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What is Environmental Consciousness? A Thematic Cluster



Excerpt from “Seeds:” Seed 5. Tiny house, caracol, snail +
Seed 19. SARS-CoV-2

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Excerpt from “Seeds:” Seed 5. Tiny house, caracol, snail + Seed 19. SARS-CoV-2

by Kim Trainor



About the Author

Kim Trainor is the granddaughter of an Irish banjo player and a Polish faller who worked in logging camps around Port Alberni in the 1930s. Ledi was a finalist for the 2019 Raymond Souster Award. Bluegrass will appear with Icehouse Press in 2022. Her poetry films, created with the musician Hazel Fairbairn, have screened at the Berlin ZEBRA Poetry Film Festival 2020 and will appear at the Ninth International Film Festival in Athens, Greece in 2021. She teaches in the English Department at Douglas College and lives in Vancouver, unceded homelands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

Excerpt from “Seeds:” Seed 5. Tiny house, caracol, snail + Seed 19. SARS-CoV-2

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Poet’s Statement: “Seeds,” a sequence from a poetry manuscript in progress called *Tell me, where do we go from here?*, thinks about forms of resistance, survival, and emergence in the context of climate change and the sixth mass extinction. Each numbered section or “seed” centres on a different organism or human-made object: lentil, yellow glacier lily, codex, tardigrade, the order Hymenoptera, among others. The *Vespa orientalis*, for example, as noted by Robert Bringhurst in *Learning to Die*, has evolved a band of the obscure pigment Xanthopterin to draw sunlight out of air and generate a small voltage. Tiny houses, mobile wood frame cabins outfitted with solar panels, are being built by the Tiny House Warriors in unceded Secwepemc Territory in the interior of BC to challenge the construction of the Trans Mountain Pipeline. In the following excerpt, I have included seeds 5 and 17—“Tiny house, caracol, snail,” which considers the snail’s logorhythmic spiral as blueprint for human communities, and “SARS-Cov-2,” which looks slantwise at the virion’s horizontal gene transfer as model for resilience. “Seeds” is inspired in part by *The Ecologist’s* 1972 report, *A Blueprint for Survival*, which was warning almost half a century ago of species loss, pollutants, population demands on food and water, the harmful effects of industrial-scale agriculture, and the global economy’s dangerous reliance on fossil fuels. Each “seed” in this long poem might be read as blueprint, whether simple human-made tool or complex organism driven by its DNA to adapt to and respond to the current existential threat, each showing a different way of being in the world. I’m also interested in the idea of attention as a moral act, as observed by the neuroscientist Iain McGilchrist (2019): “[w]ithout alertness, we are as if asleep, unresponsive to the world around us . . . without vigilance, we cannot become aware of anything we do not already know” (39). I want to focus attention as a form of respect for these organisms, not as resources, but as beings in their own right, withdrawn, dark noumena.

5. TINY HOUSE, CARACOL, SNAIL



We learned to advance while still hiding until January 1. This is when the seed grew, when we brought ourselves into the light. On January 1, 1994, we brought our dreams and hopes throughout Mexico and the world—and we will continue to care for this seed. This seed of ours we are giving for our children. We hope you all will struggle even though it is in a different form. The struggle [is] for everybody...

—testimony by Maribel, at the Third Encuentro of Zapatista Women and the Women of the World, La Garrucha, December 2007

The true revolutionary needs to be as patient as a snail.

—Rebecca Solnit, “Revolution of the Snails: Encounters with the Zapatistas”

The snails creep at a pace of one millimetre per second across the earth’s bright and shuttered surfaces, spikes, ditches, ravines, hollows.

Earth revolves around the sun, a minor star, spins on its axis.

The revolution has begun. All along the pipeline the Tiny House Warriors are placing tiny houses to defend unceded Secwepemc Territory. *We are going big by going small.*

In Chiapas, the Zapatistas form their caracoles. *Their revolution spirals outward and backward, away from some of the colossal mistakes of capitalism’s savage alienation, industrialism’s regimentalism, toward old ways and small things.*

The snail shell is the same shape as our cochlea, spiral cavity in a bony labyrinth receiving sound as vibration, transferred to nerve impulse.

A logorhythmic spiral, *κοχλίας*, *caracol*, its shape unaltered with each successive curve.

The approach of an insect to a light, a hawk to its prey. The Milky Way—the arms of spiral galaxies. Our corneal nerves.

$$r = ae^{k\varphi}, \quad \varphi \in \mathbb{R},$$

The caracoles will be like doors to enter into the communities and for the communities to

*come out; like windows to see us inside and also for us to see outside; like
loudspeakers in order to send far and wide our word and also to hear the words
from the one who is far away.*

The words are held in the names of each caracol—*Flourishing the rebellious seed.
Dignified spiral wearing the colors of humanity in memory of the fallen ones. The
heart of rebellious seeds collective, memory of Comrade Galleano. Mother of the
sea snails of our dreams.*

The soft parts of the snail are made of 81% water, 11% protein, 4% ash and other minor
organic components. It builds its shell from calcium and conchiolin, over a
blanket of nacre, *a resilient composite material . . . known as mother of pearl.*

To build the tiny houses, *supporters can bring carpentry/construction tools of all kinds to
Spartacus Books. Some basic tools you might consider donating include: hammer,
tape measure, chalk line, and clamp, wood chisel, pry bar, saw horse, chainsaw,
table saw, wrenches, screwdrivers, pliers, carpenter’s pencil, utility knife, tin snips,
nail puller/cat’s paw.*

Tools to build small things, tiny houses, caracoles, to resist the geopolitics of plunder.
*There are currently 77 military bases in Chiapas, most of them located in the autonomous
regions controlled by the Zapatistas or in areas rich in natural resources: water,
uranium, and the barite used for fracking and the drilling of oil wells.*

The snails never stop building their shells. Umbilicus. Aperture. Suture. Whorl.
*Ten tiny houses will be built and placed strategically along the 518km Trans Mountain
pipeline route to assert Secwepemc Law and jurisdiction and block access to this
pipeline . . . We are going big by going small.*

The smallest snail, *Angustopila dominikae*, could slip through the eye of a needle.

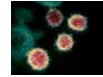
The small caracoles act as models for the world. *We hope you all will struggle even though
it is in a different form.*

*The tiny House Warriors are building something beautiful that models hope, possibility and
solutions to the world. We invite anyone and everyone to join us.*

The snail is building its shell, *spira mirabilis*, miraculous spiral. A window, a door, an ear,
a word, a world.

The small are making new worlds.

17. SARS-CoV-2



a spectrum may exist between what is certainly alive and what is not. A rock is not alive. . . . But what about a seed? A seed . . . has a potential for life, and it may be destroyed. In this regard, viruses resemble seeds more than they do live cells. . . . So life itself is an emergent, complex state, but it is made from the same fundamental, physical building blocks that constitute a virus...though not fully alive . . . they verge on life.

—Luis P. Villarreal, 2004

Between the first and the second wave they'd warned will come by Fall we hiked Hollyburn to Blue Gentian Lake. First time in the forest after months of sheltering in place, surfacing through bluegreen tree light. Western hemlock, sword fern, pink twists of salmonberry, then buds and unfurled leaves as we climbed past rusted litter of needles, second growth and a skid road, back to an earlier season, before clearcuts, before the virus, to ancient cedars and snow. Trying to see again, all the little things, and what I can't see, microscopic tardigrade, zooid, diatom, amoeba, alga, virion—this *organism at the edge of life*, 50 nanometers in diameter, slip of RNA and capsid that has slowed the world, slipped sideways from pangolin to human, or escaped from a virology lab in Wuhan.

Riboviria | Orthornavirae |

Pisuviricota | Pisoniviricetes | Nidovirales | Coronaviridae | Betacoronavirus | Sarbecovirus | SARS-CoV-2, with an affinity to the *receptor angiotensin converting enzyme 2 (ACE2)* on human cells. In the electron micrograph it looks like a child's crayon drawing of a flower or maybe a sea monster—red violet circled by goldenrod and studded with little turquoise spikes. There are ten million viruses in a teaspoon of seawater. Virions stream around the earth, above the weather, all rain down 800 million on every square metre, rain down RNA, rain DNA. O little virions.

O diatoms. O tardigrades. O mosses. O virion of the horizontal
gene transfer. Reservoir of genetic diversity. Driver of evolution.
O virion of the last universal common ancestor.

As we climbed I touched

the blanket of mosses scrawled on every ancient cedar along
the path’s edge. I didn’t have words to identify each kind, or even to know
if it was moss or liverwort. Each expressing a genetic language
in green structures. Gametophyte. Rhizoid. Feathered or slender.
Phyllids. Archegonia and antheridia. The filamentous seta of
sporophytes. Oregon leafmoss. Juniper haircap. Hoary rock. Pipecleaner.
Sphagnum. Snow—suddenly, more, snow as we ascended to
Blue Gentian, more and more, the lake still frozen, winter still.
But we cannot go back. We are an emergent, complex state,
evolving. Cro-Magnon sewing needles and antler-tipped spears.
Ochre and hematite drawings of the spirits of animals.
Smart phones and Gore-Tex and bicycles. Penicillin. CRISPR.
Our technologies. Our alphabets and poems. Our rituals. The stories
we tell of our future. We can interrupt the usual signals.
We can’t go back. But we can go sideways. We can change.

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