

## The Little Way of My Self's Revelation

*Abstract.* The phenomenon of the little—the weak, the veiled, the lowly—is, by right, overlooked. Its revelation passes unnoticed while the self remains inflated. The arrival of the little awaits its selfless reducer, not the nihilating selflessness of an absolute alterity but a way of becoming little which occasions its fullest manifestation. So little, so revealed. I advance toward a phenomenology of becoming little according to its spirituality's namesake, Thérèse of Lisieux. I build on the phenomenologies of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion pausing at three moments along the way: the return to childhood; the discovery, after me, of self-confidence; and an imbalanced audacity. The upshot is that the significance of the little is big: littleness makes possible the immanent glimpse of unconditional revelation, a glimpse of beauty.

**Keywords:** Thérèse of Lisieux • Becoming Little • Phenomenology • Revelation

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*O Flower, whose fragrance tender  
With sweetness fills the air,  
Dispel with glorious splendour  
The darkness everywhere ...*

— Theodore Baker,  
*Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming*

Have we all passed over the *philosophical* Thérèse? The nineteenth century saint and mystic of Lisieux, with her three-part autobiography, *L'histoire d'une âme*, has enjoyed a considerable devotional following since her time. Mother Teresa, Edith Piaf, Dorothy Day, and the Olympic champion, Tara Lapinski, are listed.<sup>1</sup> And it's not as though the academy has failed to notice. Philosophers and theologians Jean Guitton, Emmanuel Mounier, Louis Bouyer, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II), and apparently even Henri Bergson, count among admirers.<sup>2</sup> Count Georges Bernanos, whose screenplay became Francis Poulenc's opera, *Dialogue des Carmélites*, and who appears cited in a number of Jean-Luc Marion's works, one more devotee. Has she any critics? Certainly. Some take her for a sentimental girl living out a fantasy stained by her dolorism affected Jansenism infused time.<sup>3</sup> Others take her for a kind of

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, all references to the writings of Thérèse are taken from the archive at Carmel (which includes photos of early facsimiles of original manuscripts), accessible at <https://archives.carmeldelisieux.fr/>. For the critical edition of her works, see *Oeuvres complètes de Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris: Cerf, Desclée de Brouwer, 2004). Unless stated, translations throughout are mine.

<sup>2</sup> On Jeanne Bergson's account, her father found inspiration from Thérèse's audacity before the pope as recounted in her autobiography. The story is disputed, however; see Anthony Feneuil, "Le Mysticisme à l'état pur' (Bergson) Images des ténèbres chez Thérèse de Lisieux." *Revue théologique de Louvain* 41, (2010): 519-538.

<sup>3</sup> For a masochistic Thérèse, see David S. Barnes, *The Making of Social Disease: Tuberculosis in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, CA: UCLA Press, 1995), especially chapter two, "Redemptive Suffering and the Patron Saint of Tuberculosis," which critically proposes "consumptive heroine" as naming the saint-making model of her time. author novelist and poet, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, *La Petite Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris, France: Fasquelle, 1937); French playwright and poet, Henri Ghéon, *Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux* (Paris, France: Editions Rassemblement À Son Image, 2016 [1934]), and writer, Gaëton Bernoville, *Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus* (Paris, France: Bernard Grasset, 1954); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux & Elizabeth of the Trinity* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992), 33-40, esp. note 15; writer, son of a Nietzschean atheist and grandnephew of the French Catholic essayist, Léon Bloy, Maxence Van der Meersch's *La petite Sainte Thérèse* (Paris, France: Albin Michel, 1997 [1947]), 245: *Il faut bien que se dissipe la fade légende de la docile petite sainte à la pluie de roses, aux vertus douceâtres et moutonnières*

narcissist.<sup>4</sup> For a little girl, from a little town, of little years, and with little to show for it, the world lacks for no interest on any level. Except the philosophical. Philosophy – you know, the one about love and wisdom, and, if Hadot is to be believed, a *way of life* – has had precious little to say about the Thérèsian spirituality popularly called the Little Way, a way toward God by adopting the gaze of spiritual childhood. In any case, let's lay it to rest here. The following advances in five steps toward a phenomenology of *becoming little* which runs right along that Way.

## §1 The Paradox of the Little

Like Saint Augustine, whose autobiographical *Confessions* contains for scholars still unexhausted treasures of insight into the human spiritual condition, the autobiography of Saint Thérèse reduces the existential questions of most significance to two: the problem of God and the problem of self.<sup>5</sup> The solution to both is simple: we become our most authentic self in forgetting it so as to open the possibility of divine revelation like a fearless child wondering before transcendence. Before examining her solution directly, I take this section to set the stage for the phenomenological significance of it by introducing the phenomenon of *littleness* and its disproportionately large significance, a significance running right to the heart of phenomenology as philosophical method in its latest development introduced by Jean-Luc Marion. In what follows, I throw into relief this large significance of littleness which I will call the paradox of the little.

The magician's disappearing act comes at a cost. What leaves our sight mustn't exceed what remains on stage in its stead. That rabbit held in your hat, Will you make it vanish before me? Clever. But what will you leave to view in remainder? An empty top-hat, you say. Naturally. But then you had best be sure the top-hat you've got surpasses in size the palm of your unexpected rabbit. The poor rabbit with palm-sized prop-hat present-to-hand will never become your disappearing rabbit – unless, of course, it *shrinks*.

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<sup>4</sup> For Thérèse as narcissist, see André Brousselle, "De la faute à l'extase une stratégie narcissique ?" *Adolescence* 26, no. 1, (2008): 131-141. On the theological origins of Jansenism, which hyper-valorized mortification and the wrath of God, see Larry Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Naples, FL: AMU Press, 2010): 277-292.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Manuscrit B, 3v° "I have found my place ... and this place, O my God, is you who have given it to me." And Augustine: "Deum et animam scire cupio / Nihil ne plus? / Nihil omnino (I desire to know [what are] the soul and God. / Nothing else? / Absolutely nothing else)" quoted and translated by Jean-Luc Marion in *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, Jeffrey L. Kosky (trans.), (Stanford, CA: SUP, 2012 [2008]), 56.

But that is impossible. Rabbits no more shrink than do you or I. So goes common sense, and with it the expectation of surprise which marks the wonder of the unsuspecting child when witness to magic. Are we at the end of the story? Not by Thérèse's lights. According to her, becoming little is like taking the elevator after a failed attempt at stairs, it's a more (and simpler) directly upward route.<sup>6</sup> Shrinking, on Thérésian spirituality, is no more impossible for Alice in Wonderland than it is for me. What should the phenomenologist say to its impossibility?

The phenomenologist should also deny it. Phenomenology would have us suspend the common view, the natural attitude, precisely because it is our ordinary grown-up perceptions which so often miss the uncommon because non-obvious yet more fundamental revelation waiting for a worthy benefactor like pearls refusing to hang on swine.<sup>7</sup> It is the philosopher's task to wonder at the ordinary, to be surprised by the obvious, to catch sight of some magic, and this because in the otherwise natural attitude, often characterized for modernity by a productive intentionality, we lose our spectacles on our noses. We, unlike the child, see nothing to see. Or, to borrow Antoine de Saint-Exupéry for a moment: "But if you tell them: 'The planet [the little prince] comes from is asteroid B 612' then they will be convinced, and they will let off with their questions. That's how they are. There's no use hating them for it. Children must be very indulgent with grown-ups."<sup>8</sup>

Very well. But if, as I suggest, philosophy should shake off the all-too-common, possibility-limiting attitude, the one putting shrinking rabbits straight out of question, and if phenomenology especially, which has done, should move now even toward a particular interest in the wonder-open attitudes of the very young, Why? Here's why. Phenomenology from its early Husserlian moments has wondered at (*inter alia*) two things: the appearances and the "I" who encounters them. With the breakthrough to the *epoché*, the reduction, a method of attitude, our wondering let us be given what appearing reveals in its appearance, and that same wonder found itself directed toward a self, *mine* behind the constituting reduction, but no less the *other's* beyond object-constituting limit.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Manuscrit C, 2v° - 3v° of the autobiography.

<sup>7</sup> Phenomenology, for Husserl, is a departure from the *natural attitude* never questions how (or whether) things appear as they do. See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2017): II, 1, §27-30, 101-106.

<sup>8</sup> *Mais si vous leur dites : 'La planète d'où il venait est l'astéroïde B 612' alors elles seront convaincues, et elles vous laisseront tranquille avec leurs questions. Elles sont comme ça. Il ne faut pas leur en vouloir. Les enfants doivent être très indulgents envers les grandes personnes.* Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince* (Paris, France: Gallimard, 1963): 20.

Even today, phenomenology wonders at the (dis)appearing movements of revelation, and where I might find my *self* in it.<sup>9</sup> In brief, the self's revelation — mine and the phenomenon — remain at issue.<sup>10</sup> With progress, more questions. Could becoming little again open a way forward?

At this point we should retreat (to advance). A problematic opens as soon as thinking the possibility of becoming little. First, shrinking diminishes presence, hiding it, when what I want is the self revealed in the clearing. But then, magnifying, by whatever reduction, enlarges presence, which seems to name a *becoming large*. That's the wrong direction. If becoming little is of use, phenomenology appears tasked with reducing to a phenomenon (littleness) diminishing just as soon it augments. A disappearance followed by a re-appearance in greater magnitude, is this some cheap trick? Hardly. The more I trouble myself to notice, the more I find just such a curiosity: subtracting from one pie, leaves me with less, but once divided, returns me many; the laws of motion rule over the planets, but the littlest quantum phenomena exceed their limits; and no matter how I might resist, I grow older in years, yet no sooner do I, then I find my condition closer to when I began.<sup>11</sup> I find given in experience phenomena expanding in view as soon as they shrink, and the aporia of a decreasing which increases cannot be quickly dismissed. We are pressed, then, to find a way through (or under) to its resolution.

We might wonder now: Is not Marion's phenomenology of givenness already qualified to dissolve an aporia of diminishment and excessive manifestation? By the "donological reduction" (expanded beyond evidence and *objectivity*), the reduction to *givenness*, we see by phenomenological reduction that the more allowed to appear on its own terms, without restricting in advance the magnitude of the appearing's horizon, the more given in the reduction.<sup>12</sup> Reduction

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<sup>9</sup> Here and elsewhere, I follow Marion in releasing "self" from its possessive "my" speaking to the possibility that my transcendental "I" does not know who (where) I am; cf. *In the Self's Place*, 287ff.

<sup>10</sup> Husserl explains the method of phenomenological reduction in *Ideas I*, published in 1913, but continual refinement of the method features throughout his work. On Husserl's thought on the "I" (transcendental ego) and the problem of alter egos, see his *Cartesian Meditations* (1931 [1960]), especially the fifth meditation. For the development of the reduction from Husserl to Heidegger and finally to a reduction to givenness in French phenomenology, see Jean-Luc Marion's (1998 [1989]) *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*. Marion applies his reduction to givenness to a phenomenology of revelation in *D'ailleurs, la révélation* (Paris, France: Grasset, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> On the possibility of tiny phenomena appearing to transgress the usual space-time limits, see Tim Maudlin's explication of quantum entanglement in *Quantum Non-Locality & Relativity* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011): 6-24.

<sup>12</sup> Compare Marion's *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (1997 [2002]): 14-19.

is a diminishment. Are we not then already positioned by donological phenomenology to explain the apparent impossibility of a magnifying littleness?

Yet such expansion by givenness of the horizon of phenomenality leaves open a question: What at all has givenness got to do with reduction? If givenness gives itself from its *self*,<sup>13</sup> its arrival unconditioned, unpredictable, saturated according to any prior intentionality, what role can I, the donological reducer possibly play in bringing givenness to presence? It would appear that my freedom is at present put *out of play* by such an absolutely irreducible event.<sup>14</sup> But can I not miss the event? If missed, can I prepare for its next occurrence? When I am distracted, I fail to acknowledge the arrival of the Other (*Autrui*),<sup>15</sup> let alone the alternative modes of saturation which invade my quotidian purview. Yet if givenness gives a little leeway to littleness, how much can the little give in return? After all, unconditional givenness cannot arrive on preparatory condition and remain so.<sup>16</sup> There is a little way out. The possibility of cooperative participation facing saturation was suggested already by Marion with repeated talk of a *letting* which *permits* its arrival; the one given over to (*l'adonné*) givenness *allows* its entry, yet having naught else to do with it than humble itself by diminishing itself, a preparation *post facto*! by a *diminutio ipseitatis*, a becoming little.<sup>17</sup> The possibility of becoming little, an ego-diminishment, in the face of unconditional givenness brings us closer to seeing the little's paradox.

Phenomenology operating in its most radical reduction — the donological reduction to givenness — involves a paradox underneath the paradox of givenness. By the donological reduction, I come to see that what shows itself is *and is not* what appears. That is, what gives itself to appear is given in appearance from its *self* which does not. However, this paradox of givenness hides a paradox of *littleness* which arises on consideration of the process and no longer only the result of appearing. If we attend to the process of becoming little, we find unexpectedly that diminishment is a way of augmentation. Consider theater a showing, its stage-performers the occasion of it. A show sputters in its showing inasmuch as its stage-performers display *themselves*,

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-70.

<sup>14</sup> The event, the idol, the face and the icon, all exemplify *saturated phenomena* whose intuition exceeds any possible intentionality in Marion's (2002 [2001]) *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*.

<sup>15</sup> From Emmanuel Levinas (1969 [1961]), *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*.

<sup>16</sup> For Levinas, the revelation of the Other (as saturated phenomenon in Marion's terms) interrupts time-consciousness and cannot be conditioned by me; *ibid.*, 235.

<sup>17</sup> *In Excess*, 45. The fact of me is prior to me, but this does not prevent me from receiving my *self* as gift through a preparatory diminishment of my ego. On preparation, more later.

as happens with the self-consciousness characterizing stage fright, and *not* the show's character we are meant to see. By contrast, the greater the performance, the less present to consciousness is the self of the performer. Like the explosive burst of the little fuse surrendered to ignition so as to bring the bedazzling fireworks scene to view, the performer with reduced self, achieving flow, returns what self-inflating self-consciousness inhibited; and more, returns *authentic* performance, the uninhibited self in bright display.

How should we understand a diminishment that yields increase? We see our way through the aporia by attending to what underlies manifestation in its grandeur; with the little, there is a butterfly effect — a small change effecting large ones. But if, paradoxically, appearing is disappearing in the appearance, as in the phenomenology of givenness, is not the self of what gives itself there *annihilated*? Littleness denies it. What vanishes has become little, but becoming little has no finite limit, is, rather, infinitesimal. Manifestation demands a self-exceeding non-annihilating diminishment, a condition satisfied by the phenomenon of becoming little. Hence, the paradox of the little: I am more present inasmuch as I am less so. According to Marion's formulation of the principle of givenness, so much reduction, so much givenness.<sup>18</sup> Now, however, is it shown impossible without a paradoxical self-magnification by *diminutio ipseitatis*. Relative to that of givenness, the paradox of littleness is found neither after nor beyond but underneath it. Reduction *itself*, inasmuch as process, requires a further, subordinate principle operating in its shadow, a principle secondary to but indispensable from the maximal horizon setting donological one. According to this secondary principle of littleness, nothing is revealed without first letting itself become little. Or, in lapidary form — so little, so revealed.

## §2 Returning My Self to Eternal Childhood

Having considered (even if only briefly) a paradoxical self-revelation by becoming little, we are now positioned to address the philosophical significance of the Thérèsian Little Way. We can conceive of this Way as proceeding according to three moments: 1) a return to the attitudes of my childhood, 2) the development of a self-sustaining identity (presence) but by a paradoxically *selfless* self-confidence, and 3) the discovery of a disproportionate audacity facing the possibility of revelation. Here and in the following sections, I unfold these moments phenomenologically

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<sup>18</sup> *Being Given*, 14.

according to the paradox of the little. A full phenomenological analysis of each is beyond the scope of this paper, but their promise shows clearly in their introduction.

In giving due attention to the impossible possibility revealed by a first moment of the Little Way, namely, the possibility of returning to my self's origins, the pure wonder which marks the attitude of the child, we are invited to a Thérésian *spiritual childhood*.<sup>19</sup> Without this reversion to my beginnings, we will see no advance toward a revelation promised through self-diminishment. But how?

The answer comes by reflection. My littlest moment is my earliest one. Becoming little, then, is to traverse time. If time-travel is necessary for a return to origins (and how can it not be), we are not thereby at an impasse. Naturally, in understanding spiritual childhood, we will want to think time beyond the mathematical space-time models identifying so much of the ontology of time since Descartes. These will not allow for a *spiritual* return. The possibility of time-travel will not arise for us merely from alternative, non-linear, still mathematical models of space-time as in contemporary metaphysicians of time after him. Fortunately, a possibly non-metaphysical time already shows itself in Bergson's early phenomenology of duration (*duré*), and in that pedigree, we have a time as "field of presence" (Merleau-Ponty), historicity (Heidegger), as *interruption* from alterity (Levinas), and now as my self's origins which itself comes from beyond time, the coming of the beginning of time, or the *advent* (Marion).<sup>20</sup> A non-mathematical time freed from the measure of space, is shown possible, then, for phenomenology. Becoming little in its origin returning, time traversing modality is possible, therefore, by way of spatio-temporal categories exceeding experience of time. We see this hinted at, for example, in the phenomenon of the presence of memories of past trauma, which, though not enjoying ontic existence, yet make themselves present to me in undeniable ways.

While Bergson's *durée* and Marion's *the advent* already make possible my re-originating time-travel, the possibility of becoming little takes its first step toward realization in the procedural moment of a re-originating spiritual childhood, a move back to origins. In considering the process of diminishment within and across time, we learn again of the significance of the little for what we

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<sup>19</sup> Cf Ms A, 70v°.

<sup>20</sup> Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York, NY: The Philosophical Library, 1946 [1911]): 164-168; Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 223, 372 n. 52.



have already seen possible yet without seeing the little process operative within it. The re-originating return to my self's origins reveals a phenomenon at once time-travel and *also* a development in reverse, a *revelopment*. I move forward in this backward motion only because in returning to my origins, I return to a time *before* I acquired through unmet expectations of surprise (magic), a natural attitude marked first in its productive aim but also in a saturation-prohibited intentionality. I come to safeguard consciousness from unmet expectations by reducing reduction to the predictable, to objects conceptualizable without cost of suspending belief. But if I only ever carry on this way, my destination is the cynic, which, as Oscar Wilde quips, is one "who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."<sup>21</sup>

The little way of passing the time, therefore, is developmental reversal to a time before, an *advent*, when I looked without prediction and with expectation of intentionality-exceeding surprise. As little (again), I see that moving backwards is not mathematically restricted, as diminishment is infinitesimal, and the infinitesimal is an endless process, beyond the limits of finite time. Ordinarily perceived time and space no longer restrict my movements nor dictate the pattern of my growth and development.

All the same, there remains a question of how. The possibility of my self's re-originating journey is established, but what must I do to realize it? Here we can turn in patterned step away from time and toward a mathematically unbounded phenomenological *space*. Intuitively, self-diminishment is the ego shrunk. Hence, if a "littling" time develops me by *revelopment*, we should expect a littling space to birth a growth in reverse. In fact, this paradoxical growth is just what we find. My ego shrunk is an ego emptied of its possessions. After all, what else might inflate me but the retaining of accumulated property. Losing myself, therefore, is, we can say, a kind of non-theological *kénosis*, a self-emptying in immanence, which suffers the detachment of the self-identifying idols of my *possessive* ego, only to arrive liberated for authentic self-expression, free to bring my *self*, now clarified by the purification from my self-inflation over time, to growing presence.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Oscar Wilde, "Lady Windermere's Fan," in Peter Raby ed. *Oscar Wilde: The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays* (Oxford, UK: OUP, 2008), Act III.

<sup>22</sup> Self-inflation is here understood akin to Augustine's *distentio* (being dis-tracted, pulled away from my origins) as Marion unpacks it; *In the Self's Place*, 212ff.

How might we think this littling, *kenotic* space? A clue is found by (re)turning to the phenomenology of the gift, with attention to its recent application to the concept of sacrifice. We should recall that the gift for phenomenology is an expression of givenness.<sup>23</sup> To think givenness in terms of the gift is validated by its unconditional irreducibility, standing as it does at a distance from conditional reduction to its giver, to its recipient (*J'adonée*), or even to itself as any ontological thing. Now in application to sacrifice, we discover that if sacrifice is genuine, that is, if giving myself sacrificially is an authentic giving, then sacrifice just is a phenomenon operating by the law of the gift. As such, any concept which would reduce sacrifice under extrinsic condition or exchange would pollute its pure givenness as gift. Marion proposes two such concepts on offer: 1) a delayed discounting by which I give *up* some good in return for the hope of some future (usually more valuable) good, and 2) a dispossessing sacrifice by which I relinquish all title claims, claims to possession, without thought of who or what might *re*-possess it later. Marion rejects (1) for its obviously conditional and self-benefiting giving (so not a gift), and he rejects (2) because while dispossessing what is mine is necessary for gifting it, it is not sufficient. I do not *give* my property merely by walking away from it. Alternatively, we can think of sacrifice as a *re*-giving of the gift, a refusal to possessively safeguard what is gifted us, and instead by detachment to make of it what it *is*, a gift, given now back to its original giver.<sup>24</sup>

However, Marion's account is not complete. While dispossession will not qualify for self-giving sacrifice, the kenotic self-emptying of Thérèse's Little Way is neither an egoic self-possession, nor mere relinquishing of property, but a *de*possession or a moving down (and away) from what inflates me. As the progressive return to childhood bypasses future predictive intentionality, so the *kenotic* self-*de*possession bypasses the pre-parative constituting intentionality, both kinds of intentionality conditionalizing my self's unconditional revelation. By *de*possession, I shrink my ego, ridding it of idols, which prepares for revelation only by un-preparing constitutive control of it. Space creating self-emptying makes possible my little way of time travel by permitting the eternal return of my early wide-eyed wonder.

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<sup>23</sup> See *Being Given*, chapters two and five (71-113, 248-327).

<sup>24</sup> Marion, *Certitudes négatives* (Paris, France: Grasset, 2010): 187-231.

In the end, I arrive at the beginning. This first procedural move is one back to origins (not things) in their *selves*.<sup>25</sup> Arriving at the beginning, however, is not enough. After all, when I am little, I *want* to be big.

### §3 Confidence in the Balance

Childhood is not enough. My origin teams with life, children are the energetic, and I desire to advance and explore. Why, though, must we desire the advance? Are we not full of life, fulfilled in our domestic security? Is the little way of my self's revelation, the possibility of becoming little, not proposing a perpetual childhood or infantilism? The Thérésian Little Way, as it seems, devalorize maturity, locking us at home in Neverland. We must insist, however, that the return to eternal childhood, re-originating return to my earliest stage, will *not* leave me infantilized. And this because it is an easily observable fact that children do *not* want to remain little. Spiritual childhood is not enough because childhood itself has sights far beyond it, children anticipate eagerly the coming of age.<sup>26</sup> As little, I *desire* to advance beyond the limits of my time and size. Right at the desire to walk, I find myself striving for elevation, and I succeed inasmuch as I am light and so easily airborne.

Rather than remain in puerility, I learn to stand, not on my *own* two feet as the possessive me was accustomed to, but, like a toddler, to teeter on the balance of a presence-sustaining confidence with a missing self. For Thérèse, balance is a sailing on the surface of the depths of my origin, a bubbling up from the advent of my time, the time before mine.<sup>27</sup> No longer do I remain

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Husserl's rallying cry, "Back to the things themselves!" at Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Volume I*, trans. J.N. Findlay. (New York: Routledge, 1970), 168.

<sup>26</sup> In what follows, I take my analyses of desire and its coming as advent from Marion's contributions, *In the Self's Place*, especially chapters 4-6 (145-289).

<sup>27</sup> For the sailing metaphor, see her Poem 17, "Vivre d'amour," at line 8. We might think of the Thérésian self as balancing between the Cartesian *ego ille* (or Pascal's *le moi*, cf. note 28 below), signaling the Western substantivized individual, and the Buddhist *jikaku* or "self-awakening" taken up by the Japanese philosopher, Nishida Kitaro, in a quasi-Hegelian negation of the self, an awakening to nothingness; cf. Shigeru Taguchi's "Non-contextual Self: Husserl and Nishida on the Primal Mode of the Self," in *The Realizations of the Self* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan: 2018). On the Japanese/French Catholic intersection, Ida Görres, whose most important work, the Thérèse biography *The Hidden Face: A Study of St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003 [from the German original, *Das Verborgene Antlitz*, 1944]), Seijiro Yoshizawa translated to Japanese as *Kakusareto Kao* (Tokyo, Japan: Kajima Kenyakujo Shuppankai, 1969), connects Catholic piety to Japanese filial piety in *Broken Lights, Diaries and Letters 1951-1959* (London, UK: Burnes and Oates, 1964), 145; Görres herself was the daughter of Countess and first Japanese immigrant to Europe Mitsuko Aoyama. See also Görres's "When Does a Person have a Capacity for Liturgy?" trans. Jennifer S. Bryson, *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 25, no. 3 (2002): 126-39.

emptied and returned in my re-originating moment, but I am filling with desire, and with ego now *depossessed*, my desires have me *persisting* in an alternative stability, one off-land and standing on a moving ground. Toddlering forward, I *balance* my sail between the chaotic depths beneath me and my newfound self-elevating desire. If I fall, I'm hardly hurt — the little's fall lacks distance.<sup>28</sup> Paradoxically, I lost my self in self-gifting sacrificial *depossession*, yet here in this second moment of my revelation's way, I feel myself empowered to stand.

Might it be objected that we resolve infantilism only by smuggling in a return of the metaphysics of presence? Are we not, in this talk of persistence and self-guided stability, undoing for phenomenology the overcoming of the metaphysics of presence which sedimented the self by substantification in Descartes's *ego ille* and Pascal's *le moi*.<sup>29</sup> The phenomenology of revelation born of the donological reduction looked past any creeping metaphysical staticity in thinking the "I" as transcendental ego. Now, despite it, infantilism falls only to the re-possession of my ego, with property rights to its persistence in time.

The objection forgets the paradox of littleness: self-diminishment is neither annihilation *nor* crippling deficiency, but the surprising method of self-magnification. If the movement from spiritual childhood to persisting on voyage were an ordinary self-determining intentionality, the metaphysics of presence, would in fact, regress us to before the initial return. I am not supported on water by my own two feet, but allow the support of desires from elsewhere (*d'ailleurs*) to energize my persistence in balance.

We can speak of Thérésian confidence as a *selfless* self-confidence. For Thérèse, "It is confidence, and confidence alone, that must lead us to love" [*C'est la confiance et rien que la confiance qui doit nous conduire à l'Amour*].<sup>30</sup> I advance and explore only by confidence in the buoy of my re-originated desire. I advance and explore only by confidence in what is otherwise than me (Levinas), and comes from elsewhere (Marion), the possibility of revelation, and its desire under-riding me. The balance of Thérésian confidence is a sailing on the unstable deep. *Selfless*

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<sup>28</sup> *Enfin, c'est de ne point se décourager de ses fautes, car les enfants tombent souvent, mais ils sont trop petits pour se faire beaucoup de mal*, as recorded on August 6th, 1897 and in *Thérèse de Lisieux : J'entre dans la vie : Derniers entretiens* (Paris, France : Desclée de Brouwer, 1973): 119.

<sup>29</sup> See Vincent Carraud's *L'invention du moi* (Paris, France: Presses Universitaire de France, 2010): *Le moi et la substance*, 87-124.

<sup>30</sup> From a letter to her sister (also a Carmelite), *soeur Marie du Sacré-Coeur*, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1896, letter 197.

confidence stands apart from sheer self-confidence and its nihilating self-negation because to be less, in its infinitesimal (infinity's non-substantive counterpart) movement, is happily in self-revelatory process, so neither here nor there. My movements are not perfectly stable. I hobble in my teetering from a one-sailed voyage of confidence.<sup>31</sup> What moves beneath me is neither in my control nor conceivable in its profundity. I balance only by persisting in *depossession*. My confidence will not remain shallow, however, but moves me deeper by the desire for greater heights. That is, the desire which moved me beyond infancy, continues to move, now with courage to approach the source of hidden desire which called out my confidence in the first place. The courage which desires to advance beyond self/less self-confidence has Thérèse beside herself, we follow her here by desire which she calls love.<sup>32</sup>

Once again, the possibility of terminating the Little Way here presents itself. Might I not take solace in the achievement of confident balance? But solace *here* is cheap with the possibility of flight hanging in the balance. Complacency in what is not my place, the teetering undocked ship en route, risks regression — “*the world is thy ship, not thy home [La vie est ton navire et non pas ta demeure]*.”<sup>33</sup> Why? Because desire is in motion, and to resist its current is to replace self/less self-confident balance with self-centered insistence, a static persistence in presence over and *against* my gifted origin. Where else shall I go, then? *Verso l’alto!* To the heights! The motion of desire pushes me overboard toward an elevation above my semi-secure self/lessly confident sailing. A motion which launches “*me full sail on the waves of confidence and love, which attracted me forcefully but on which I had not dared advance [me lança à pleine voile sure les flots de la confiance et de l’amour qui m’attiraient si fort mais sur lesquels je n’osais avancer ...]*.”<sup>34</sup>

While my confidence moves me to greater heights, courage brings me through danger to the edge of balance. Courage is the desire moving me toward danger, and what could be more dangerous than the unknown because inconceivable coming revelation. With courage I follow this elevated (elevation) desire until the point where I am standing on edge — at the limit of balance.

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<sup>31</sup> I introduce a non-teetering, in fact soaring, movement later.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Ms B, 1r°; Pope John Paul II’s apostolic letter, *Divini Amoris Scientia, Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is Proclaimed a Doctor of the Church*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ms A, 41r°. She is misquoting (*temps*, not *vie*) a poem of Lamartine here.

<sup>34</sup> Ms A, 80v° (ellipses hers).

#### §4 Anisomorphic Audacity

Acrophobia is an acquired taste. In our early climbing moments, no one has told us to fear the departure point. Why should I fear the sure foundation which brought me here? After all, my surety wasn't in my own capacity; I stand confidently above what far exceeds me in depth, but only because I've never been dropped. Still, if in all confidence, love brings me right up the precipice, will I take the leap? What brings me from peeping over the edge, considering the sudden distance from there to here? Even a courageous confidence will fail me now. What I need *here* is a confidence *redoubled*, an over-edge looking desire which, seeing its limitation, desires, despite it all, unimaginably beyond its capacity. The confidence of the little is stubborn, it pushes past its own limit, to a beyond capacity – audacity. Throwing myself over the edge, that's madness. Are we out of our mind for thinking it? Yet, we do think it. In our quiet moments, when assured of no *in*lookers, we indulge on occasion in that unreasonable dream of an improbable greatness. If confidence moved us to leave our home in childhood, and, with courage, to near the edge, confidence *redoubled* plants the wild will to leap<sup>35</sup>. Audacity moves in excess.

Where to? If the destination and its route were mapped for me, the saturation of desire would fall to fore-seen intentionality. We do not see first, but with Augustine, *believe* so as to *then* better understand.<sup>36</sup> To confide in the invisible infinite to excess is no horizontal confidence; the horizon of horizons opens for me only with a confidence plunged to its depths in desire. With Thérésian belief, which is trust, my gaze emerges from a messianic onlooking toward an advent beyond the border of immanence; yet, surpassing Derrida's tears<sup>37</sup>, with expectation of an as-if-already present confidence. Because the coming *has* already come if only in telling us of its coming. Audacious desire itself is evidence.<sup>38</sup> Can I find such audacity in the world? In the young we can. In my childhood, I believe in tooth-ferries, and expect Christmas miracles. I have no concept for what comes, no prediction, but I *hope* for it with a confidence which all but *demand*s that it do. In my

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<sup>35</sup> Compare the madness of love in Plato's *Phaedrus*, 245b.

<sup>36</sup> As in Augustine's *credo ut intellegas* in *Sermo* 43, 7, 9 (J.P. Migne ed. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> John D. Caputo's messianic reading of Derrida, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> Thérésian audacity manifests in her insistence on approaching the pope for permission to enter the Carmelite monastery at the age of 15 (Ms A, 62r°), in her desires to become a saint despite no public recognition in her lifetime (Ms B, 2v°), and in her desire for the vocation of the priesthood which she knew impossible to attain (Ms C, 2v°).

childhood, I *expect* the unexpected, and I am full of anticipation for its arrival. As far they go, surprises are wasted on grow-ups.<sup>39</sup>

Confidence alone *leads us* to sit as a child on the lap of infinite love. The voluptuousness of eros, which desires to approach the Other is desire, beyond prudence, to approach infinite presence. Anisomorphic audacity is disproportionate desire, which safeguards, in preparation, the unconditional arrival of what a coming revelation. Audacity is an enflaming the expectation of surprise. I find myself winged with confidence and love, from teetering on water to flying on air, to see by tearing the veil. To speak like Kierkegaard, I find myself, at this moment along the little way, with desire to *leap*. If by now, I become flight sick, it is only because my desire for wherever desire comes requires of me the abandonment of any lasting grip I might still have on myself.

*Anisomorphism* is an inadequacy, a failure of correspondence between what is yet related, the lost in translation. As such, the desire of an anisomorphic audacity is a madness, a *ravishing*.<sup>40</sup> The desires emergent from the little self in its newfound confidence exceed any proportion to its own capacities or merits. Disproportionate desires are audacious – which is precisely what they must be if there is any possibility of beckoning a revelation. Surely the over the edge fails in fit to any of my little self's capacities standing there. I desire the revelation not from the safety of adequacy, but from the eruption coming up from within my self-lost confidence.

Perhaps, however, I will lose confidence. What is to ensure its sustaining presence? Some days I approach the world as though it's mine, but other days I wonder how I ever felt that way. Suppose we *do* manage to persevere in such confidence. Even then, are we not asking for our dissolution? Finite me isn't built to take in infinite desire and remain intact. Kenotic self-littling, if it were to develop such an audacity, would have a death wish: leaping will just be a fall to my destruction.

In fact, the situation is just the reverse: death by desire is abundant life. Putting aside annihilation and dissolution, Dasein's being-toward-death, anisomorphic audacity reverses the finality of death, a

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<sup>39</sup> Emmanuel Mounier counts Thérèse's own life an unexpected surprise, God's practical joke: "À une époque où l'esprit petit-bourgeois ne peut manquer d'apparaître comme l'antipode le plus morne de la vie chrétienne, ne serait-ce pas une ruse de l'Esprit-Saint, un paradoxe de la Miséricorde que d'avoir caché sous ces apparences banales les mystères de la plus haute flamme d'amour ?" cited in Bernard Bro's *La Gloire et le Mendiant* (Paris, France: du Cerf, 1974): 16-17.

<sup>40</sup> Cf Ms A, 36r° at which we find her curious desire for suffering. Understanding her here as expressing desire to cool the unbearable heat of an audacious desire to be infinitely desired, we start to alleviate the curiosity.

being-toward-birth, playing on the edge of death and life, and on an the *pete*rotic ascent toward my self's revelation which the kenotic "death to self" made possible.<sup>41</sup> The release from pain apparently afforded by self-destruction is reversed along the little way to a pain which is in motion toward pleasure, a death by fatal attraction; only here I feel a pleasure not destructive or sadistic, but harmlessly increased by my decrease, an elevating pleasure (*jouissance*) which is, thereby, a non-destructive death, a *petite mort*.<sup>42</sup> Such a non-annihilating, non-belittling *becoming little* hangs in the balance. Desire for the inadequate is disproportionate because it is *depossessed* desire. The desire to leap from faith in the winged balance of confidence *and love*, no longer the balancing of me on what stands underneath, a balancing still occasioning some fear and trembling, but the audacity to put the welcome of the advent to the test. Following the trail of my love, I find at the edge the trace of myself *loved* by the love I loved with. "To love you as you love me, I must borrow your own love, only then will I find rest [*Pour vous aimer comme vous m'aimez, il me faut emprunter votre propre amour, alors seulement je trouve le repos*]."<sup>43</sup> "Borrowed" love lifts me out from water up into air, to *expect* revelation. by enflaming the expectation of surprise, I find myself winged with confidence and love, ready to leap, daring to see by tearing the veil.

### §5 Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming

Did you push me? If I fell over the edge, what brought me there? And if you didn't, or if I remain on the edge, full of audacity, but never accomplish the leap, could I truthfully say I possessed an audacious desire? Of course, desire is what brings me out of (and over) my mind. Excessive desire is no more *mine* than the life I find myself already with before I knew me. Can we not say more? Is there a figure to this desire? Is it a blind rush, my freedom abducted, the absolute event overcoming me *without me*? A Thérèsian phenomenology must say a little more. After all, my childlike wonder brought me to an audacious self/*less* self-confidence. I have not disappeared in my self-abandoned surrender, but by paradox, am more present *now* than ever.

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<sup>41</sup> Heidegger did not ignore the birth-side of Dasein's totality but defaulted toward being-toward-death. On this, see Lisa Guenther's "Being-from-others: Reading Heidegger after Caverero," *Hypatia* 23, no. 1 (2008): 99-118.

<sup>42</sup> Compare *jouissance* and "death" in Roland Barthe's *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris, France : du Seuil, 1973): 58.

<sup>43</sup> Ms, 35r°.



What, then, do I see in the waning moments before taking flight? Whatever I see, it must attract. “Love attracts love [*L’amour attire l’amour*].”<sup>44</sup>

Yet what attracts more than beauty? No one can see beauty and remain *still*.<sup>45</sup> And the attraction must not pull me toward the glamorous idol in its billboard magnitude, its bedazzling finitude which always disappoints: the idol is me, but not my *self*. Or at least not its place. I find my self’s place along much narrower pathways, along a *little* way. No, the edge of finitude is no place to get distracted. Wherever I am, beauty is a most pleasant sight. So, what I see *here* must be an *iconic* beauty, porous as it spills infinity.<sup>46</sup> I am drawn by the trace of a beauty which draws me in to self-abandonment, into the chrysalis. If beauty attracts, the desire I see before I leap must attract without limit, saturation washing over every finite mode of it.

We can now speak of a kind of destination. But note, the destination is no final resting place. The metamorphosis of finitude only quickens my activity, bringing it to flight. What is it, then, to lose oneself in the madness of a desire for revelation if not the love of the beautiful? Becoming little, the fulfilling *kénosis*, is the motion of love whose movements are the birthplace of beauty. Nietzsche is in accord with Thérèse here: “Truly, his desires must not grow mute and vanish in satiety, but in beauty! Graciousness should be part of the magnanimity of the high-souled ... But if power is gracious and descends to make itself visible, then I call such condescension beauty.”<sup>47</sup> Beauty is the face of that infinite love which already moves within me, which names my form, by the motion of love, a life *in via paulula*, the love of love bringing previous moments to fruition in the transformation-in-beauty of the *littled* or *le petité*, the leaping self, caught up in flight.

The passive participial form of “little” might suggest a way destined for a resting finality. But beauty itself is not so static. The desire for desire’s origin is *from* desire; the desire from elsewhere *desires* its *littled* lover.<sup>48</sup> *Faites attention!* the self’s beauty names here the coming revelation *and also* the

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<sup>44</sup> *Votre amour m’a prévenue des mon enfance, il a grandi avec moi, et maintenant c’est un abîme dont je ne puis sonder la profondeur* (Ms C, 35r°).

<sup>45</sup> For Marion, no one can see Revelation and live (Hebrews 10); such a presence terrifies (Exodus). For Thérèse, apparently, the prospect doesn’t threaten: she risks her life in leaping toward it.

<sup>46</sup> On the idol and the icon, see Jean Luc Marion’s *God without Being* trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago, IL: UCP, 2012): 7-53.

<sup>47</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 1930), 128; cited in Ida Görres, *The Hidden Life*, 306.

<sup>48</sup>: “Here in the world, I cannot conceive a more grand immensity of love than that with which it pleased you to saturate me gratuitously, without any merit on my part [*Ici-bas je ne puis concevoir une plus grande immensité d’amour que celui qu’il vous a plu de me prodiguer gratuitement sans aucun mérite de ma part*] (Ms 35r°).”

beautiful style (Merleau-Ponty) of the one whose desire pushed her over the immanent edge. Beauty, revelation's arrival in presence, is no unilateral showing but a dyadic union in love.

A remaining worry: If I leap, will I remain myself? Is there evidence to justify the hope of self-revelation or will my wishes turn out fantastical? Will I possess what I love, or will I arrive alone at the end of the world? In fact, I find justification for hope right where I am, in my processual, ongoing transformation. My transformation is the possibility of infinite desire realized in the shining of an excessive beauty, a *flourish*. As such, a *diminological* reduction, reduction to littleness, places selves – that of the Other, of what gives, and the little me (Thérèse) – in *selving*, unfolding along the way, at sites of beauty revealed. I am always already being revealed.

Still, evidence is in traces (Levinas), shadows of the unimagined advent, which no one has ever seen.<sup>49</sup> Why should we expect the unimaginable from its dimly lit symbols? Will revelation come in dreams? To make claims on the possibility of metamorphosis is surely passed the limit of phenomenology. On the horizon of phenomenality, beauty only deceives us with her fleeting charm.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, if phenomenological revelation will not come in dreams, its *beauty* isn't lesser for being little. "Love's very self comes by becoming little" [*Le propre de l'amour étant de s'aibasser*].<sup>51</sup> We need not yet cross the Rubicon<sup>52</sup> so long as we let beauty awake; after all, beauty is the site of audacity's attraction, no less.<sup>53</sup> To be sure, immanent beauty catches us by a glimpse: the twinkle in her laughing eyes, the sunlight flickering off water-droplet decorated springtime leaves, the peaking rainbow out from cloud-breaks just before dusk, the butterfly in its ephemeral flit, or the rose in bloom. These are passing moments. All the same, such small moments of fleeting revelations remind me of the passing, as I too pass by, and remind me in their passing not to idolize. "To leave, let that alone, and wish all, wish a better beauty, *grace*."<sup>54</sup> Along the little way, *everything is*

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<sup>49</sup> Compare John 1:18, Colossians 2:17, and Hebrews 10:1.

<sup>50</sup> Proverbs 31:30.

<sup>51</sup> Ms C, 2v°.

<sup>52</sup> Moving from philosophy to theology; cf. Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology* (Fordham, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> "Let Beauty Awake" from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Songs of Travel and Other Verses* (1896), set to music by Ralph Vaughn Williams in 1904.

<sup>54</sup> Adapted from Gerard Manly Hopkins's "To What Serves Mortal Beauty," in W.H Gardner, *Gerard Manly Hopkins*, II (London: Oxford University Press, 1961 [1949]): 318.

*grace* [*tout est grâce*] because everything is *gift*.<sup>55</sup> For me, the metamorphosis unfolds in dynamic vignettes of beauty, a beauty which *rushes* by and through attraction, a beauty which, though passing, expresses my unique style revealed, expresses by revealing the beauty present to *l'adonée*, now the one madly attracted to and by revelation.<sup>56</sup> I flourish, blossom, speak, radiate in trace of beauty by a *style* which brings self to presence. Revelation dispels the darkness by an illumination filling the unseen. And if the little's desire is to find its satisfaction, union with what it leapt after, then it will find that satisfaction only in its own beauty's revelation, insurmountable *distance* overcome by infinite love's *petite amie*. "I live by Love [*Je vis d'Amour*]."<sup>57</sup> Becoming little, therefore, reveals the saturated meanings of revelation for phenomenology, moments of beauty filling the dark kenotic void of the *littled*— more than transformation, my self's luminescent *transfiguration*. Or better, the self in bloom.

*Pour toi, je dois mourir, Enfant, Beauté Suprême*  
 Quel heureux sort !

Je veux en *m'effeuillant* te prouver que je t'aime  
 O mon Trésor !

— Thérèse, *Une rose effeuillée*<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Thérèse (*viva voce*) recorded in *J'entre dans la Vie - Derniers entretiens*, (Paris, France: du Cerf, 2017): 41.

<sup>56</sup> On style, compare Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden Fischer (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1983); Mark K. Spencer *The Irreducibility of the Human Person: A Catholic Synthesis* (Washington D.C: CUA Press, 2022): 65ff.

<sup>57</sup> "Vivre d'Amour" line 8.

<sup>58</sup> Poem 51.

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