
Aspects of the Other in Susan Howe and Rosmarie Waldrop's Work

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Abstract

In this paper I will investigate how the experimental American poets, Susan Howe and Rosmarie Waldrop, treat excluded voices/cultures from early American history. Howe and Waldrop belonged to or were close to the poetic formation of language poetry. The poetry of language writers was characterised by a focus on the materiality of the text, a foregrounding of the visual aspect of the words and syntax, which meant that authors were arranging words on the page, investigating the possibilities of syntax and working, in structuralist terminology, with the signifier's level of the written language. In discussing their work, I will point out the way Howe and Waldrop were dealing with the figure and material traces of the Other within poetry, whose foundations are in the experimental poetry practice of language poetry. I will first focus on Susan Howe's book *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* (1990) in which she deals with the story of Hope Atherton, a minister who wandered among Native Americans in 1676. Then I will deal with Waldrop's book *A Key into the Language of America* (1994). It is inspired by Roger Williams' book of the same title, which is considered to offer the first extensive study of Native American languages printed in English. Waldrop's poems are written in relation to the structure of Williams' book, bearing in mind the legacy of cultural imperialism. I will discuss how both of these authors are dealing with repressed history within American historiography in a mode of writing which is often described as non-narrative writing.

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