Fables Of Mind: An Inquiry Into Poe's Fiction

Joan Dayan

Joan Dayan, Professor of English at the University of Arizona, is the author of Fables of Mind: An Inquiry into Poe's Fiction (1987) and A Rainbow for the Christian West (1977). In Fables of Mind, Joan Dayan subverts the conventional image of Edgar Allan Poe, presenting him instead as a writer who attempted to question and allegorize epistemogy. His fictions are interpreted as complicated critiques of the laws of identity and contradiction and of abstract notions of body or soul. By examining Poe's use and reinvigoration of Locke, Newton, Edwards, and Swift, she elaborates the philosophical underpinnings of Poe.
Cited in Rules for methodizing the Apocalypse, Rule 9, from a manuscript published in The Religion of Isaac Newton (1974) by Frank E. Manuel, p. 120, quoted in Never at Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton (1983) by Richard S. Westfall, p. 326, in Fables of Mind: An Inquiry Into Poe's Fiction (1987) by Joan Dayan, p. 240, and in Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin (1999) by Richard H. Popkin, James E. Force, and David S. Katz, p. 124. Truth is ever to be found in simplicity, and not in the multiplicity and confusion of things. This revisionist study of Poe's fiction concentrates on works generally neglected by Poe critics. Operating in reverse chronological order, Joan Dayan begins with a close reading of Poe's Eureka, subtitled "Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe" and uses this cosmology to examine Poe's method in creating his fiction. This "unreadable" work, she argues, best exemplifies that method, for in his work, the bizarre, apparently nonsensical, and the most stylistically jarring lapses are the truest exercises of his fiction-making powers. Fables of Mind makes the unprecedented argument that the issue of convertability--of the material universe, of the landscape, of the identity of woman--is the key to Poe's thought and the plot of his fiction.