his old friends what make music with him. He love very much the man what play the long horn like this" (59). According to Antonia, the pleasure of Mr. Shimerda's childhood reminds him when he lives in the new country. Things are totally different. In his hometown, he can play music with his friend which is what he likes. However, in a new country, there is no such a thing. The feeling of playing music is different. As Kevin Caruso points out, nostalgic people normally feel very inattentive and absent-minded in doing something. Antonia describes "Some days he take his violin out of his box and make his fingers on the strings, like this" (59). Mr. Shimerda picks his violin, but he does not want to play it. He just puts the fingers on the string over and over;

this shows the sign of being absent-minded. Although he plays the music, his mind does not focus on it. He actually thinks about something else when his fingers touch on each string.

For Jim Burden, he believes that the homesickness leads Mr. Shimerda to commit suicide. This assumption takes place when he is in the sitting room, thinking about the Christmas day on which Mr. Shimerda comes to thank for the present. He can remember his face and manner which is very mysterious for him. Then, he moves to the kitchen and tries to memorize the story that Antonia tells him about his father's life in the old country. It is very happy and full of funny story in which he has never forgotten. "I went overall that Antonia had ever told me about his life before he came to this country; how he used to play the fiddle at wedding and dance...the great forest full of game" (66). Jim believes that all these stories always haunt Mr. Shimerda which he cannot escape. It disturbs his mind and makes him long for his hometown. He also believes that Mr. Shimerda's soul might rest in his house in the new country. Although his soul wants to go back to his hometown, it cannot find the way back home. It is very far and takes time to travel to his home. He might face and struggle over the severe weather which makes him feel tired.

The next cause of Mr. Shimerda's suicide is a loss of beloved friends. The loss of the beloved can make people feel melancholic and very painful. According to Birren's Cognition, Stress, and Aging, a loss of a beloved person can affect life of the close person. For Mr. Shimerda, in this new country, he has only two Russian friends named Peter and Pavel whom he can talk and trust. Having such friends can make him feel more lively and cheerful. He is very much happy, and Antonia never sees his father feels like this. She is very surprised when she tells the story of two Russian men to Mrs. Burden and Jim. She is very happy and excited when his father finds new friends in this country.

My papa find friends up north, with Russian mans. Last night he take me for see, and I can understand very much talk. Nice mans, Mrs. Burden. One is fat and all the time laugh. Everybody laugh. The first time I see my papa laugh in this kwan-tree. Oh, very nice! (23).

Mr. Shimerda is very happy to have Russian friends; they are very nice. He visits them very often and always takes Antonia with him. This causes a strong relationship between them. When he knows that Pavel is sick, he comes to see him and talks to him. He feels very concerned about Pavel. After he knows that Pavel is dead, he feels shocked and becomes very sad. Then, he learns that “Peter sold off everything, and left the country - went to be cook in a railway construction camp where gangs of Russians were employed” (40). This makes him even sadder.

However, the loss of two Russian friends affects Mr. Shimerda’s life a lot. In “About Death and Dying: Returning to Work After a Loss,” Michael Baskin-Jones suggests that the loss of the beloved can produce grief and makes people very hard to concentrate on daily tasks or sometimes they may find their minds thinking about all things that had happened. This idea is clearly seen in Mr. Shimerda’s case. He is very sad for losing his two friends and causes him very depressed. He then goes hunting and goes into “the empty log house and sit there, brooding. This cabin was his hermitage until the winter snows penned him in his cave” (41).

Clearly, Mr. Shimerda feels so much depressed that he exiles himself from the world outside. Whenever he goes out hunting, he always keeps himself in an ‘empty log house’ where he used to have his happy time with two Russian men. This shows that he does not concentrate on his job -- hunting because he spends most of his time sitting alone in the hut.

He feels very much depressed and desperate because he has no one to talk to and to understand him.

Lastly, a sense of hopelessness can also be a cause of suicide. This sign of hopelessness can be observed through people's appearance and manner. In Hope and Hopelessness: Critical clinical construct, Farren points out that the feeling of hopelessness makes people feel discouraged and despair; they expect nothing in life, so they do not try to do anything. For Mr. Shimerda, the fact that he cannot work to earn money makes him feel uncomfortable and meaningless. He feels that his life is worthless and empty when he has nothing to do except going out for hunting everyday.

For Mr. Shimerda, he feels that his life is useless and purposeless. He does not know who he has to live for. However, the death of Pavel and Peter's emigration make him so much depressed and melancholy, causing the feeling of loneliness and desperation. It gets worse and expresses through his outward manner. When he comes to thank for the Christmas present at Mrs. Burden's house, Jim describes his feeling toward Mr. Shimerda:

The old man had come to believe that peace and order had vanished from the earth, or existed only in the old world he had left so far behind. He said almost nothing, and smile rarely; but as he rested there we all had a sense of his utter content (57).

From this point, it can be seen that Mr. Shimerda feels very desperate in life as seen in "peace and order had vanished from the earth." He does not really enjoy the party, resting in the chair and looks weary. In other words, he acts like a sick person who looks very lonely and desperate. As Suttitanakul points out, a sense of hopelessness can be expressed through people's appearance and behavior. Mr. Shimerda's behavior implies his weakness and

worthlessness of his life. It seems that he feels very feeble, having less energy to do anything in his life as seen in “He said almost nothing, and smile rarely.” Also, Suttitanakul asserts that hopeless person will see thing negatively and always expect to get the worst outcome for the problem. In case of Mr. Shimerda, he thinks that everything in his life is absolutely worthless and desperate. He wants to find the solutions or the good ‘way out’ in his life such as problems of communication, poverty, nostalgia, and loneliness from the loss of his friends. He has no one to talk to, so he cannot tell anybody else and thinks aimlessly and endlessly. As a result, he sees that his life is meaningless and empty.

In addition, the sign of Mr Shimerda’s hopelessness can be observed through a weird manner or action. This is quite generally believed that a person who does a weird action somehow gives a warning sign that something will happen to that person in the future. For Mr. Shimerda, there is evidence that can tell about his action of ending life. A religious person like Mrs. Burden can feel that there might be something wrong about Mr. Shimerda. On the Christmas night when Mr. Shimerda goes to The Burdens’ house to thank for the presents, Jim describes that Mr. Shimerda kneels down to pray for God in front of the Christmas tree with his body is formed in the letter ‘S’. This is the sign to foreshadow Mr. Shimerda’s suicide since the letter ‘S’ stands for ‘suicide’ or another word ‘sin.’ However, when Mr. Shimerda goes back, Mr. Burden says “The prayers of all good people are good” (58). In this sense, it implies that Mr. Shimerda will receive what he wants according to his wish; no one knows what he wishes. In this point, Mr. Shimerda commits ‘suicide,’ so his action is regarded as ‘sin.’

Mr. Shimerda commits suicide on the day after he comes to thank the Burdens for the Christmas present. His family and neighboring friends including The Burdens, Jake, and Otto

Fuchs are very surprised since they do not know Mr. Shimerda's fatal decision. Nobody believes that he can do it because he always 'considerate and un-wishful to give trouble,' especially Otto Funch, the Burdens' servant.

He done everything natural. You know he was always sort of fixy, and fixy he was to the last. He shaved after dinner, and washed himself all over after the girl had done the dishes...Then, he put on a clean shirt and clean socks, and after he was dressed he kissed her and the little one and took his gun...He must have gone right down to the barn and done it then. He layed down on that bunk-bed, close to the ox stalls where he always slept (63).

From this passage, it can be seen that Mr. Shimerda is a very neat person. He always does things so naturally that nobody can notice what is going on in his mind. He gradually thinks about the plan to commit suicide by doing everything as usual such as shaving after dinner, getting dress and kissing her daughter good night. Then, he goes out with his gun. All these behaviors are Mr. Shimerda's routine. However, there is one point that nobody notice; it is going out at night with the gun. This is weird action because people hardly go hunting with a gun at night.

From the above discussion, it is believed that the causes of Mr. Shimerda's suicide result mainly from mental illness. He feels very depressed because he cannot communicate with other people. He feels nostalgic and longs for the previous happy life when he moves to the new country. He thinks about what he does in the past with his friends, playing music and dancing. Besides, the death of Pavel and Peter's emigration brings him a moment of grief as well as loneliness. Moreover, a sense of hopelessness makes his life meaningless and empty even when he comes to the Burdens' house to thank for Christmas present. It is believed all

these causes reinforce him to commit suicide. Because he thinks that he is old and useless, it is not good to live on. The good way to escape life problems is to die, but it should be easy and fatal. As a result, the suicide is an option which provides relief from such a suffering.

Old Mr. Shimerda is dead, and his family are in great distress... The gun was right beside him when Ambrosch found him...I seen bunches of hair and stuff sticking to the poles and straw along the roof. They was blown up there by gunshot, no question (64).

Christians' Perspectives toward Mr. Shimerda's Suicide

After the death of Mr. Shimerda, his family and friends came together to see his body. They were shocked for a while and then criticized about his death and the causes of his suicide.

Mr. Shimerda's suicide is very sudden for people who are familiar with him. His suicide brings sadness and distress to his family members and friends, the Burdens. They are worried about the future of Mr. Shimerda's children, especially Ambrosch and Antonia. They are young, and they are not mature enough to fight for their future. At the same time, it also brings shame to his family because his action is against God in the perspectives of Christianity.

Firstly, suicide is regarded as a great sin. According to Phipps, suicidal person will be accused of a betrayal and a violator of God's rule; his soul will be punished for a long time before God forgives his sin. In My Antonia, Jake, the servant of Jim's father, is very concerned about Mr. Shimerda's soul. He said to Ambrosch, "it will be a matter of years to

pray his soul out of Purgatory, and right now he is in torment” (67). From this, it can be seen that Mr. Shimerda’s soul is punished for many years even though there is a person praying God to forgive him. However, whoever commits suicide -- children, priest, and coroner, God does not forgive him/her.

Secondly, the body of suicidal person will receive less attention from the priest. It is very difficult to find a priest or coroner to manage the body because it is an unnatural way of death. However, Mrs. Burden is the first one who wants to see and manages Mr. Shimerda’s body, but Mr. Burden says she cannot do so because this is the duty of a coroner to examine the body and find the cause of death. In this sense, Mr. Shimerda’s body is left for several days to wait for the consideration of the coroner and the priest.

There is nothing we can do... The body cannot be touched until we get the coroner here from the Black Hawk, and that will be a matter of several, this weather (64).

This shows a sign of negligence of a religious person.

There is another interesting point about the duty of the priest. Normally, the priest will pray for God to forgive the sin of the dead. However, in the case of Mr. Shimerda, there is no priest coming to pray for him because he committed a great sin. In this point, Mr. Burdens is very concerned that the Shimerdas cannot find the priest to pray for the funeral. He then thinks that the priest is not much important in the funeral because the priest is only a medium between God and the dead. The priests pray only for the dead, not for the forgiveness of sin. On the Sentence Day, the dead person will come to see God without the help of priest.

We believed that Mr. Shimerda's soul will come to its Creator as well off without the priest. We believe that Christ is our only intercessor (69).

Thirdly, it is very difficult to find a place to bury the suicidal person. Since the suicide is the action against God's destiny and the betrayal, it is strongly believed that the body will not be allowed to be buried in any churchyard. In the case of Mr. Shimerda, it is Mrs. Burden who is very concerned about the place to bury his body. She asks for the Catholic graveyard in Black Hawk and also the Norwegian graveyard, but these two churches do not welcome his body because "a man who had killed himself could not be buried in a Catholic graveyard...and the Norwegian graveyard could not extend its hospitality to Mr. Shimerda" (72-73).

Lastly, because the body of the suicidal person is prohibited to be buried in the sacred graveyard, the relatives of suicidal person will have to find a place to bury the body of the deceased. At first, Mrs. Burden travels around to find the churchyard that welcome Mr. Shimerda's body, and she thinks that the American churchyard will agree with this. Unfortunately, she cannot find a churchyard for his body. In this sense, Mrs. Shimerda tells the Burdens that they will manage his body and bury him by themselves. They decide to bury him at the southwest corner of their own land which later becomes a cross-road. In this point, the Burdens feel very painful to see Mr. Shimerda buried at the cross-road as well as to see people walk over his body. This shows the lack of respect and insult and makes Mr. Burden very angry and uncomfortable. "I don't know whose wish should decide the matter, if not hers. But if she thinks she will live to see the people of this country ride over that old man's head, she is mistaken" (74).

Clearly, Mr. Shimerda's suicide is an action against God according to Christians'

viewpoint. It is regarded as a great sin and his soul is punished for many years in Purgatory. Also, he receives less attention from the coroner. His body is left for several days for the consideration of the coroner. Furthermore, there is no priest coming to pray for his funeral because he committed a great sin of taking his own life. As a result, his body will not be allowed to bury in any sacred churchyard. So, his body is buried at the southwest corner of his own land which later becomes a cross-road.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The study of Mr. Shimerda's suicide reveals the fact that mental illness plays a significant role on his death. His suicide develops from depression, homesickness, the loss of the beloved, and the sense of hopelessness. This is due to emotional retreat, instability of his mind, as well as severe life experience. Therefore, he chooses suicide as a way to escape sufferings and the pain in life.

Due to the prolonged sad mood that developed from all over his life, it makes him keep himself away from the society around him. He is an immigrant who rejects to assimilate to new place and to join people in the society; he is like a stranger who does not belong to the place where he lives. In this point, he has a poor relationship with other people, and he retreats to his own world. This makes him detach from the society.

With his weak personality and a poor leadership, he cannot be a good leader to the family. He cannot find a good job to earn money. He can buy a farm, but he does not know what to do on them. This makes him feel uncomfortable and meaningless. He feels that his life is worthless and empty. No money, no hope, and no future for the life in this country.

From his deep sense of hopelessness, Mr. Shimerda sees everything in life totally dark and dull. He does not know what and who to live for. He is captured by the feeling of oldness and mental illness and need to release from these sufferings. This is the reason that leads him to commit suicide.

His suicide causes sadness and shame to his family; at the same time, it brings deep concern to the future of Mr. Shimerda's children -- Ambrosch, Antonia, as well as Yulka. It is very sudden and people are not prepared for it, especially the Shimerdas who do not know how to arrange for the funeral and bury his body. It is the Burdens who take care of the funeral and try to find a place to bury him. Because his action is a great sin against God, no Catholic graveyard welcomes his body. Finally, he is buried at the crossroad at the southwest corner of his land.

However, in this research, the researcher discovered many worthy things. Firstly, the importance of language and communication is emphasized. Although Mr. Shimerda cannot speak and communicate, he encourages Antonia to learn English in order to survive and interact with people in the society. Next, the researcher is deeply impressed with the sincerity and kindness of the Burdens to the Shimerdas, especially when they help to arrange for Mr. Shimerda's funeral. Furthermore, they are very concerned about the future of Antonia, Ambrosch and Yulka. Finally, the sacrifice and devotion of Mr. Shimerda to his family is much appreciated. He neglects his own happiness, leaving his native land and friends behind to seek for a good opportunity for Ambrosch and Antonia to have a wealthy life and to find a good husband.

It can be said that the study of Mr. Shimerda's suicide correlates with other research previously studied. In "An Analysis of "Alienation" in Rebecca Harding Davis' Life in the Iron Mill, Khanthaporn Changprasert employs the theories of alienation such as Marxist's concept and psychological perspectives to analyze the main male character, Hugh Wolf. Wolf is an immigrant who is imprisoned and feels alienated from all aspects of social and personal life. He feels alienated from society and colleagues. When he is in the prison, he

feels very lonely and isolated. The world around him is dark and empty. He spends his life in jail with no hope and no purposes. Finally, the sense of hopelessness causes him to commit suicide. Similarly, Mr. Shimerda is a Bohemia immigrant who feels so much attached to his native land that he has a problem on adapting and living in a new country. Even worse, he cannot find a job to earn money for his family. Without money, his life becomes even more depressed. He pretends to go out hunting everyday, but he cannot catch anything. Instead, he always goes into the old house where he can find solace and thinks about his previous happy life. In this point, he thinks that there is no purpose, no hope, and no future in his life. Like Wolf, Mr. Shimerda chooses suicide to escape from his painful life.

Interestingly, this study also correlates with the research of Katarina Wihelmsen and Hude Quan mentioned in Chapter 2. The study of Whielmsen in “Longer Life – Better Life? Study on Mortality, Morbidity, and Quality of Life among Elderly People” focuses on the perspectives of mortality, morbidity, and quality of life of the elderly toward their lives as well as the main factors that lead the elderly to commit suicide. The findings show that old people give an importance on health, strong relationship with people, and activities. For the causes of suicide, he concludes that they are family disruption, severe physical and mental illness, loneliness, and depression. Likewise, the study of Hude Quan in “Physical Illness and Suicide among the Elderly” marks the outstanding picture of the elderly suicide. He points out that elderly men who live in rural area tend to commit suicide more than women by using gun. The causes of suicide are physical illness, loss of the beloved person, as well as chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer. Interestingly, these two studies focused on the causes of suicide in elderly people. The major and common causes are chronic physical and mental illness, loneliness, and depression. For Mr. Shimerda, these causes affect his life for a

long time and reinforce him with other causes such as nostalgia and a loss of the beloved. He thinks that his life experiences are very painful and unbearable, so he commits suicide. In addition, like the study of Hude Quan, Mr. Shimerda lives in the rural area and uses the gun to commit suicide.

It is important to note that nowadays more people at different age group commit suicide. According to Rathus, suicide is very common for people at age 24 – 44, but it is reported that men at age 25 – 34 have a high rate of committing suicide more than women. However, suicide rate among the elderly is very high. The age group is ranged from 55 – 85, but it is reported that the elderly at age 65 – 84 have a high rate to commit suicide. For the methods to kill themselves, it is reported that men are more likely to use severe methods such as gun and hang themselves than women (60% vs. 28%). For women, 44 % of which tend to use sleeping pills or poisons more than men (11%) (516-517).

In Thailand, for example, suicide is committed by people from all kinds of works with many different causes, and it is presented through mass media such as newspapers or television. One case was that there was a man jumping into the railway of BTS Sky train. This case was a shocking event and frightened a lot of people. In the Daily News, it was reported that

On August 12, 2006 at 08.00 a.m., a university student jumped into the railway of the sky train at Asoke Station in order to commit suicide. The police officers came to the place and went to see Mr. Teerasak Sitthidumrong with blood and the burnt over his body. Also, his clothes were torn by the high voltage from the railway. He was taken to Police Hospital with the coma. However, the police found that he left suicide notes writing to his brother

about desperation in life, “I have 700 Baht left in my pocket. I have to leave because I have nothing to do. I owe Mamm a debt of 2,000 Baht. Please pay for me. Tell my fiends that I have already gone; see you next world. Father and Mother, I feel very disappointed in myself!!”

However, the officer from the BTS sky train said that after BTS had operated for six years, there were 2 – 3 people per year trying to commit suicide.

However, the security guard could help them because BTS prepared the staff two times a year for the emergency. In this case, it was unpredictable (16).

Another interesting country that has a high rate of suicide is Japan, where suicide has alarmingly increased since 1998 and marks the top of 30,000 suicidal people per year (Goerzen 1). This is very frightening and doubtful why the suicide rate is high in such a well-developed country in many areas of advancement and technology. But, what factors cause people to commit suicide?

According to Matt Goezen and J Sean Curtin, the causes of suicide are mainly from economic factors such as endless bankruptcies, unemployment, accumulated debts, lower income and psychological factors such as personality disorder, despair, and depression. At this point, Japan is sometimes known as ‘a society of stress.’ This is due to the rising of suicide rates each year and the main cause is depression.

There are some cultural factors that lead to the rise of suicide in Japan such as a traditional ritual of self-sacrifice known as ‘hara-kiri,’ lack of family relations and social network as well as individual isolation.

Surprisingly, the suicide in the elderly is higher than the youth. As J Sean Curtin points out, it is found 11,529 old people committing suicide in 2003, and there is a common spot in Aokigahara wood at the Mount Fuji where old people normally hang themselves. This wood is known as 'suicide forest.' For the youth, there are average 250 young people committing suicide each year by imitating the celebrities' death called 'copycat.'

From this point, it can be seen that suicide is increasing in our today society. It can occur to any person whether young or old, rich or poor. This disease can infect anybody who has weakness. Thus, there should be a precaution for a close person to keep an eye on their people in order to protect them from this fatal fashion.

Suggestions for Further Studies

There are many interesting topics in My Antonia that should be studied further.

First, the Ideal of Womanhood is very interesting to study. Mrs. Burdens and Mrs. Shimerda have different characteristics. How does the Ideal of Womanhood influence their ideas and behaviors?

The importance of the family and a strong relationship between family members is an interesting topic. There should be a study to compare The Burdens to The Shimerdas, especially the marriage life and Christian practices in daily life.

Also, the social conditions and life of the immigrants in the nineteenth century should be discussed because there are many problems they have to face when they move to a new country.

Finally, there should be a discussion on the alienation in terms of the cause for people to commit suicide.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Willa Cather's Biography

1873	Born in Back Creek Valley, Virginia.
1880	Moved to Red Cloud where she learnt about the farming life and presented such a life in her best-known work, <u>My Antonia</u> .
1890	Attended the University of Nebraska and began to write the essays for <u>Nebraska State Journal</u> and <u>The Hesperian</u> , the student newspapers and criticism for <u>Lincoln Journal</u> .
1895	Graduated from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and then moved to Pittsburgh.
1896	Worked as editor for <u>Home Monthly</u> , a magazine in Pittsburgh, and <u>Pittsburgh Leader</u> , the local newspaper.
1901	Worked as a Latin and English teacher in Pittsburgh.
1903	Published <u>April Twilights</u> , her first poetry.
1905	Wrote and published <u>The Troll Garden</u> , her first short story.
1906	Moved to New York and worked as an editor for McClure's Magazine.
1912	Quit her job as an editor and began to write and publish her first novel, <u>Alexander's Bridge</u> .
1913	Published her novel, <u>O Pioneers!</u>
1915	Published her novel, <u>The Song of the Lark</u> .
1918	Published her well-known novel, <u>My Antonia</u> .

- 1921 Published the short story, Youth and the Bright Medusa.
- 1922 Published One of Ours and won for the Pulitzer Price for Fiction.
- 1923 Published A Lost Lady.
- 1925 Published The Professor's House.
- 1926 Published My Mortal Enemy.
- 1927 Published Death Comes for the Archbishop.
- 1930 Won the Howells Medal for Fiction.
- 1931 Published Shadows on the Rock and the short story, The Fear that Walks by Noonday.
- 1932 Published the short story, Obscure Destines.
- 1935 Published Lucy Gayheart.
- 1940 Published Sapphira and the Slave Girl.
- 1944 Awarded the gold medal for the National Institute of Arts and Letters.
- 1947 Died at the age of 74 in New York.
- 1956 Published The Old Beauty and Others.

VITA

VITA

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