Jonathon Holden

Garage Day

He had now and then considered
committing suicide.
"Garage Day" he called it, like "Garbage Day"
(which was each Wednesday).
Monoxide in the garage.
Did the impulse run in his family?
His mother's father had during the Depression.
And, possibly, his mother had in 1985
32 days after his father had croaked
from a heart attack brought on
by emphysema. *Croaked* — a pretty graphic
bit of slang, when you considered it.
He remembered Schopenhauer's remark, how
The thought of suicide had gotten him
through many a long night.
So when, at 50, he'd been diagnosed
with multiple sclerosis,
he took an inventory of his extant
losses: possible confinement
to a wheelchair, to his home.
Suicide. It was something to keep around
for a rainy day.

He had read "the good parts"
of Derek Paulson's in *Final Exit*:
how many of which pills to stock up on.
To end one's pain, "Self Deliverance" could be
a rational course of action.
But what kind of pain?
He thought of the words people used:

"Ache." "Burning pain." "Throbbing pain."
Etc. As for the other kind,
that was the main subject matter
of Dostoievski, of the existentialists.
It was "subjective."
He turned its etymology over in his mind
rationally (if it were possible to be
rational about it.) "Subjective":
a dual word: To be subjected
is to be thrown under something.
But to be the "subject" of a sentence
is to be . . . Here we go, he thought, around
again.

Suicide:
a fail-safe strategy for life
"Fail-safe." It guaranteed an end
to suffering. (Or possible suffering,
for he wasn't even in a wheelchair yet.)
Was there a moral issue here?
Obviously it would be a selfish act.
But he wouldn't be around to view the shame.
People could disparage him behind
his back, it wouldn't matter. Because
he wouldn't know.
And who would be damaged?
His wife. His son. His daughter.
Damaged how? His wife would inherit
their estate: three quarters of a million.
As for the kids, they would feel pain.
But damage? Just temporary.
He had raised them well.

He considered the suicides
of intellectuals. Socrates, with "hemlock."
Bruno Bettelheim with a plastic bag.
Berryman jumping off a bridge.
He considered the evening news —

was it 20,000 dead or missing
in Honduras from Hurricane Mitch?
He had landed once in Tegusigalpa.
He and his ex-wife were flying to Belize
for spring vacation. TACA airlines
would fly past Belize City first, then,
after landing in Tegusigalpa, turn
around. But the landing in Tegusigalpa
was terrifying.
You're headed straight at a mountain
but just as you are about to hit it
the plane goes around
its corner and you're bouncing along a muddy
goat-track of a runway.
How a kind of cheer went up
from the dozen American college boys
who were down there for
one purpose only: to get laid
south of the border. Imperialism.
It was a sad cliche that after Washington
the city which European diplomats
were most eager to visit was Tijuana.
Humans were bad, destroying the rain forest,
the planet. What had Schopenhauer
said? That suicide is the only truly
free act possible — free in that it
demonstrates freedom from
The Will of the Species.

D. considered some more, and then,
like many of the intellectuals he knew,
he considered the word "consider,"
its etymology: *To consider: To be with the stars,*
the sidereal. An image of the intellectual
worthy of Jonathan Swift.
And it struck him that the few times
he had been the happiest were
when he had *not* been "considering."

He remembered working on his house,
he'd written about it later, *slinging*
the framing hammer by the handle's end.
Such work was hard, his ex-wife
was having an affair, yet his life was
as full, then, as it has ever been.
An intellectual like Schopenhauer
made a philosophy of his hatred
of life and of women. He recalled
the definition of cyncism his father had taught him.
It was defined in terms of motive.
He thought of the cabin.
It still stood.
He himself was an intellectual, too.
In spite of that, he thought of his children.