Article

Entanglement in Fir: Thinking Matter in Peter Larkin's "praying // firs \\ attenuate"

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Abstract: This article reads Peter Larkin's poem "praying // firs \\ attenuate" (2014) as a way to think the divine in relation to the ecological as a mutual poetic giving. It suggests that the poem entangles the reader in a series of relational imaginings that complicates the modern commodification of the nonhuman and questions a secular fatigue with the divine. Through a Catholic metaphysics in which all things—human, nonhuman, holy—are entangled, Larkin's religious ecology maps the way to horizons promising that which cannot yet be imagined. In an entangled, layered, rhythmic, and echoing poetic form, Larkin reveals the intimate relationship between plenitude and the attenuated, gift and scarcity.

Keywords: Peter Larkin; entanglement; trees; scarcity; gift; poetry

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"praying // firs \\ attenuate" appears in Peter Larkin's 2014 *Give Forest Its Next Portent*, a volume focused on wooded areas of landscape in the critically and environmentally neglected geography of the English Midlands.[1] Larkin, a former Philosophy and Literature Librarian at the University of Warwick who has been writing poetry for over thirty years, is now established as one of the most important ecopoets writing in the early twenty-first century. Bringing together theology, philosophy, and literature, his work can be read as part of an ecotheological tradition mediated through poets like S. T. Coleridge and William Wordsworth and theologians such as Friedrich von Hügel and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. From these writers, Larkin has developed a microscopic approach to the cosmic that focuses on the locality and specificity of landscapes that do not obviously connote the sacred. He thus fulfils Harriet Tarlo's call for a poetic focus on radical landscapes that go beyond the pastoral but nevertheless invoke the divine (Tarlo 2007). Tarlo claims that the ecstasy invoked by earlier models of "nature poetry" is absent from the modern ecopoem, concerned as it is with "industrial sites, chemical pollution, foot and mouth disease, sea defences and the lack of biodiversity we find in our semi-rural areas" (Tarlo 2007). But for Larkin, the broken and ruined landscape reveals and gives forth more of the divine than the pastoral, connected as it is with a sense of scarcity shared by the trees that survive within it and the God to which they reach. His poetry thus lays bare what Tarlo calls a "non-linguistic world" that speaks by "pushing at the inadequacies of language" to "make it do more and be more, even as it expresses frustration at the difficulty of this "saying"" (Tarlo 2007).

Tarlo's argument that the ecocritical gestures towards that which is yet without form will be familiar to the reader of Christian poetry, a tradition that has at once struggled with and nurtured the idea of the "unsayable" in seeking to discuss questions of faith, spirit, and God. Larkin's significance as a poet is in part based in his ability to bring together the ecocritical and the religious in experimental

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[1] (Larkin 2014); further references in footnotes refer to the part and page number. Thanks to Peter Larkin for generous permission to cite his work.

poems that reveal what it means to be in a world in which dualisms like nature/culture, body/mind, subject/object are as unstable as those between spirit/letter, faith/empiricism, and divine/human. "praying // firs \\ attenuate" creates a space in which to reflect and soften these dualisms by giving voice to an observer who stands immanently within the landscape while remaining receptive to transcendence in order to bear witness to the complexity of what he calls its "entanglement in fir".[2] It does so in a poetics that is at once dependent on both Catholic metaphysics and the ecocritical to imagine a togetherness or "entanglement" in which the human, nonhuman, and holy are gathered. The central image of entangled fir trees through which the poem sways in and out move the reader through the matter of the world and so reveal how the "natural" and "divine" encircle each other even as they reach beyond the boundaries of their relation. Larkin creates the space for this to play out in an almost perichoretic dance in which the trees sway into a co-eternal and consubstantial relationship that evokes the dynamism of the Trinity.[3] While Larkin does not declare a faith position in "praying // firs \\ attenuate", the poem nevertheless communicates a sense of interconnection and evolving relation that brings together all created things, material and anagogic.

With reference to Karen Barad's work on entanglement, I argue in this essay that "praying // firs \\ attenuate" is an example of how Larkin finds in poetry a form that initiates an intimacy with creation that shifts the focus from the poet's relationship with the world to the assemblage of the relationship itself. This assemblage is rhizomatic and interwoven, a structure that offers a series of co-ordinates by which the hidden connections between all matter—nature, society, God—can be determined.[4] But it is also a relationship that keeps the reader entangled in connections that otherwise appear scarce or lost. Readers new to Larkin will immediately notice the repetition and resonance of words like "scarcity", "almost", "reduction", and "closing" for him, a terminology that, as Larkin claims, frees him from "endless debates about absence" to explore "plenitude on the one hand" and "rarity on the other".[5] By this, Larkin means that his work allows for attention to the tremendous gifts given by the natural and divine amidst the "scarce" conditions of a world diminished by consumerism, competition, and disenchantment. The abundance of the language in which he relates this scarcity transforms the sites he describes into dwelling places in which the reader might turn from the page to the specificity of trees and plants, prayer, and revelation. In doing so, I suggest, Larkin moves the reader from an initial state of impasse (or "stalemate" as he writes in the poem) in which she is overwhelmed by his layered meanings into a condition of deep thankfulness for the intricate synthesis of all things laid bare in his poetry. This essay close reads sections from "praying // firs \\ attenuate" to illuminate how the poem grants agency to both the material and immaterial, ecological and sacred in order to reveal their entanglement with each other, an entanglement that keeps the reader attuned to the specificity of both the natural and divine without fetishizing either.

Towards the end of "praying // firs \\ attenuate", Larkin's eponymous fir trees call out to the divine in a prayerful paralysis in which they "invoke the stalemate of prayer" rather than "trust their spires to it".[6] This is one of many assessments of the vertical axis made in the poem: the firs do not believe or trust that their spires can reach up towards the possibility of transcendence that lies beyond the horizon, but nevertheless appeal to prayer as a call or song:

> Something still not cryable in this soil　　that firs won't trust their
> spires to it　　they do, however, invoke the stalemate of prayer　any
> sung throng might be a freshening-towards if firs were ever stockpiled:
> they would curtain the air, not spend prayer on safeguards　no such
> intimation without intimidation stalking the safety, towering the

2　(Larkin 2014, part VII, p. 191).
3　On perichoresis and poetry see (Charlton 2014).
4　(Prynne 2013); Prynne claims Larkin's poetry is rhizomatic.
5　In (Hardy and Larkin 2006).
6　(Larkin 2014, part VII, p. 192).

> entrapment fir　　signals are not so singular but squander well like
> prayer.[7]

These lines suggest that song might enact the new life and redemption summoned in prayer by becoming a "freshening-towards" that horizon through the gathering of the trees. But Larkin uses the word "stockpiled" to describe this gathering: if "firs were ever stockpiled" they would then "curtain the air", he writes, and "not spend prayer on safeguards".[8] The notion of the stockpile indicates that these trees might reach vertically and transcendentally upwards if their being was translated into that of accumulated goods kept in reserve for later use during emergency periods of shortage. In an ecological sense, the image is brutal, indicating a graveyard of piled-up tree corpses cut down by the human for the use of humans in an era defined by its excessive consumption. But Larkin marries this ecological sense with a religious thinking in which the trees take off from the horizontal ground in which they are rooted to rise vertiginously but slowly upwards. They speak this journey through what Larkin calls "fir signals".[9] That plants and trees can communicate is as familiar to the reader of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6. 28), in which the lilies speak God's truth, as it is to ecocriticism. As Eduardo Kohn argues in *How Forests Think*, all living things seek to represent themselves through a "semiosis" not equivalent to human language (Kohn 2013). By thinking of trees and plants as "selves", the observer can make sense of their ability to communicate through vibrating sounds, fungal networks, and their ability to differentiate soil and mineral types. As presences with which humans engage, the vegetal also decentres the human to create an alternative religious ecology in which the fir trees map a struggle to reach the edge of the divine also encountered by the human (Latour 2014, p. 5). In Larkin's work the centring of the fir trees as that which reaches towards the edge of the divine demarcates their encounter as one of limit and insufficiency: they do not find or locate God in their gridlocked prayer, but rather reveal the process of striving towards revelation as scarce, weak, and reduced.

But Larkin's rich poetics always pushes back against this scarcity. In a syntax that tirelessly repeats and rethinks forests, woods, plantations and plant life, he answers material and spiritual limitation with linguistic abundance. As the theologian John Milbank argues, Larkin's poetry is "a thicket" in which "stunningly beautiful phrases" are buried like "tangled shapes or blooms in a complex and even untidy ditch".[10] His words thus incarnate entanglement, a concept that indicates a participatory way of thinking and living in which things are recognizable as different and separate, but interact to manifest a new state. Entanglement does not describe a divinity that "visits" the world and is caught up within it: rather it suggests that the spiritual pervades the everyday and moves across it (or, as I suggest in a moment, is "diffracted" across it) so that the human, nonhuman and divine are at once distinct and joined. Particularity of this trinity of life forms is rescued by Larkin's ability to "tear" the text to reveal new meanings within the repeated, and so offers a "spiritual-political resistance" to the human will to sever itself from the non-human and sacral.[11] The supplicate, doubled back and forward slashes that hold up his title, for example, visually cut between the words with which the poem commences, but also reconnect them: a poem is recognizable through its "lined out" form and Larkin's slashes also serve to remind the reader what kind of text she reads. The epigraphs to "praying // firs \\ attenuate"—by Philippe Jaccottet, Alice Oswald and Ed Dorn—also draw the reader into a framework in which the natural and spiritual almost touch but are prevented from doing so by human intervention. Oswald's "Think of ten quiet trees with their nerves in the air", for example, connects visually to the firs' failed attempt to pray "upwards", but the line also gestures to a hypersensitive, nervy connection

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7　(Larkin 2014, part VII, p. 192).
8　(Larkin 2014, part VII, p. 192).
9　(Larkin 2014, part VII, p. 192).
10　John Milbank, "'The Beckoning Obstruction': On the theme of scarcity in the poetry of Peter Larkin", unpublished essay; quoted with permission of the author.
11　"Spiritual-political resistance" is Edmund Hardy's phrase, in (Hardy and Larkin 2006).

between the trees and that towards which they rise (Oswald 1996, p. 35). Their leaves, sprays, and twigs are exposed to an unseen that nevertheless moves them in their quietude. These stilled trees, cited from Oswald's poem "The Apple Shed", are not just quiet but quietist: like upturned jellyfish caught in a storm, their nervy branches taper skyward, tentacles swept up by the wind's force. These antrorse limbs meet Larkin's praying firs, their thinning reach attenuated and elevated into his "gentler ecology / of mission", in which they are sent out and up for the purpose of an unspecified but inclusive, or "entangled", salvation.

Entanglement invokes a mutual pervasion in its understanding of the way particles of energy or matter can become correlated in pairs and "share" an existence, or salvation as Larkin poem intimates, even when removed from each other. As Barad argues in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, reality is constituted by meetings between things even when those things are not "proximate in space and time" (Barad 2007, p. 74). Space, time, and matter have no existence prior to these meetings: they do not "interact" (as independent entities that come together), but rather "intra-act" (all entities arise from an ontological inseparability). For Barad, these intra-actions imply that everything is connected and so ethically responsible for "the reconfigurings of which we are a part" (Barad 2007, p. 93). To make her case, she borrows Donna Haraway's strategy of "diffraction" or the bending of waves of light to envision a critical practice that sets itself up as an alternative to "reflection". In quantum physics, diffraction is specifically related to the way light behaves at once like a particle (matter moves in a single trajectory) and a wave (matter spreads or radiates and travels outwards). Where reflection invokes mirroring and simulation (particles bounce off surfaces to repeat a set image and are committed to representationalism), diffraction registers process, movement and "consequential meanings" (able to acknowledge difference, contingency and intra-action).[12] For Haraway, diffraction provides a record of specific histories of "interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference": an example is her reading of the material development of the safety-pin through its entanglement with the steel and plastics industries, and through narratives of safety and security (Haraway and Goodeve 2000, pp. 102, 105). Similarly Barad traces the agency and historicity of matter itself in order to shift expectations of matter as "a passive and blank slate" to understand it instead as "substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing" (Barad 2007, pp. 150–51). What we perceive through phenomenological experience is, then, the smallest units of material coming together through ongoing intra-activity and entanglement. As "matter(ing)" articulates and configures the world, it also presses the question "what matters?" to deliver an ethical imperative about "what matters and what is excluded from mattering" (Barad 2007, pp. 151, 220).

To address the issue of "what matters" at the conclusion of her book, Barad turns, not to quantum science, but to a Levinasian ethics of responsibility to the other as the ground of human experience (Barad 2007, p. 391). Like other philosophers of entanglement—Haraway, but also Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett—Barad cannot help but engage with the religious as that which gives voice to "an incarnate relation" that counters the "metaphysics of individualism" (Barad 2007, pp. 392–93). Haraway states directly that her ability to conceptualize the relationship between different kinds of material and things is "inherited" from "sacramentalism" and a "Catholic relationship to the Eucharist" (Haraway and Goodeve 2000, p. 141). Her embrace of "Catholic sensibility" is in tune with Barad's Levinasian resolve to meet "each moment", Latour's faithful commitment to a politics of things in which humans are entangled and incarnated, and Bennett's call for a "litany, a kind of Nicene Creed for would-be vital materialists" ("I believe in one matter-energy, the maker of things seen and unseen") (Haraway and Goodeve 2000, p. 141; Barad 2007, p. 396; Bennett 2010, p. 122; Latour 2008, pp. 1–13). A more explicit reading of Christianity and entanglement is offered by Christopher Baker, Thomas James, and John Reader, who argue for a return to a "radically reformulated version of Christian realism" as a "non-anthropocentric, networked, flexible

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[12]　Donna J. Haraway, Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan@_Meets_OncoMouse™ qtd. in (Barad 2007, p. 71).

and immanentist materialism" via "theologemes" ("building blocks of ideas or myths that contain theological content") (Baker et al. 2015, pp. 3–5). God is thus diffracted in a horizontal immanence in which entangled entities create the possibilities for "radical and systematic change" driven by a "theology of hope" open to "multiple possibilities, rather than a foreclosed single trajectory of linear progression" (Baker et al. 2015, p. 7). For Milbank, poetry reveals these possibilities by "hovering" between "the invocation of real phenomenal presences on the one hand, and narrations that mingle the historical with the fantastic, and the actual with the possible, on the other". In addressing the created and uncreated, poetry comes to "a finally meaningful real, a mattering that is, indeed, also matter, also the real ground beneath our feet" (Milbank 2008, p. 3).

Larkin's poetic wooded landscapes imagine this "meaningful real" by both invoking trees and following them as if they provide a path into presence. The effect of becoming entangled by the firs is not to retreat into a pastoral remove from the world, but to become oriented towards God. The beginning of part VII reads:

> The huddle of needle is sustained hindrance (vertical duress)   but
> given a latitude slimmer than entanglement in fir   firs are not simply,
> but an arc to their staying put with offcuts of prayer[13]

The fir is identifiable through its clusters of needles that form an interruption, a "hindrance", to the bracketed ("vertical duress"). This rupture of the axis associated with the transcendence is realised by both the architecture of the fir and the words that follow the "duress": "but" and "given". The conical shape of the fir means that its branches curve out rather than point directly up: the band of needles thus thwart the constraining force of vertical movement by maintaining their work of intervention. This implicit critique of a three-tiered cosmology in which heaven, earth, and hell sit in an upright relation to each other is disclosed, not only by the action of the firs' leaves, but also in the bracketing of this vertical pressure. It is simultaneously alleviated by the word "but", removed as it is from the rest of the line to connect it with the subsequent one, but positioned here so not to diminish the impact of the word "given". Giving, gift, given again stand in relation to scarcity. The possibility of gift dedicates the reader to what Larkin calls in his book on Wordsworth and Coleridge a "sacral horizon", one that is forever anticipated but never arrived at (Larkin 2012, p. 114). Earlier in "praying // firs \\ attenuate", this finds form in the idea of "a gift depleted enough to thin forwards of entire horizon".[14] Here, the anticipation of the horizon serves as a border of revelation, one that also "thins" out into a margin or "latitude" that, because it is "slimmer than entanglement in fir", grants the reader a locale from which to observe entanglement. If diffraction reveals entanglement, then the arc solicits both the curve of the needles that so effectively displaces the vertical and the transcendent, as well as the electrical spark ignited by the flow of energy made across a gap in a circuit. The firs are certainly "not simply" in this moment of luminosity: the arc only enables a stability or "staying put" to make space for the reader to find in them "offcuts of prayer".

As offcuts of prayer, rather than complete devotional texts or lines of sacred knowledge, the trees resist simplification and become a form of diffracted praise, an ethics of thankfulness and prayer. As David Farrier notes, Larkin explores entanglement as a "matter of ethics" as well as "a fact of being", his "incomplete", "sparse", and "networked" language replacing linear meaning for a "hovering sense".[15] The elements in his poetry diffract because they overlap, commingle, and intra-act as relational resources resisting categorization as individual and disentangled sites of resource or waste. For Larkin, the world is not a series of atomized geographic areas that can be exploited to the

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13 (Larkin 2014, part VII, p. 191).
14 (Larkin 2014, part III, p. 174).
15 (David Farrier, "How do industrial forests think? Pine Trees, Pylons, and Peter Larkin's Plantationocene Poetics", paper given at the "World Literature and Dissent" colloquium, University of St Andrews, 17–18 June 2016; quoted with permission of the author.

point of destruction and ruin by environmental and economic damage. Against a reading of creation as a series of 'sacrifice zones' (geographic areas permanently scarred by environmental damage), Larkin invokes the notion of the 'sacred grove', communally protected forests or wooded areas deemed holy by specific cultures and religious groups. Diffracted praise, a thankfulness that moves with and for the things that utter it, founds a religious thinking that relates to life as the becoming of a sacral entanglement so that the "vertical" and "horizontal", transcendent and immanent, are overgrown by an abundance of "firs in faith" and "firs at praise".[16] As one of the oldest forms of life (the *pinaceae* family can be traced back one hundred millions years), the firs grant an encounter what has always been there, and so conjure an encounter with a sense of the unconditional. In doing so they inhabit the sacral horizon to which the subject is drawn, but stay silent in their witness to its impossibility. The prayer the firs embody is thus muted even as they inhabit it:

> Pray the "as nothing" of a not nothing of its asides towards promise:
> dismantling is not an unsheltering　　if dispossessed then its actant
> scope companions on behalf-of, there is no posse not already greeted
> in its shorter grain　　meted out in a less-than not going without, no
> provisioned comparisons of lack

The firs bring prayer into being here through the "promise" of its "asides", a word that delineates the privacy or reserve of its expression (as an "aside"), as well as the sides of its own borders.[17] Significant here is Larkin's deft ability to find a way to signal nothing by creating the sacred space of the firs in words: as the firs promise, "dismantling is not an unsheltering".[18] This shaping of a poetics that disassembles Christianity without giving up its sanctuary speaks to the "depleted" or scarce gift.

The idea of the "gift depleted" is one that comes after a series of scarcities: prayer as "mute", a "containment" "unowned", an "other-than not" and a "world's non-origin".[19] Within this passage the gift is emptied out and stretched, "attenuated", into a horizon that explores the premise of "givenness" as a way of moving towards relationship. While the poem remains "scarce"—it cannot reveal or promise relationality—it can attempt a reconnection with what Larkin calls elsewhere "the non-human and more than human universe" (Hardy and Larkin 2006). In this the connection between the ecological and the sacred is made apparent. The shortage that scarcity acknowledges for Larkin pertains both to consumable goods and their exhaustion in the face of unlimited growth, but also to sources of belief, devotion and inspiration. While markets produce an ever-more desperate dependence on the world to meet a seemingly insatiable desire for things and experiences, Larkin reads scarcity as a diminished gift that unconditionally "gives", but under the conditions of lessness or loss. For example, the poem's attempt to offer relationality when it cannot directly communicate with the reader creates a "tensionality", and so potentiality, of being "in relation to". This being-in-relation-to is invoked through what Larkin calls "a reservoir of accompaniment" that goes deep but is not easily heard (Hardy and Larkin 2006). The companionable soundtrack that does sound out, however, has a trace in prayer's untimely abundance, a kind of encrypted music held at bay by a woodland that holds all in reserve by "up" coding its promise in a closed-off cipher that hints at transcendence:

> to field any reserve before a sieve of exfiltration　　how abundant
> prayer moves through the brittle shepherding of its　texture its sizing-
> at, arising at a common asymmetry of rarities
>
> 　　awaits a gentler ecology
> 　　　　　of mission at this un-

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[16]　(Larkin 2014, part I, p. 163).
[17]　(Larkin 2014, part III, p. 174).
[18]　(Larkin 2014, part III, p. 174).
[19]　(Larkin 2014, part III, p. 174).

> ripe upcoding
> of the woods
>
> do not pray
>   in the guise of another
>   instilment   let the
>   firs be their own
>   surplus of salience
>
> this gives a numinous dis-
>   enclosure at the pull of
>   newly contingent enclave[20]

The passage enacts an entangled thinking through a series of ecological and ontological "riffs" that tune into language's potential to embody praise and devotion. Yet there is no institutional authority to direct such prayer here: "do not pray/in the guise of another/instilment", Larkin writes, refusing as he does any gradual drip of religious ideology that might stealthily imbue or instil. Instead, the reader is liberated to take off from Larkin's words into a thinking able to register a continually happening world through the unknowable and scarce, as well as the familiar and present.

Interconnection and entanglement with the unknowable and scarce is also tuned into through the poem's acoustic and theological echo of other poets. In Larkin's "let the/firs", the reader can hear the "let" and "for" lines that distinguish Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno* (1759–1763), for example:

> Let Amasiah bless with the Chaffer—the top of the tree is for the brow of the champion,
>   who has given the glory to God [...]
>
> Let Helon rejoice with the Woodpecker—the Lord encourage the propagation of trees!
> *For the merciful man is merciful to his beast, and to the trees that give them shelter.* [...]
>
> Let Pedahel rejoice with Pityocampa who eateth his house in the pine.
> *For they began with grubbing up my trees and now they have excluded the planter.*[21]

Smart's own religious ecology echoes through Larkin's invocation to let "the firs be". In this letting, Larkin acknowledges "their own/surplus of salience", and so evokes the way the firs go beyond human categories to block our attempts to demystify or explain them away ([Hardy and Larkin 2006](#)). Prayer too is "abundant" when it "moves through" and beyond those regulatory structures that appear to tend and guard its words, but do so only through an at once hard and breakable "brittle" reading of its complex fabric. The weave of Larkin's language, by contrast, is stretchable and ductile, re-sizing and filtering prayer to "sieve" out the generic into a "common asymmetry of rarities". Against the neat complacencies of symmetry, harmony, and measure, the phrase "asymmetry of rarities" denotes an uneven correspondence (reminding us that human kinship with any other is frequently discordant), one in which prayer is re-thought as something exceptional, infrequent, and unusual. Larkin's prayer issues no demands, but waits patiently for a "gentler ecology", relationship and settlement inside the prolonged intervals between the infrequent and scarce pulses of the poem's rhythm. These pulses become more audible in the form taken by the shorter lines: the four, five, and three line stanzas offer verse form as a way to reach the horizon through a "numinous dis-/enclosure", wherein the firs set free the spirit they embody. This reference to the numen and enclosure again brings together the sacred with the ecological, the numen's liberation rejecting attempts to fence off either God or the firs from public attention. By countering both land enclosure and privatized religiosity, Larkin creates a numinous commons that grants the divine through a poetic "giving" revealed in his syntax.

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[20]   ([Larkin 2014](#), part III, p. 177).
[21]   ([Smart and Williamson 1980](#)) I, Fragment A, line 94; Fragment B, line 13; Fragment B, line 108..

Neither nostalgically "whole" nor straightforwardly accessible, the syntax nevertheless dovetails into a "strong incompleteness" in which a horizon of hope might be perceived. This "strong incompleteness" demarcates the edge of our perception even as it makes audible poetry as "an exploration of what must not be allowed to be lost" (Larkin 2012, p. 94). While we long to make sense of our world by dividing its territory into parts that we name, identify and catalogue, Larkin exposes this impulse as absolutist and violent. As our desire to capitalize on and control morphs into brutality, we denounce the outcome as accidental, "newly contingent", refusing responsibility for our crimes.

Larkin, however, peacefully meets the "pull of/newly contingent enclave" with grace through nature, the firs "giving" to us a chance to speak through a sacred call.[22] Intoning through Larkin's scarce, dense and compressed language, this numinous cry orients the reader's attention to referents that allow for relational imaginings. Communally confirmed by the firs' gifts, our damaged engagement with the non-human and more-than-human begins its repair. As Larkin argues in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Promising Losses*: "The human imagination makes up or makes good the difference suffered within such an insecure connection, a scarcity which can prove innovative to the imagination itself" (Larkin 2012, p. 86). Larkin's words, in both prose and poetic form, witness a transformation of poetry's phenomenological limits into sensory clues through which we are relieved of the burdens of religion as magic into a "spirituality of hiddenness" or "attenuation of the transcendent".[23] Removed from its negation as add-on metaphysics, the divine becomes, as William Desmond writes, a "more than the whole that lacks nothing" (Desmond 1987, p. 229). Through his own poetizing of scarcity, Larkin locates the reader at the border of revelation to keep her at a distance from those counterfeit deities forged "in the guise of another" that, caught in their own fiction, crumble into base authority or empty emotion. It is the reverie we experience at this "hospitable horizon" that "gives" to us "a numinous dis-/enclosure", or as Larkin writes elsewhere, "a dedication arising out of the incompleteness of the bond between a graced imagination and nature".[24] That this dedication is relational, partial and mysterious for Larkin, as it was for Smart, is to secure it as the ground of an "*environment* of union" whereon "everything that rises must converge" (De Chardin 1964, p. 192).

Citing Pierre Teilhard De Chardin at the end of this reading places Larkin within a Catholic tradition that rejects a nihilistic position on life. Teilhard's statement is part of a reflection on the "concept of the place of Man in Nature" and, like Larkin, he reads this as "charged with a thousand differing potentialities, elastic and even fluid—indivisible" (De Chardin 1964, p. 191). Recognizing the diversity of views on such thought (his example is the "hostility" between "the Marxist and the Christian", each convinced by his own "doctrine" but joined in "equal faith in Man"), Teilhard argues for a shared hope created, not by rules, but by topophilia (it is "not a *formula*" but an "*environment* of union") (De Chardin 1964, pp. 191–92). This "primordial" and "elemental" faith in place is at play in "praying // firs \\ attenuate", but it is an unlimited and participatory one that works in relationship with all matter, created and uncreated. Larkin affirms specific sites of matter as given and gifted, and curves our attention towards them like the growth of a branch that bends into its habitat. Larkin describes this movement in a short preface to his 2010 poem, "Brushwood by Inflection", through the "inflection point", a joint where the branch shifts its direction "outwards" to move either up or down.[25] The inflection point's register of any shift in concavity complicates the vertical momentum of the tree, not least because as branches thicken, they often break off and become brushwood and undergrowth. These "break-offs" are diffracting moments in which the history of the tree is now traceable in its "matted", "strewn" and entangled form, one Larkin's poetry realizes in relation to its ethical meaning as interconnectedness. The tree's trajectory thus recalls Milbank's notion of the diagonal that is both dependent on the co-ordinates of up and down even as it exceeds them as a

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22　See (Chrétien 2003; Chrétien 2004).
23　Email correspondence with Peter Larkin, 15 January 2015.
24　(Larkin 2001, p. xii; Larkin 2012, p. 105).
25　Peter Larkin, "Note" to "Brushwood by Inflection (2010)", in (Larkin 2014, pp. 7–34).

way of participating with both. For Milbank, only poetry can interrupt the flow of time and space by "diagonalizing out" of our known co-ordinates of creation to "glorify and rectify" an unknown cosmos.[26] Larkin's poetry imagines a way of reading this cosmos by making present the entangled detail of matter by working through its minutiae. His descriptions both adjust our perception even as they draw it towards a limit, a horizon, at which the possibility of gift is continually renewed. As Larkin reminds us, to the extent that human life continues, albeit unevenly and unequally, the world does keep giving. The maze-like patterns of rhythm and connected meanings in his poetry responsibly register this plenitude by restricting it into a poetic form that presents the scarce as a gateway into the gift. It is in this lowly givenness that Larkin's poetry takes us deeper into "new horizons of relation" that are charted through an entanglement that refuses to distinguish the earthly from the divine, or the immanent from the transcendent (Hall and Larkin 2010).

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26 See (Milbank 2008, pp. 3, 7; Milbank 2007).

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