Zemlja and Pioneer Day

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Zemlja and Pioneer Day

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Zemlja*

I am the coloniser and
the colonised
the zemlja,
an egg-timer filled with
beads of sand, blood and kiša
that I cannot hold or contain,
runs through my fingers.

I sprint through the freshly rotary-hoed bed
the sand searing February coals,
my feet sinking up to my ankles
like poofing through silken powder,
or a virgin snow fall I have never known
I stop; “Is three minutes all I have
before I burn to dust, to glass?”

My feet could be the roots
of a sprouting seed, pressed into
the soil with an index finger,
the blue beads of NPK fertiliser and
butterfly sprinklers rusty red
coaxing me to grow
from deep below,
from under,
from the bore,
from the pre-human aquifer,
but they will never be —

I am a seedling
plucked from my mother’s womb
the spongy organ of the placenta
entwined within
the tendrils of my
embryonic roots,
transplanted into
the sandy sandy sand sand
to grow devotional
to the zemlja of a
Western land.

A foreign land
a foreign sand
My land. My sand.
An Other’s land

outside
(and inside)
Other and all,
coloniser and colonised —

I sprint four strides
“poof poof - poof poof”
across the ploughed bed,
into the shade, before
the 4pm sun turns me to dust —

* Zemlja means earth, soil, land, dirt, ground and country in Croatian and is pronounced ze’mlya /’zɛːmlja/.
Pioneer Day

Once I was a wilderness,
a poor common farmer,
a pioneer myth to take
you anywhere, as I
strummed the love songs
to be property, married,
my mouth pressed against
the wind of the first settlers free:
“To-ra-lee, to-ra-lee, to-ra-lie,
I’ll give you six ribbons
to tie back your hair.”

Once I was a Tuart seedling
planted on W.A.’s 150th year,
commemorative medallions
for all the school children,
a tongue controlled
with trinkets shiny.
The landed gentry
justify proceeds from
the convicts, left behind
in our own time, starving.
Aboriginal peoples in chains
a hiccup of history,
enslaved by the song
from the blue guitar:
“If I were the emperor
I'd build you six palaces
with six hundred servants
for comforting fare.”

Once I was a stick
with beer bottle caps,
a Murrumbidgee River Rattler,
hanging off the boat
with a garden out the back.
A communion wafer,
my first taste of damper
stuck like glue
to the roof of my mouth,
on Pioneer Day at school.
The lessons of Britannia,
starting again with nothing,
wasted on children

with thousands of years
of Empire-soaked feet.
The under-class is the bone
that is the back of a country;
that rare dirt a tune we share:
“But I am a simple man,
a poor common farmer.
So take my six ribbons
to tie back your hair.”
This poem was created in part, using a random text generator and the following works by Jon English and Thomas Stannage.

Works Cited
