

The Body of Work - Dorothy Porter's *Akhenaten*

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Abstract:

This article stages an 'imagendering' of Akhenaten, a contemporary collection of poems by Australian poet Dorothy Porter. Surviving sculptures of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten depict a hermaphroditic subject who is, for Porter, a muse of transgression. Her fascination is with his challenge to long-held creative conventions of Egyptian art, depicting himself with a combination of breasts, swollen belly, rounded thighs and a penis. This collection of poems is thus a site of gendered reinscription made possible by the death of Akhenaten's physical body. His bodily absence allows for Porter's textual presence. Operating in this speculative historical space, a space in which the body of work physiologically cross-dresses and engages in sexual play across the boundaries of masculine/feminine, history/poetry, symbolic/semiotic, this poetry demonstrates that language itself can never evade embodiment.

1 There are two names on the cover of Dorothy Porter's collection of poems, the poet's own name, and the name of her subject, the Egyptian pharaoh, Akhenaten. In this introductory space both identities and genders operate simultaneously but separately, while between the covers identities merge, gender distinctions dissolve, and history interplays with poetry in an unbound space made available by silence. Interpolated into this silence, Porter's poems speak of/for a long dead pharaoh in deliberately liminal and shifting ways, toying with palimpsests and challenging authenticity. In Porter's rendition of history, Akhenaten is an artist. She calls him "a visionary and a poet" (*Akhenaten* xiii) and reworks one of his hymns in her text, treating it as poetry and challenging authorial authenticity by casting his 'poem' in her collection. This shared vocation as poets is only one of the levels at which the distinction on the front cover between the two identities, one masculine, one feminine, begin to dissolve.

2 The starting point of this dissolution is the collection of sculptures that inspired Porter's poems. Akhenaten's strange physique, depicted in surviving limestone reliefs, has been understood by Egyptologists, and Porter, as artistic innovation. There are, however, alternative readings of the curvaceous, breasted man. Nicholas Reeve, in *Akhenaten: Egypt's false prophet*, maps the contentious research claiming that Akhenaten had a rare genetic disorder called Marfan's Syndrome. Some of the indicators of the disease include a raft of deformities applicable to the peculiar features visible in images of the pharaoh: tall stature and slender bones, long face, elongated limbs and skull, pigeon chest, wide pelvic girdle, localized distribution of subcutaneous fat, and misshapen outer ears. But Porter disregards this medicalized reading, seeing Akhenaten as deliberately rejecting established conventions both of artistic representation and of gender conformity. This version of events, this fascination with transgressive gender logics in the Akhenaten subject matter is, I am arguing, both

canvassed and mirrored in Porter's own poetry. The poems decommission a range of binary categories in ways so interwoven that this article looks beyond the visual representation of Akhenaten's multi-gendered body in order to understand his hermaphroditic effect on a number of oppositional logics operating in the world of this text. The Akhenaten image of multiple gender creates a faceted mirror in which the poet unravels a multiplicity of agendas.

3 Porter begins her writing with a prose introduction for Akhenaten in which he is credited with initiating a "bold adventure in the arts" (Porter, *Akhenaten* xiii). Porter's poetry can be read as an equally bold adventure, especially in terms of revisioning the gendered poetic subject. Art historians point out how "severely Akhenaten led his artists to break with tradition and to experiment with what is the only genuinely new style during the many millennia of Egyptian art" (Terrace and Fisher 121). His endeavours are as transgressive as Porter's own disregard for binary logics. But this collection offers more than the mirror-space for a poet imagining the life of another poet. Many of the slippages between Porter and her subject are specifically the outcome of silence, a silence in which poetic gestures can exist without being curtailed by historical facts. This pervasive silence operates because after Akhenaten's death the Egyptians tried to erase him from their records. Porter is explicit about this facet of her project, incorporating into her prose introduction the spaces in which she intends to write. She describes the pharaoh's silence as enforced:

On his death he was execrated as a heretic, his name removed from the monuments, his city abandoned and used as a quarry...The Egyptians wanted to forget the heady Akhenaten years as quickly as possible. (xiii)

Akhenaten finds a new existence in Porter's poems, a textual existence which serves as a kind of survival. Porter takes his erasure as her starting point, reinscribing his name in direct challenge to the Egyptians' attempted annihilation. Her poems are, then, not exactly revisions of history (although they resemble them). Unlike her literary feminist forebears like Virginia Woolf, Gilbert and Gubar, and Adrienne Rich, Porter validates not only that which history has forgotten, but chronicles silences which are indelibly etched in the remains themselves. She traces a wilful act of erasure, a *damnatio memoriae*. This poetic practice is thus not precisely an attempt at retrieval because central to Porter's adoption of Akhenaten is the silence of the essentially irretrievable.

4 There is a freedom inherent in the open relationship between poetry and history. Dismantling these categories allows Porter to undergo a kind of transference with her protagonist in ways that undermine structures central to the dominant discourse, namely, individuality and authenticity. It is this loss of individuation that shapes Porter's conception of her relationship with Akhenaten. She says of the pharaoh:

I found out as much about him as I could and then I trusted my own intuition. And obviously I used myself. Any book like this is clearly masked autobiographical writing. (Digby 3)

From behind this mask Porter can imagine herself as the decadent Egyptian who redefined the art of his time and indulged in unbridled sexual exploits that crossed between hetero- and homosexuality, and traversed the incest taboo. The reversal of this mask gives the pharaoh the language and experience of the Australian suburbanite, saying to his baby "give Mummy/ a big hug" (106). The finished product is like a poem in translation. More than re-vision, this poetry requires an act of creation or invention, a convergence of the self with the lost voice to create an altogether new Akhenaten-self. Like the 'tombeau' which Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes in *The Pink Guitar*, this poetry is "the collaboration between two poets, the dead and the living, [whose] interests...do not necessarily coincide....The classical tombeau ends in a draw" (Blau DuPlessis 41). The dead and the living meet in like circumstances in Porter's collection. And it is arguably in crossing the boundary between life and death that Porter also transgresses both an/other personality, gender, and the other discourse (other to poetry) of history.

5 What Porter finds in Akhenaten's silence, then, is what she refers to in an interview as "hypothetical space"(Digby 2), a silence in which to hear better. Perhaps this interpolation of the personal into the historical partly serves to make this poetic and fictionalised revision a mockery of the long-sanctified discourse of history. Porter mimics the role of historians in producing a vision of the past, yet antagonizes historical discourse by writing herself into the gaps creatively, a gesture while not antithetical to the suppositions made in historical writing, is at least outside the traditional notion of history as non-fiction. Francis Hartog deliberates on the *Histories* by Herodotus, the first historian, in a way that brings much to bear on this discussion:

The Histories are a mirror into which the historian never ceased to peer as he pondered his own identity: he was the looker looked at, the questioner questioned, who always ended up by declaring his own status and credentials. Was he an historian or a liar? (Hartog xxiii)

Writers of history, whether they are poets or historians, must ponder their own identity in this mirror. The vacillating dividing line between truth and fiction which began the supposition that Herodotus was in fact two people (one an historian, the other a liar) also signals a collision beneath one name, especially given that naming and accurate identity are typically crucial to the function of history.

6 For Porter this is as political in relation to gender as revisionist histories have been for

feminists. Porter has sought a kind of communion with both Akhenaten and silent space. If the two-way, two-faced relationships (inevitable to the forging of such bonds) are to become fertile poetic spaces, it is necessary to further unravel this collision between the 'other' and the self. Alphonse Lingis also recognises a kind of mirror in such processes. He says:

I find myself afflicted with the imperative that commands the other. I feel its weight as a force that weighs on my understanding. I find myself compelled to see his or her surfaces as ordered surfaces, exposed to me and ordering me, that is facing me. (27)

When Porter orchestrates her relationship to the lost and silenced voice of Akhenaten she peers into these mirrored spaces, both historical and personal, seeing the other, and seeing herself, and specifically seeing herself as a male figure who cross-dresses in terms of the representations of his physical body.

7 The boundaries of authenticity become contested sites in this collection, but it is gender, Porter argues, that shapes poetic endeavour. She claims that "women have not been given time, have not been given space, have not been given permission to be creative, but only in the cracks of male creativity" (Digby 2). This is perhaps the reason she chooses a history riddled with such cracks. She refers to the "enormous gaps" (Digby 2) in the Akhenaten story and describes her intellectual meeting with the pharaoh as one which defied her expectations of her own interest in the masculine/feminine dichotomy:

I had come to see the famous bust of his wife, Nefertiti, but it was the smirking, distorted, oddly beautiful face of Akhenaten that put out tentacles to my imagination. A strange confession from a feminist poet. (*Akhenaten* xiii)

But it is not such a strange confession given Porter's fascination with the liminal gender Akhenaten attributes to himself, and which she, in turn, exploits in her version of history. The story she tells of the pharaoh's life is one that questions any demarcation between the symbolic and the pre-language pulsions of the polymorphously perverse infant. But the lines she draws in the Egyptian sands are not entirely congruent with the ways in which feminists have read these differences across psychoanalytic phases.

8 Just as the visual representations of Akhenaten's body demonstrate a coexistence of male and female in one physical space, Porter's poetics employ coexistent gendered psychoanalytic categories: the (feminine) semiotic and the (masculine) symbolic. To claim that these categories are gendered follows some well-trodden philosophical paths (most famously those forged by Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva¹). The plural

¹ Like Toril Moi in her influential feminist reader *Sexual/Textual Politics*, I have taken these three women as representative proponents of Lacanian inspired feminist approaches, partly because they are arguably the most significant theorists of this school, and "partly because they are more closely concerned with the specific problems raised by women's relation to writing and language" (Moi 97).

semiotic, Kristeva claims, belongs to the maternal chora (what Lacan calls the Imaginary), while the symbolic entails the singular and phallogentric law of the father. Porter draws on these theoretical positions by playing with a logic of reversals that begins simply with her attraction to speaking through a male protagonist. She continues this preoccupation via her poetics, as both Porter and her Akhenaten are mutually engaged in breaching the boundaries of physically/linguistically wrought oppositional categories. This, of course, mobilizes the contradiction inherent in writing the semiotic, that is, using symbolic codes to access a pre-language state.

9 Akhenaten, both the collection and the pharaoh, is arguably dominated by the semiotic world of the pleasure principal. He refuses to concede to the law of his father by rejecting outright his father's favoured god Amun and devising his own new god inspired by his mother. But this law of the father, as Porter depicts it in her poetry, is strangely (hermaphroditically) dominated by the pulsions of the body. The father/King's god "Amun" is on numerous occasions likened to an anal fixation, replete with farts (14) and a "dirty nappy" (18). Akhenaten feels suffocated by these compulsions that are opposed to his own, as though Amun "spread his black bum / over my eyes and mouth" (3). Seemingly, then, the semiotic space of polymorphous desires, ruled by unbound and feminine logic, is here linked to the paternal law which the child is flouting. Thus the semiotic becomes associated with the father, while the symbolic order is dominated by a mother-politician who gives Akhenaten the new singular god Aten, the sun, as a deity.

10 As Porter explains in her introduction, Akhenaten is "credited with establishing the world's first monotheistic religion" (xiii). This singularity is decidedly patriarchal when read in opposition to the feminine plurality which would more logically be embodied by the pantheon of gods worshipped during the reign of Akhenaten's father. Monotheism is easily compared to phallogentrism, but Porter's text will not be pinned down by this gendered delineation. As described above, in the artistic representations Akhenaten commissioned during his reign, his likeness was variously adorned with androgynous combinations of breasts, swollen belly, rounded thighs, and penis. In Porter's poem "My Ka" an inner self is the subject of the sculptured depiction of the pharaoh:

My ka has big breasts
that can squirt milk as far
as Kush

My ka has fat thighs
as heavy as gold.

She hides her cock

but can flash for
ceremonial occasions. (38)

This inner self is a woman with a phallus. She shares both her gender and her fascination with power with Akhenaten's mother who "is a politician / and a good one / she loves power" (10).

11 The father/King is, by comparison, completely ineffectual. He:

 [...]plays
 in his inoffensive way
with his health
 or his harem

Mummy plays
 with gods
Mummy frightens
 iron. (10)

Arguably, Porter is here envisioning an Irigarayan bodily encounter with the mother (Irigaray 25). There is also a pun suggested by the Egyptian 'mummy' implying the relationship between the mother and death. As the ultimate satisfaction of desire, death is, of course, the unity finally achieved by the self which splits upon entry into the symbolic order.

12 However, these oppositions are colliding because the monotheistic worship of Aten seems here to belong to a semiotic relationship with the powerful mother. She "let Aten / loose / in my baby head" (12). For Porter's Akhenaten the maternally dominated semiotic persists beyond infancy and is textually manifest in the pharaoh's fascination with the functions of the body and physical, sensual pleasures which indicate these undirected and multifarious desires. For example, the satisfaction of sexual desires, in many forms, is made religious in this collection. Akhenaten tells the story of the birth of the god Horus, the Egyptian sky god, in the poem "Death and the Randy Vulture" (76). The tension between multiple bodily desires is palpable in this work. The vulture sees Osiris' penis and the poem asks "What is a poor vulture to do / eat it or fuck it? / Stomach and cunt / have a civil discussion" (76). The outcome of this discussion is that "cunt wins and Horus is conceived" (76). But closure is not so readily achieved in Porter's larger gender shifting vision of ancient Egypt as semiotic space.

13 Interestingly, in terms of the play of contradictions being mapped in this poetry, these bodily functions are often linked to the most symbolic practice — writing. It is when Akhenaten sits down to write a hymn that he is diverted by one of his servants and bodily pulsions. The telling verse reads:

 then Parenfer poured me

a jar of beer
that got bottomless
during his fart concert
oh, I pissed myself
laughing at his anal rendition
of Amun's Sed Hymn.

The toilet humour of this poetry offers a critique of the patriarchal religion in line with feminist notions that the feminine semiotic is exchanged for the masculine symbolic order when the child subject is subsumed into the law of the father. At this point Akhenaten employs the bodily logic of the semiotic space in order to resist, or at least temporarily divert, this shift into the symbolic order. This suspension occurs, paradoxically, while he is trying to call up this new order so as to write a hymn for his singular (and thus arguably patriarchal) god. At the end of the poem the commentary incorporates a description of "a donkey/ his black penis extended/ a happy erection in the sun/ / I watch him for luck/ and let my Hymn come" (50). Obviously, the collapse of meaning shared across the word "come" simultaneously refers to both ejaculation and to the outpouring of the words of the hymn. This sexual play in language is indicative of the slipperiness of these representations and the way that desire itself is a product of the symbolic order which substitutes its logic in place of the semiotic connection with the mother.

14 The anal phase of the polymorphously perverse infant is also linked to Akhenaten's homosexual and incestuous relationship with his brother. Their desire for each other during a sexual encounter is punctuated with the smell of "donkey shit" and the sound of "an old woman noisy in the palace toilet" (113). But the distinctions between the semiotic and symbolic are consistently blurred in the text, especially when the god Thoth, the ibis, "shits /with a quick squirt /on a library of papyrus" (37). A gesture which Akhenaten acknowledges is "strange behaviour/ for the god of scribes" (37). Arguably this is "strange" in that Thoth is male, and his engagement in writing positions him firmly in the symbolic order, but this positioning is undermined by his writing implement, his anus, which is the province of desires typically linked to the semiotic and maternally dominated bodily processes.

15 Porter's representation of Akhenaten's myriad sensual pleasures also encompasses his oral fixation made manifest in his request that the sculptor give him "a beautiful mouth" (31), but neither is the oral pleasure separate from the symbolic order. Akhenaten, as a poet of sensual and sexual sensations, tastes the words he chooses. The poem "Luminous" plays out these relationships between orders of knowledge:

Luminous

My mouth
spiced with sunlight

luminous

what a tasty word!

the juice
of a fresh melon

the spiked drink
of an erect nipple

luminous

my mouth sends Aten
incense (48)

In this poem, the oral fixation is neither separate to, nor precursor of, the symbolic order. The two are melded in a synaesthetic approach to language as a physical, sensual entity.

16 These collapsing boundaries between pre and post language states are as undivided as Akhenaten's visions of his hermaphroditic self. However, such self portraits are interestingly made abject in the text. The sculptor Bek reveals his revulsion in bodily ways when he asks: "Is that you, Pharaoh?/ He said and his voice/ shivered" (31). This question refers to the illustration of the feminized Akhenaten drawn in, as Akhenaten describes it, the "nauseating sand" (32). The shudder and the nausea are linked to what appear to be epileptic seizures which take hold of Pharaoh at crucial moments in the text. At these points the body takes control over the ruler of Egypt in ways that do not undermine the pharaoh as much as privilege the power of the physical body over this imagined historical world. After one such seizure Akhenaten prays to Aten, asking him to teach him how to live with the loss of control. This implies, in line with the theories, that the essentially phallogentric monotheism is inextricably linked to the abandonment of the semiotic as the phase in which the pulsions of the body dominate.

17 Such blurrings are equally crucial to the new monotheistic worship of Aten orchestrated by Akhenaten. The poetry tracks the inception, rein, and death of Aten and Akhenaten in tandem. The relationship between creator and created is completely entangled in that Akhenaten devises the God Aten, and then claims that Aten is the source and invention of all things on earth, including of course Akhenaten. This chicken or egg problem is both sexualized and sexually politicized in terms of power and desire when Akhenaten confronts it in the poem called "Inundation":

both the Black
and the Red Lands
of my kingdom
tremble for Aten
do His bidding
like a twelve year old bride
in His harem rooms

but then Aten trembles for me
or do I tremble for Him?

Sometimes He is imperious,
shoves me away
and I lie prostrate
among the cool mosaic water lilies
hysterically immobile
as any woman
blubbering ignored
on the harem floor.

But other times
He calls for me
silly with desire
whimpering (45)

The power distinctions between god and subject are seamlessly merged in this poem. These sexualized fascinations pepper the text in ways that speak Akhenaten's ambiguous world view. His sense of himself without boundaries or stable gender, his multifarious sexual drives, and his failure to ever concede to the law of the father (embodied by the patriarchal religion of Amun) all suggest his position in the feminine or pre-symbolic phase. Yet this sits in awkward contradiction with the masculine and phallic monotheism of his worship of Aten — the sun who is arguably also a son.

18 To complicate this further, his sun god, Aten is undeniably a manifestation of the symbolic order. The pharaoh says Aten "will have a new sign" (26) but this sign cannot be communicated, it is unto itself. This is evident in Akhenaten's orders to his advisor Ay: "explain-no-/ show/ Bek and the others/ what I want" (27). The symbol for Aten is its own language and therefore cannot be explained to the royal sculptor Bek. But despite this highly symbolic gesture, which is at the core of his religion and equally at the core of his reign, up until the end of his life Akhenaten is in search of a corporeal voice. This search culminates in a violent struggle between flesh and language. Akhenaten arranges a trepanning operation to open his skull - the place of the brain and, therefore, language. This body is now no longer seeking sexual pleasure, it is seeking freedom from language, a desire that necessarily equates with death. The poem reads:

tomorrow Pentu
my Skull-Opener
will come

he will clean
his instruments
in the sacred fire

he will give me
poppy juice

his knife will free
this muck (164)

Just as it was in the Thoth story, muck, or shit, is words. The operation may find a reversion to the silence in which the poetics originated - the silence of erasure "sweet / in my empty skull"(164). This could be read as the final satisfaction of desire, the return to unhindered semiotic space. But the outcome remains unknown because the operation is set for a tomorrow that never textually arrives in the collection. What is significant is the implication of the body in the process, and opening the body as a means for finding something trapped in the mind.

19 These poetics of physical space seem to belong to Cixous's logic of the female body: A woman, by her opening up, is opened up to being "possessed," which is to say dispossessed of herself.

[...]

Through the same opening that is her danger, she comes out of herself to go to the other, a traveler in unexplored places; she does not refuse, she approaches, not to do away with the space between, but to see it, to experience what she is not, what she is, what she can be. (42-3)

Writing a male figure within the logic of this feminine space, Porter re-genders power across these sexual differences. This allows her to dream up a hero whose sexuality is boundless, traversing both genders, both sexual orientations, and engaged in incestuous liaisons with his brother and impregnating his daughters.

20 The poetry consistently pivots on these pluralities:

in sex and art
I'm like a Hittite army
I don't recognise borders

I heap male and female
into one silky dune
and dig in my toes (129)

The sliding grains of sand are sensuous in their silkiness, slipping between toes and suggesting both the Egyptian desert sands and the passage of time measured in the hourglass. The slipperiness is undifferentiating in relation to sex and art, the two colliding in one collection of poetry, one visualization of history. Here is the liminal space that is shared by the body (sex) and the body of work (art).

21 This unbound freedom is arguably an outcome of the aforementioned gaps in Akhenaten's historical remains. These silences signal a space in which Porter's poetic inventions and interventions cannot be held up to the mirror of historical accuracy, she uses, instead, a mirror in which she can speculate freely. Cixous suggests that this anti-mimetic space belongs to her definition of feminine writing: "If there is somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where it writes itself, where it dreams, where it invents new worlds" (xxix). These inventions are the opposite of mimesis - a logic born out by these poems in which it is precisely 'nothing' (historical silence) that is supplemented by invention. As Gaston Bachelard maintains, "If we cannot imagine, we cannot foresee" (xxx).

22 Porter imagines memory in a mode of poeticizing that sends imagination, not along its usual course toward the unknown future in which to invent, but that opts instead for speculation in the palimpsestically available past. She trespasses in this chronology by taking up a silence which poses uncertain challenges to historical discourse. It is in such openings that feminine spaces can reconfigure masculine logics to speak a dual language of bisexuality and the multi-gendered self. Thus gender transgressions operate in Porter's poetics in multifarious ways, but they always signal the possibilities of infiltration. Silence as an unbound space is able to infiltrate both historical records and language itself. Silences thus insinuate themselves into language in ways that endlessly negotiate and renegotiate with the symbolic. Akhenaten's bisexuality both in his depiction of himself, and in his sexual choices as they are mapped by Porter's collection, posits the doubled category of the hermaphrodite. He engages in intercourse with his wife, brother, daughters and concubines in a sexually transgressive poetic of body politics. Cixous renegotiates bisexuality in ways pertinent to this discussion:

Bisexuality — that is to say the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes [can be seen as] [...] a fantasy of a complete being, which replaces the fear of castration and veils sexual difference insofar as it is perceived as the mark of mythical separation - the trace, therefore, of a dangerous and painful ability to be cut. Ovid's Hermaphrodite, less bisexual than asexual, not made up of two genders but of two halves. Hence a fantasy of unity. Two within one, and not even two wholes. (41)

23 Perhaps this goes some way to explain the fascination with physiological cross-

dressing in Porter's collection. She employs the transgressive politics of bisexual behaviour to undermine the binary oppositions which pin down gender beneath codes of authenticity, including psychosexual theories of language. Strangely, for Porter as a poet embroiled in her own transgression (in the form of autobiographical transference with her protagonist) Akhenaten pays a hefty price for his challenge to the dominant discourse. The outcome of Akhenaten's transgression is silence, the silence that falls when a populous abhors such outlandish acts. In Akhenaten's case this retribution is for nonconformity to his role as King. Historian Cyril Aldred says:

[A]ncient Egyptians had deliberately effaced most of Akhenaten's memorials, expunged all mention of him from their official records, and done their best to blot out of their consciousness the recollection of a pharaoh who had apparently not conformed to the centuries-old tradition of repeating the primal pattern of kingship which had come down from the gods. (113)

To defy a divinely given patriarchy is a large-scale transgression. But, perhaps the most significant manifestation (for art) of this nonconformity is envisioned in the pharaoh's artistically represented anatomical cross-dressing. This self-depiction constitutes his artistic innovation, but all that he achieved was debased by the Egyptians at the end of his reign. That the protagonist transgresses by virtue of his art is also central to Porter as the poet who is herself undertaking similar poetic innovations and transgressions in her poetry. Writing from behind the mask of her character, Porter is able to experiment with miscreant behaviour on two levels; crossing into the psyches of these historical others, and crossing again via the gender and sexual trespasses made by Akhenaten.

24 The necessary consequence of such infringements returns this discussion to the problem of authenticity. Acts of transgression are, by definition, necessarily not authentic, or not subordinate to the logic of authenticity. This is because they involve a violation, a disobedience antithetical to the genuine, valid or original that defines what is authentic. Perhaps Porter seeks a new mode of authenticity by her transgression, one that parallels her personal, rather than empirical, truths as provisional to breaking silences. However, these violations and the outcomes they manifest, are textually punished by the poet writing the collection. As the poetic-narrative draws to a close Porter depicts Akhenaten blaming himself for the fall of his Kingdom, mentally laying out his sins: "My dead daughter / my debauched little brother" (122). Some poems later he is more lucid: "My eyes hurt as I write / It's my own fault" (132). One of his responses to this personal anguish is directed at his wife, and is alarmingly like the silence which circumscribes his own fate: "I chipped out Nefertiti's face / from her stela" (133). In accordance with this, the final obliteration awaits Akhenaten's death.

He understands his posthumous fate:
the workmen of the new king
have arrived with chisels
and hammers
they have orders
to cut down my city
and cut out my name (167)

25 But such retribution is reserved for the historical character, Akhenaten, while Porter manages to evade the silent punishment of destruction she is examining in these transgressive poems. This is the final poem of Porter's book, her next will be a fiction, the highly successful narrative poem, *The Monkey's Mask*. This verse novel also chronicles the remains of a silenced poet, the murdered young woman Mickey whose mysterious death drives the plot. Mickey and Akhenaten are both sexual transgressors who are textually punished for their multifarious desires. Mickey is killed during sex play with a female academic and a male lawyer, but her murderers are hard to track because of her sexual rapacity with (fictionalised) members of Sydney's poetry scene. Her poetry holds the clues to the mystery and much of it is destroyed to throw the private investigator off the trail. For both Akhenaten and Mickey, silencing and destroying both the transgressively sexualized body and the body of work (poetry) is the narrative punishment Porter chooses. This constitutes a strange stance for Porter, as a poet who is interested in exposing sexual alternatives in her own poetry. This is also important in relation to the role of the image. Once the physical bodies of these poet-protagonists have been disposed of, the visual can be replaced by the textual.

26 But, as this article has argued the textual can operate as a mirror. Here there are implications for autobiography. Dorothy Porter is open about her own bisexuality, something which makes these narrative punishments even more striking. It is not the province of poetry analysis to speculate on this issue intrusively, but perhaps within such a mimetic discussion it is apt to end by turning the mirror outward so that it reflects the poet writing. It seems pertinent to leave it to Foucault to address Porter's role in the sexual politics of contemporary Australian society:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places [herself]himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; [she]he upsets established law; [she]he somehow anticipates the coming freedom (Foucault 6).

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