MILTON AND OTHERS WALKING, SOARING, AND FALLING

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE FALL OF KINGS AND GIDDY MEN

I want to insert another general commentary on seventeenth-century changes in topography at this point as though an interlude between chapters, partly as preparation for Vaughan and Marvell, partly as a resumption of some of the paradigmatic and historical uses I made of Milton earlier. The broadest point again has to do with the subversion of courtly settings and their presumed poet-audience relations, which as I've said gather up a large repertory of rhetorical devices. Those settings are thus often assembled from precut descriptive pieces, like the elaborately decorative elements of Shepheardes Calender. Of the wide range of rhetorical resources they rely upon, none is more important than periphrasis, which ranges from short epithets and metaphors to extended semi-allelogories. By transcribing something into terms more elaborate than is strictly necessary, periphrasis sometimes realizes what might not show in a cleaner, simpler image—realizes, for instance, attitudes toward an object. At other times it is mostly adornment and a demonstration of poetic credentials before an audience of a certain training. When Spenser in Shepheardes Calender comes to November nearly at the end of his long task, the sun reflects Colin Clout's own discouragement over his poetic career. It is just such a figure as Sidney or Ralegh (Spenser's "shepherd of the ocean") would appreciate:
And Phoebus, weary of his yerely taske,
Ystabled hath his steedes in lowlye laye,
And taken up his ynne in Fishes haske.

This is an elaborate way of course to say merely that in the late season (not Pisces late, however), the sun runs low on the southern horizon. The implications of the figure extend almost to allegory and drag in a history of myths and a residue of writers who have similarly set the sun charioting about the sky as a conscious force fit for Homer’s or Virgil’s busy commerce of gods and heroes. Phoebus is also Apollo driving steeds of inspiration above Parnassus, but here the pastoral variant humbles the “lay.” The ambiguity of ystabled (which might as well have been ystalled) comes as a small bonus, since to be stabled is to be motionless when the poet would prefer a high-flying career. The modesty is evident also in the patronizing of small by great poets a few lines later: “The kindlye dewe drops from the higher tree, / And wets the little plants that lowly dwell” (31—32). In Spenser’s further paraphrases, the twelve months and seasons get equated with styles and poetic moods; pipes of course become poetry; shepherds, fellow poets; wasted sheep, neglected trade; muses, capacities and talents; tears, verses; Tityrus, Virgil; ripe fruits and harvest, successful poems; weeds and chaff, failed outings; and so on. Weary Phoebus thus inhabits a consistent landscape-translation by which the craft of writing is artfully lowered into pastureland.

Whether lowered or elevated, adornment is a courtly demonstration of decorum among both poets and social ranks. A similar formal showing of place is what Lear has in mind, for instance, in having his daughters deliver their set pieces to him. When such ceremonial relations break apart and even the king is exposed to the bare elements, he discovers the quite different speech of unaccommodated man, which means man not only without a hundred attendants to go hunting and stir up a daughter’s house but also without periphrastic avoidances of creaturely facts, men without polite fictions. In this respect King Lear is one of the most incisive of the renaissance rhetorical commentaries, and its targets I think are about equally the humanist expectations for eloquence and the assumption that nature—outdoors and human—will submit to demonstrations of status. In a moment I want to turn to the sense of clifftop falling that Shakespeare equates with the discovery of that stripped down truth.

Sixteenth-century humanist scholars were taught not so much to
decipher enigmatic places as to deploy illustrative figures and images in support of rhetorical strategies. Handbooks such as Richard Sherry's (1550) elaborated those figures for teachers of composition and divided them into varieties of *rei descriptio* such as *topothesia* ("A fayne description of a place" that does not exist), *topographia* (description of an actual place), *chronographia* ("When we do plainly describe any time for delectations sake, as the morning, the evening, midnight"), *pragmatographia* (description of a thing by a gathering together of all the circumstances belonging to it), and *prosopopoeia* or personification (giving animation to senseless things). Combined with enumeration, distribution, exclamation, apostrophe, narration, and the like, these schemes and tropes gave writers in both prose and verse the tools with which to generate the details of their topical maps, and they provided more or less conventional tones and accents.

Similar formulas appear in later poets as well, of course, but in abbreviated form and less prominently. Donne, as we have seen, avoids descriptive passages in favor of argument and dramatic monologues. Herbert views secular conventions and schemata with some distrust in the Jordan poems and in revisionary love poems, although he puts traditional Christian iconography and typology to frequent use. The relation of topography to readership is crucial in the sense that a remotely stationed poet such as Marvell in "The Garden" or Vaughan in "I walkt the other day" assumes the exclusion of any intermediary social or religious order between him and the truths he unveils. No one is addressed directly as the explicit subject of encomium and no one assumed implicitly as listener.

The reasons for this are no doubt personal in some cases, but they are also broadly social. Schoolmen, clergymen, government leaders, artists, and intellectuals in the seventeenth century loosened the controls that the court had earlier maintained as the audience of sophisticated literature, as in drama popular theater broadened the outlets of acting companies and playwrights. We have seen the nature of Jonson's group and Herbert's stationing of readers at the door of the temple; others appeal to different sets and exercise greater or lesser influence over them. Milton's fit few are expected to come prepared with Latin, Greek, and Hebrew traditions if they are to understand *Paradise Lost* without footnotes; sympathy for Puritan causes does no harm as well. Milton's training in rhetoric and composition was much like that of earlier young humanists, and as late as his Cambridge exercises he delivered rhetorical addresses that made considerable use of topics and fig-
ures from the handbooks. Yet the impression we get from the poems almost from the beginning is that he has an extraordinary concern for what the poet himself is doing in the landscape and very little for conventional periphrasis. Though he has ample precedents in the masque and in Spenserians for the conversion of place into tapestried symbol, the poet's assumed status as genius in attendance is what counts. The Nativity Ode establishes him as celebrant in a redefined landscape, as he marks Christ's transit between the majestic court and the stable. Sun, stars, sea, mountains, and shepherd haunts tune up for an altered harmony in tribute to the incarnate god.

In effect they learn a new placement, and the poet breaks free from the descriptive means that in classical poets kept nature in the hands of the old deities. As we have seen, even in the largely conventional tribute the Genius of the Woods offers the Dowager Derby in "Arcades," he claims attention himself as summoner of the shepherd throng. In "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," the poet observes from a distance, more or less a figure of solitude despite the rural and village society around him. That joy and melancholy convert his surroundings into sites for poetry makes his solicitings of them compatible with reverie and solitude, which grow stronger and more productive as he proceeds. Mirth has a greater range of festivities, which are attractive and blameless. The followers of Comus and the early cheerfulness and pastoral ease of the Cambridge shepherds of "Lycidas" will insist upon greater shortcomings in joy—as also in the long range will the Philistine festivities of Samson Agonistes. Here the Lydian airs that climax the poet's delights have an impressive gravity; and as critics have come to appreciate since Johnson, the two moods blend sufficiently to soften the contrast:

Lap me in soft Lydian Airs,
Married to immortal verse,
Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes, with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running;
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony.

Like a good deal about "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," Lydian music is conditioned by its history among poets; the speaker implicitly has the company of muses who have traveled from Greece through roundabout to reach him. But Milton's attention is more
on the internal experience and the melting voice than on any sharing of musical styles. The poet himself does not attempt to cultivate an audience and does not imagine doing so in the future. Unlike the Genius of "Arcades," he does not address a group or call others to celebrate his discoveries. No one is expected to overhear him except the fictive goddess of mirth herself. Melancholy raises objects seen from it to greater but also more lonely heights. The hermitage the poet thinks of seeking out is a place of esoteric study rather than monastic discipline or brotherly order. The speaker wishes not only to catalogue the gifts of melancholy but to resolve the contrast between choices, and to do so he needs to see how far each carries. He has no fear of falling and expresses no reservations about his mission, but we know in retrospect that a solitude presided over by mirth and melancholy can be deceptively peaceful. The poet of "When I Consider" and "Lycidas" discovers greater complexities in the calling.

When Milton rethinks mirth and melancholy in *Paradise Lost*, he gives them a quite different significance for sociality, the highest joy being the communal celebration of the angels, the gravest melancholy exile from the center. The solitary journey of Adam and Eve into the wilderness accompanied by providence blends the two. More importantly, however, the poem concerns communication as "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" do not and considers explicitly the matter of privacy, aloneness, and the lyric address of helpmates to each other and to objects and their creator. It also concerns temptations, debate, and the need for accommodated dialogue and, as part of its reflections on its own making, stages the generating and reception of language in all quarters. These concerns are too vast for me to do much more with them than list them, but we need to take note of their relations to the pertinent matters here: the keying of lyric address to the isolation that comes of either soaring or falling and the straining of connections to an audience from remote extremes. Isolation is often accompanied by a psychology of falling and temptations to fall, when the lone self finds itself without outside support and far from desirable conclusions. The lady in *Comus* is separated from her brothers before Comus assails her. Eve moves apart from Adam to be tempted; Samson's betrayal of his trust comes when he is separated from his people and momentarily forgetful of them; Satan's first move in the rebellion is to draw off to the north of heaven. Isolation is such a natural preliminary to temptation that we might overlook it but for Milton's emphasis upon its contribution to the outcome. Christ of course re-
verses the implications of solitude in *Paradise Regained* by turning desert privations into advantages. His withdrawal is preliminary to the establishing of a moral paradigm to be sent abroad later.

Prefallen Eden has a privacy more in keeping with that of happy wanderers who represent the other side of solitude that Vaughan and Traherne among others associate with Eden. Unlike Marvell's version of the lone garden dweller, Milton makes Adam and Eve quite sociable. They also have no difficulty with remoteness, since all creatures about and above them are linked in a single order. When Raphael descends to them, he joins the celestial to the earthly paradise effortlessly, the downward spiral of his flight forming an almost geometric diagram of accommodation:

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Down thither prone in flight
He speeds, and through the vast Ethereal Sky
Sails between worlds and worlds, with steady wing
Now on the polar winds, then with quick Fan
Winnows the buxom Air; till within soar
Of Tow'ring Eagles, to all the Fowls he seems
A Phoenix, gaz'd by all, as that sole Bird
When to enshrine his reliques in the Sun's
Bright Temple, to *Egyptian Thebes* he flies.
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The vertical dynamic of such renaissance paintings as Raphael's "Michael Vanquishing the Devil" and Luca Signorelli's last judgment foreshortens similar journeys and prepares a similar linkage.3

In the fallen world, however, the reception of messages is likely to be traumatic even when the news is good. The narrator's appeals for divine help link soaring and falling and connect both to the great spaces and moral ups and downs of the story itself:

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Descend from Heav'n *Urania*, by that name
If rightly thou art call'd, whose Voice divine
Following, above th' *Olympian* Hill I soar,
 Above the flight of *Pegasus* wing;
The meaning, not the Name I call: for thou
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
Of old *Olympus* dwell'st, but Heav'nly born,
Before the Hills appear'd, or Fountain flow'd,
Thou with Eternal Wisdom didst converse,
Wisdom thy Sister, and with her didst play
In presence of th' Almighty Father, pleas'd
With thy Celestial Song. Up led by thee
Into the Heav'n of Heav'n I have presum'd,
An Earthly Guest, and drawn Empyreal Air,
Thy temp'ring; with like safety guided down
Return me to my Native Element:
Lest from this flying Steed unrein'd, (as once
*Bellerophon*, though from a lower Clime)
Since the first fall rejects the Father's wisdom, the poet must recover that wisdom to conduct us through the remainder of the epic.

Likewise, Herbert's version of invocation in "Easter-wings" appeals to Christ's pattern of ascent to cure one wasted by sin, and in "Prayer I" either God must descend or men must rise, though it is their nature to fall. Similar steeply up and down prospects threaten the poet's equilibrium in "Temper I." However, the fear of falling does not necessarily carry doctrinal definitions of peril; it can be simply part of a pervasive sense of individual vulnerability and slippery footing wherever egocentrism crops up. For that universal sense, Jay Appleton's *The Experience of Landscape* and Bert O. States's reading of the precipice speech of Edgar to Gloucester in *King Lear* (4.6.11–26) suggest other ways to gauge the hazards of topography. Appleton bases relations between landscape and feeling on instincts for prospect, cover, and hazard; for States, steep places have a kinesthetic as well as a psychological impact. Both fit the portrayal in earlier renaissance texts of downfalls from high social position and subsequent exposure to the wild.

Edgar's clifftop prospect provides an index of the difference between those downfalls and the spiritual guilt of the metaphysicals and Milton. It warrants our scrutiny both as a remarkable inset lyric of place in its own right and as a contrast to the later giddiness. Edgar's description of the precipice for the blind Gloucester conjures a believable and detailed setting for Gloucester's proposed self-destruction:

*Edg.* Come on, sir; here's the place: stand still. How fearful
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles; half way down
Hangs one that gathers sampire, dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen that walk upon the beach
Appear like mice, and yond tall anchoring bark
Diminish'd to her cock, her cock a buoy
Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge,
That on th' unnumber'd idle pebble chafes,
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong.

(4.6.11–24)

Although States does not consider it, Edgar later gives us a matching view from the bottom upward:
Gloucester could not see if he did look up, but an absence of skylark song might seem to bear out Edgar's claim. More and more as he goes along, Edgar constructs his imaginary visions as a cure for Gloucester's self-destructive urge. The second passage, in fact, replaces the compulsive desire to fall with a defense against inhuman spaces and godless vacuums. It also reintroduces a mythic element reminiscent of the late comedies and their tragicomic falls and miraculous recoveries:

Edg. Upon the crown o' th' cliff what thing was that
Which parted from you?
Glou. A poor unfortunate beggar.
Edg. As I stood here below methought his eyes
Were too full moons; he had a thousand noses,
Horns welk'd and wav'd like the enridged sea:
It was some fiend; therefore, thou happy father,
Think that the clearest Gods, who made them honours
Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.

The spaces that Edgar conjures for the mind's eye now contain some of the wonders that genii loci perceive and interpret. He postulates a destiny to control one's will and gods to play with one's fate.

In States's reading of the first speech, the downward view arouses its vertigo by its sizing and spacing of items. Edgar conjures a world that is without "comforting gradations of distance," yet gives clarity to things that do not become vague with distance, like objects in a Breughel landscape that are "miniature within immensity." The same clarity reappears in the second speech, which, despite the distance that renders skylarks silent, finds small ridges on the horns of demons. In States's view the function of such optical devices is at least twofold: they demonstrate the powers of theatrical fantasy for an audience that (like Gloucester) literally sees nothing of the kind, and they raise a terrifying attraction of the mind's eye to things before the body can react with fear of injury: "In short, vertigo is not simple fear of falling; it is a peculiar collusion of the senses through which the body overextends itself and participates in space. It is primarily through the eye that we 'de-sever' the world, Heidegger says, and bring the world close, 'in the sense of procuring it.' Unfortunately,
there is a frightful countermovement involved when you are procuring the world from a verge; for there is a sense in which the eye, grasping an object in space, takes the body along with it."5

What Edgar’s visual prospect asks for in addition is some explanation as to why Shakespeare has these characters develop a father-son relationship of this sort at this particular moment. Edgar prepares for the verticality of both speeches upon first entering the heath, where being cast down is metaphorical for the loss of social position: “The lowest and most dejected thing of Fortune, / Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear” (4.1.2—3). Edgar refers of course to the wheel of fortune that makes one “dejected” in the Latin sense and assumes that from the bottom of the social precipice one can fall no further. Capitalizing upon that commonplace, he literalizes the metaphor in the prospect he conjures for his father, for whom he serves both as eyes and as moralizer. One must go through the experience of falling all the way to the bottom before “esperance” can cure despair (dejection in the English sense). When Edgar adds, “Welcome, then, / Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace” in the preparatory scene, he is already well on his way to the later vacuum that opens beneath his feet. It is true that “unsubstantial” means also a space before fallen beggars emptied of goods. Certainly it is not apportioned out to be possessed piece by piece in lyric blazon; it is a wilderness where all quarters are alike and one is blasted by every unobstructed wind. But if empty terrain has no impediments to break one’s fall, it also sets none against hope.

As if to underscore that point, Shakespeare has Gloucester enter, led by an old man, and has Edgar point to a specific example of the fallen state in one “poorly led” (4.1.10), soon to be better led by being misled. Before that, Gloucester turns his own trope on the paradoxes of slates wiped clean and ledgers emptied of assets: “Our means secure us, and our mere defects / Prove our commodities” (4.1.20—21), which is to say that our goods tempt us with false security and sense of possession, but our flaws then prove to be our good. The power behind this conversion of superfluity into disaster—and then, if we are lucky, of poverty into an asset—is in Gloucester’s view the capricious gods, to whom we are as flies to wanton boys. Edgar’s answer from the bottom of the imaginary precipice is that the clearest gods also bring about miracles that preserve us. Gloucester may thus become again a “happy” father, blessed by happenstance in his son and (in Edgar’s mythologized landscape of fiends and deities) by the tutelary powers of steep
places. Demons, too, of course, are residents of Edgar's dreamlike vision; they are wild, with eyes like moons and horns wrinkled like the sea seen from a high eminence; and they are cagey in enticing old men to pitch themselves down. The abyss one falls through now has overseeing presences that cannot be visualized as sapphire gatherers or diminutive larks can. We are led to guess at them by Edgar's fantasy, as from Lear's earlier talk of oaths, charms, and demonic curses. We might also remember the coincidence of Lear's wrath and the storm: the heath has uncanny collaborations with states of mind; spaces are permeated with spirits as well as crows winging "the midway air" no larger than beetles. Since some of these are full of malice in Gloucester's view, it may be tempting to them to nudge us over if we come too near the verge. And so the fear of falling has spiritual depths as well as bodily vertigo.

The experience of falling in that metaphoric sense involves the cancelling of identities based on status, retainers, and superfluity, and a reduction to something more essential that Cordelia and Lear take to be the bare forked animal. Gloucester realizes that phase of falling more clearly than Edgar, having gotten there quicker than most, thanks to Edmund. Edgar, too, however, instinctively poses as a beggar deprived of all comforts and social standing. And when the gods show themselves, they do so in providential bounty, as Gloucester seeks to right balances in rewarding his guide with a purse:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{that I am wretched} \\
&\text{Makes thee the happier: Heavens, deal so still!} \\
&\text{Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,} \\
&\text{That slaves your ordinance, that will not see} \\
&\text{Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly;} \\
&\text{So distribution should undo excess,} \\
&\text{And each man have enough.}
\end{align*}
\]

4.1.65–71

These sentiments are echoed by Lear and by the sense others have of overseeing but intangible deities who punish and sometimes reward. In the storm and in the curses of Lear, the gods suggest not an interpretable intent but mysteries that no one totally penetrates. Lear proposes to Cordelia that as they sit in prison they anatamize the cycles of power at court with the aloofness of sages:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{and we'll talk with them too,} \\
&\text{Who loses and who wins; who's in, and who's out;} \\
&\text{And take upon 's the mystery of things,} \\
&\text{As if we were Gods' spies: and we'll wear out,} \\
&\text{In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones} \\
&\text{That ebb and flow by th' moon.}
\end{align*}
\]

5.3.15–19
His emphasis is upon endurance and stability among a multitude of falls watched over but not prevented by the gods. Indeed, his implication seems to be that people damage themselves while spies keep count. In any case, as change governs all other things under the moon they will become immune to the common lunacy.

To return to Jay Appleton’s terms: *King Lear’s* exceptionally hazardous landscape is without landing places, coverts, or comfortable plateaus; it is precipitous and slippery. Edgar does not suggest horizontal vistas to go with his views up and down but focuses on objects either made diminutive by distance or mythologized by fantasy. In such a world, men are puny and fragile even if no monsters rise out of fogs, approaching bigger and bigger. If the gods do not break their falls by miracle, they are destroyed by their own momentum. Nor does Edgar provide order and arrangement of emblematic objects in the landscape for the mind to escape the eye’s dominance, as hieroglyphic worlds and medieval landscapes allow it to do. Close scrutiny does not produce security, only items scattered here and there to measure the gulf. The parallel to literal falling specifically with Lear is the loss of kingship. The gifts of the gods (if they exist) are position, power, social connection, the company of retinue. The giddiness Edgar raises in his listeners is not easily disconnected, then, from the contexts of hazardous rule of kings over subjects and of fathers over inheriting sons and daughters. It is I think specifically a courtly vertigo, similar to the one that Wyatt understood so well and that Sidney and Spenser identify in their versions of knights in and out of favor. To be cast out is to become not only socially isolated or debased but to be dejected. Shakespearean figures are not used to living on the margin and do not choose to do so, unless like Jaques they are chronically melancholy.

That courtly orientation becomes still more evident if we reconsider the vertigo of later figures for whom falling accompanies a spiritual precipitousness but not social ostracism. Also, pilgrims may have to go about and about to gain their eminences, but we know that mountains and their weather will be guiding signs and that the afterworld has a system of rewards, however postponed and misunderstood. Nothing essential depends on the social order for Vaughan, Milton, Traherne, or Herbert though blessings may be manifest through it. Mystery is associated with the comings and goings of providence; the rest of the pilgrim’s confusion can be attributed to his own deficiencies or corrupted faculties. He does not entertain the possibility of wanton and destructive gods who might push him off an eminence.
The least visualized and social, the most moralized fall, is perhaps Herbert's in "Giddiness," which concerns the dizzy inconsistency not of powerful men but simply of man. It is unlike the giddiness of King Lear in every important respect:

Oh, what a thing is man! how farre from power,  
From setled peace and rest!  
He is some twentie sev'rall men at least  
Each sev'rall houre.

Herbert's concern is not anyone's change of state or the way the gods torment the great. Man as a species brings whirlwind changes upon himself simply because his state is such and "His minde is so." The cure does not lie within himself, though the flaw does:

Lord, mend or rather make us: one creation  
Will not suffice our turn:  
Except thou make us dayly, we shall spurn  
Our own salvation.

Changeable and unstable, we require a daily upholding lest we spin away into so many roles that our segments of the world return to primal chaos. As Donne is also wont to point out, everything would collapse every minute were it not divinely upheld. Or again, Herbert's church monuments under the "blast of Death's incessant motion" will soon "bow, and kneel, and fall down flat/To kisse those heaps, which now they have in trust." Vaughan is typical in imagining the day of judgment as a vast undoing of the six days' creation and at the same time a final cure geared to human worth, which paradoxically requires at that point both a reiteration of the fall and a final great ascendancy. First comes the unmaking:

When thou shalt spend thy sacred store  
Of thunders in that beate  
And low as ere they lay before  
Thy six-dayes-buildings beate,

When like a scrowle the heavens shal passe  
And vanishe cleane away,  
And nought must stand of that vast space  
Which held up night, and day,6

—when these things are done it will be too late to ask "What shall I doe?" ("Day of Judgement"). But one can begin preparing early and can be assured of justice if not necessarily of mercy.

One of the things that happens both here and in Herbert's "Vertue," where the whole world turns to coal on that day, is the shrinking of real space to accommodate moral space and a sense of the ending as a resting place. In "Ascension-Hymn" the high heavens become the walks of those who have "gone into the world of light";
in “The World” eternity is reduced to a single vision moving “like a vast shadow.” It is with eyes closed that we are to imagine the heavens rolled up like a scroll, or eternity “like a great Ring of pure and endless light.” The removal of signs and stellar influences inscribed in the heavens may leave a vacuum, but it is not so immense as to defy crossing altogether. Vaughan expects a final court in their place, with records for human accountability. The day of judgment is thus preeminently a vertical day: a few ascend, many fall, but all are provided for. It is the interim that is cloudy and difficult. In Herbert’s “The Temper I” the initial vertical ambitions of the poet remain extensive and extract an impassioned appeal for an end to those interim ups and downs:

O, rack me not to such a vast extent;
Those distances belong to thee;
The world’s too little for thy tent,
A grave too big for me.

But flying with angels and falling with dust are ultimately one and the same, so that again the vast extent can be accommodated to human proportions if God so chooses.

The public fall that Shakespeare has in mind—the fall of kings and their counselors—is often supplemented in courtly poetry by the fall of lovers from grace. The two are comparable and sometimes closely linked. When Wyatt expresses his dread of falling and finds that it makes him “stand not fast,” he is thinking not merely of the slippery footing of the court but the treachery of personal relations when trust is violated. In adapting the language of courtship and substituting God for the sovereign beloved, Herbert is mindful of the need to rethink those personal as well as the greater aspects of falling. As helpless to command his own fate as the forlorn lover, he hopes to limit the duration of his vulnerability and see past it. In that respect Herbert is typical of the metaphysicals in intensifying the frailty of the lyric speaker and universalizing his fall beyond local causes.

A similar giddiness crops up in others, sometimes where we least expect it. Marvell, for instance, is so much a poet of containment that sharp ascents and fear of falling might seem alien to him. But he associates falling with kingship in the Horatian ode and “The First Anniversary,” in which Cromwell’s spill from his coach has effects much like those that accompany the fall of Shakespearean kings:

Thou Cromwell falling, not a stupid Tree,
Or Rock so savage, but it mourn’d for thee:
And all about was heard a Panique groan,
As if Natures self were overthrown.
It seem'd the Earth did from the Center tear;
It seem'd the Sun was fain out of the Sphere.

That other versions of soaring and falling are also crucial to Marvell testifies to the inevitability of verticality among seventeenth-century poets. Containment predominates even in "On a Drop of Dew" only to a point. Although the soul refuses to spread out or take in the life into which it has plunged, it eventually exchanges self-enclosure for ascent and dissolves into the sun. The separability of body and soul both intensifies the panic of the fall and makes possible a conclusion as soaring closure. The vertical thrust of "The Definition of Love" is also extraordinary, although the state of love is not finished in this case but suspended. Hope cannot fly to its high object, and no union can take place "Unless the giddy heaven fall" and the world "be cramp'd into a Planisphere." Marvell nonetheless ends with a definition that establishes the union of minds against movements up or down, in effect locking the mind and its high object together at a fixed distance.

Distortions of scale in "Upon Appleton House" suggest a similar giddiness but a different attitude toward it. The tendency of all things to fall is countered by the Fairfaxes, especially by Maria:

No new-born Comet such a Train
Draws through the Skie, nor Star new-slain.
For streight those giddy Rockets fail,
Which from the putrid Earth exhale,
But by her Flames, in Heaven try'd,
Nature is wholly vitrifi'd.

Marvell takes advantage of rising fires and falling stars to gauge Maria's function as a local power. She is to trains of things following her as comets to their tails—or actually superior to such and to falling stars as well, since the comparison is denied even as it is offered. All such things fail or yield only partial light; she is suffused through all nature. If nature is clarified when she finishes working upon it, it is because she has brought down from heaven a spirit tested there and not itself subject to obscurities and deformities. Visual spaces are compressed in Marvell's close-up of earth's giddy rockets, and yet the heavens remain distant.

The effect is similar to that of the world as chaos later, with its contrast between earth's vast ruin and the smaller domain of Maria:

All negligently overthrown,
Gulfs, Deserts, Precipices, Stone.
Your lesser World contains the same.
But in more decent Order tame.

The short list of scattered regions and vacancies in the earth’s surface is of places both extensively horizontal and vertical. (The “stone,” since it is singular, does not give us discrete pieces with which to fill empty spaces, merely a material to go with sands of the desert and to hold up cliffs.) The list conducts a quick photographic journey over a terrain much larger than the tour of the Appleton estate but still visualizable all at once. The main point of the first two lines, however is the lack of relation among earth’s parts and the miracle it takes to reduce them to “decent Order tame.” If the lesser world of woods, streams, gardens, and meads that Marvell addresses does reflect overthrown things, they are reduced to miniature; no one will plunge from their precipices. Nor can deserts exist where the space is lacking; if gulfs do, they must be models only. For one who has played tricks with cattle as fleas, the visual manipulations come easily, as does the couplet which then transcendentalizes the entire microcosm of the estate: “You Heaven’s Center, Nature’s Lap. / And Paradise’s only Map.” The distinctive thing about such a map is its reduction of distances to scale and of real things to symbolic counterparts. If heaven is truly centered here, it overcomes distances and their sense of isolation and leaves no place to fall.

Meanwhile, with the nation set aside, the family and the estate become the chief social unit. The fall that comes as a shock to an abdicating king and carries nature to ruin with him is avoided by the ex-general who has already resigned from high office but recuperates greatness in a private mode. Together with his daughter, he has the leverage to lift all local things under his jurisdiction to their fulfillment. England’s fall is less lamentable because of that sturdy and holy household, where entering the door is so much like entering heaven’s gate and prepares for doing so. This notion of a center returns to the geometry of the opening sections, where Marvell criticizes the high-thrusting ambitions of architects and thinks how to “immure / The Circle in the Quadrature.” Perhaps better even than the holy mathematics of the house are the woods and streams that render the essence of heaven—better for the narrator, since nature is more his terrain and the experience is more available to lyric apostrophe. The poet’s travels can remain horizontal because so much descends to the human plane in this highly privileged place. If leather boats are antipodes in shoes and the dark
hemisphere is like those tortoiselike amphibians that carry them homeward, even fishers are maps of the heavens.

Variants of the fall and its cure are crucial to Milton, too, as we have seen, especially in the lyric passages and invocations of *Paradise Lost*. As though in answer to previous incidents of giddiness in the great and kingly, Milton magnifies Satan's fall severalfold, as Christ hurls him "headlong flaming from th'Ethereal Sky/With hideous ruin and combustion down/To bottomless perdition" (1.45–47). That hell is "bottomless" is itself an old figure intended to be more moral and metaphysical than descriptive. Without a sustaining creator, its inhabitants have no substantial being and hence no resting point, though they appear to rest. They also have no social foundation and no center for one, which leads to Pan-daemonium’s struggle for power. The sense of falling is intensified in Satan’s plunge into chaos on the voyage to earth, which forecasts the poet’s third invocation cited earlier:

At last his Sail-broad Vans
He spreads for flight, and in the surging smoke
Uplifted spurns the ground, thence many a League
As in a cloudy Chair ascending rides
Audacious, but that seat soon failing, meets
A vast vacancy: all unawares
Flutt’ring his pennons vain plumb down he drops
Ten thousand fathom deep, and to this hour
Down had been falling, had not by ill chance
The strong rebuff of some tumultuous cloud
Instinct with Fire and Nitre hurried him
As many miles aloft.

Edgar’s imaginary cliff is diminutive by comparison, though more exactly realized. What Satan falls into is the least humanized realm of the poem, a place of confusion devoid of divine and demonic influence alike and incapable of conclusion or resting place because incapable of order or recognition. That it is not totally incomparable to human experience is established only later, by the high tower of Babel and man’s fall into a similar hubbub, in repercussion from soaring pride and high climbing. Satan’s sense of falling here is protracted of course and would be endless in panic and despair, Milton says, but for the intervention not of the clearest gods but of chance. Although his initial fall has overtones of the prince plunging from high place, Milton replaces the errors of a Lear with a sense of the ridiculous, since to break with God is to break with logic itself. Pity and fear are erased by that conversion of the tragic flaw into absolute terms and its removal from conditions with which we might identify.
These descriptive passages are seated in the midst of primarily dramatic and narrative actions that we cannot consider specifically lyric, but they produce interludes that offer commentary on events and attitudes toward them. It is primarily in such interludes that Milton explores the isolation of the fallen—in Satan’s and Adam’s soliloquies and in the narrator’s invocations. When the narrator participates in the poem’s soaring and falling and apostrophizes the powers responsible for it, he seeks to move from blindness and isolation into the company of the spirit that created the cosmos. That spirit established bonds between creator and creature, initiated a beginning, and pointed toward what followed from it. As his part of both the process and the ending, the poet seeks to join that hierarchical company whose members see and to a degree possess a common source. In the second invocation, he has escaped “the Stygian Pool” and been

Taught by the heav’ly Muse to venture down
The dark descent, and up to reascend,
Though hard and rare.

3.19-21

In the invocation to Book 7 cited earlier, he is less sure about the next phase. Urania dwells in the divine presence itself and contributes “Celestial Song” for God’s entertainment. But if she does not guide the poet in his native element as well, he will repeat the fall and wander erroneous, without end.

The only truly secure pattern of descent into isolation and the periods of death for Milton is Christ’s, the ending of which is known before the outset. Except for a brief prediction of the entire cycle (Book 3. 227–65), however, Milton does not dramatize that descent in *Paradise Lost*. The final cure for falling is reserved for *Paradise Regained*, where Christ reverses the fall of angels and men and the fall-of-great-men theme by refusing empire and secular power. That he makes a soft landing from the pinnacle is due to angels that

in a flowry valley set him down
On a green bank, and set before him spread,
A table of Celestial Food, Divine.

4. 586–88

The renewed services of the host depend upon the emergence of a visible and active divine being. The only conclusive ceremony belongs to paradise, but one of the functions of such flowery valleys is to establish relations between the immediate place and that more distant one. Both lyric and the cure for isolation depend upon that connection.
He knocks at all doors, strays and roams,
Nay hath not so much wit as some stones have
Which in the darkest nights point to their homes,
By some hid sense their Maker gave;
Man is the shuttle, to whose winding guest
And passage through these looms
God order'd motion, but ordain'd no rest.

Vaughan, "Man"

I see them walking in an Air of glory,
Whose light doth trample on my days.

Either disperse these mists, which blot and fill
My perspective (still) as they pass,
Or else remove me hence unto that hill,
Where I shall need no glass.

Vaughan, "Ascension-Hymn"