

The idea of suicide has for long intrigued the human being and the theme has been recurrent in literature from the very beginning. One of the most quoted examples is seen in Hamlet's famous soliloquy "*To be or not to be*,

that is the question".

Poetry has also contemplated the theme of suicide as can be seen in the lyrics to the song "Suicide is Painless" which is the theme for the M*a*s*h* series.

"Suicide is Painless"

(words by Mike Altman - music by Johnny Mandel)

Through early morning fog I see
visions of the things to be
the pains that are withheld for me
I realize and I can see...

that suicide is painless
It brings on many changes
and I can take or leave it if I please.

The game of life is hard to play
I'm gonna lose it anyway
the losing card I'll someday lay
so this is all I have to say...

suicide is painless
it brings on many changes
and I can take or leave it if I please.

The sword of time will pierce our skins
it doesn't hurt when it begins
but as it works its way on in
the pain grows stronger... watch it grin, but...

suicide is painless
it brings on many changes
and I can take or leave it if I please.

A brave man once requested me
to answer questions that are key
is it to be or not to be
and I replied 'oh why ask me?'

Suicide is painless
it brings on many changes
and I can take or leave it if I please,
and you can do the same thing if you choose.

DISCUSSION:

1. How does the author see suicide?
2. What famous words are quoted in the lyrics?
3. What reasons does the author give in favor and/or against committing suicide?

Death, in general, has fascinated the human imagination - more so when inflicted prematurely by other men. The imminence of premature death to be inflicted upon inmates who are on the death row, has aroused the imagination of many writers who turn out novels, plays, poems and songs.

A good example can be seen in the song

below which was written and sung from the point of view of a man who murdered his best friend who was having an affair with his wife. While waiting for his execution, he was reflecting on Emil, the friend he killed, his father, Françoise, the wife, and Michelle, his daughter. It is sung in two versions:

SEASONS IN THE SUN

(written by Rod McKuen and Jacques Brel)

(Adieu Emile / Goodbye to you) my trusted friend,
We've known each other since we were 9 or 10,
Together we climbed hills and trees,
Learned of love and ABC's,
Skinned our hearts and skinned our knees.
(Adieu / Goodbye) my friend it's hard to die,
When all the birds are singing in the sky,
Now that spring is in the air,
Pretty girls are everywhere,
Think of me and I'll be there.

We had joy, we had fun,
We had seasons in the sun,
But the hills (we would / that we) climbed,
Were just seasons out of time,

(Adieu / Goodbye) papa, please pray for me,
I was the black sheep of the family,
You tried to teach me right from wrong,
Too much wine and too much song,
Wonder how I got along.
(Adieu / Goodbye), papa, it's hard to die,
When all the birds are singing in the sky,
Now that the spring is in the air,
Little children are everywhere,
When you see them I'll be there,

We had joy, we had fun,
We had seasons in the sun,
But the wine and the song,
Like the seasons have all gone,

Adieu Françoise, my trusted wife
Without you I would've had a lonely life
You cheated lots of times but then
I forgave you in the end
Though your lover was my friend
Adieu Françoise, it's hard to die
When all the birds are singing in the sky,
Now that the spring is in the air
With your lovers everywhere
Just be careful - I'll be there.

All our lives we had fun,
We had seasons in the sun,
But the stars we could reach
Were just the starfish on the beach.

Adieu Emile
Adieu Papa
Adieu Françoise...

Yeah....Yeah...
Goodbye Michelle my little one,
You gave me love and helped me find the sun,
And every time that I was down,
You would always come around,
Then get my feet back on the ground.
Goodbye Michelle it's hard to die,
When all the birds are singing in the sky,
Now that the spring is in the air,
With the flowers everywhere,
I wish that we could both be there,
We had joy, we had fun,
We had seasons in the sun,
But the hills that we climbed,
Were just season's out of time,
We had joy, we had fun,
We had seasons in the sun,
But the wine and the song,
Like the seasons have all gone,

DISCUSSION:

1. What life events are recalled in the song?
2. What is the main source of imagery used in the song?
3. How does the singer wish to be remembered after he is gone?
4. What flaws does the author see in himself?