

EDGAR ALLAN POE WEEK, OCT 5 THRU 11

THE BEDLAM FILES

With Adam Groves

“Believe nothing you hear, and only one half that you see.”

— Edgar Allan Poe

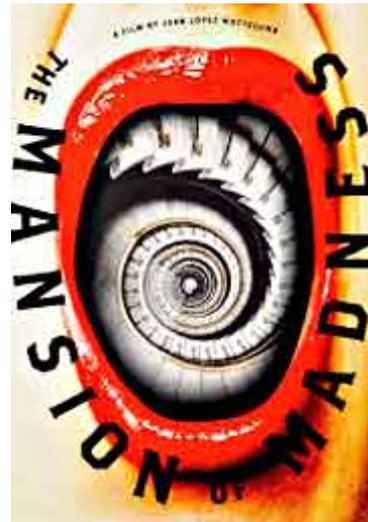
Streaming Now



1. JACOB'S LADDER

Hard though it might seem to believe, this glitzy 1990 release, directed by Adrien Lyne (following [FATAL ATTRACTION](#)) and scripted by Bruce Joel Rubin (following [GHOST](#)), is one of the great modern horror films. It's a singularly nightmarish look at reality slippage, with Lyne's flashy and insistent TV commercial influenced visual style, in which the imagery isn't crafted but *sold*, aptly conveying a descent into hallucinatory insanity. My one complaint: the best scene, involving a winged monstrosity crashing

Adam's Picks



1. THE MANSION OF MADNESS

This phantasmagoric spectacle, loosely based on Edgar Allan Poe's "System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether," remains a landmark of Mexican horror-fantasy. Made in 1973 by the late Juan López Moctezuma (1929-1995), it's an exercise in unfettered insanity with scant narrative cohesion. The film is best experienced as a succession of dreamlike images in the manner of [FELLINI SATYRICON](#) (1969) and [EL TOPO](#) (1970), presented with a surreal tinge that never feels forced or show-offy. The crisp photography by [Rafael](#)

through a ceiling, is found only in the deleted scenes portions of the film's DVD and Blu-ray releases. PARAMOUNT PLUS



2. VINCENT & THEO

Regarding this highly atypical 1990 Vincent van Gough biopic by the late Robert Altman (1925-2006), starring Tim Roth as Vince and Paul Rhys as his brother Theo, many people (including Altman himself) claim it works best in its original three-hour miniseries form. Having seen that version, I beg to differ. Overlong and expository in nature, the VINCENT & THEO miniseries plays to me like an extended MASTERPIECE THEATER episode, whereas the 138-minute theatrical cut is as quirky and eccentric as anything Altman ever made—and, I suspect, more than a little autobiographical in its portrayal of a stubborn artist waging a doomed fight against commercialism and compromise. CRITERION CHANNEL



3. TEMPEST

Corkidi (1930-2013) is an incalculable asset, as is the wildly imaginative art direction by the late Spanish artist/author Leonora Carrington (1917-2011).

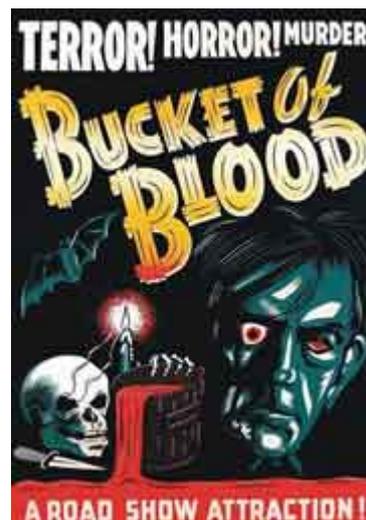
FILM



2. THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

This 1928 silent was one of the first-ever adaptations of Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher," and it retains much of its initial fascination. The writer-director was the great Jean Epstein (1897-1953), who follows Poe's narrative closely, yet still makes the material his own. Epstein may have gotten a bit too enamored with the copious third act optical effects (not unlike modern-day moviemakers who overdose on CGI), but those effects were ground-breaking for their time and remain startling proof that, in the hands of a master, a flawed treatment can result in a classic film.

FILM



Disney just can't seem to stay out of trouble these days. The Disney plus release of the South Korean mini-series TEMPEST has proven especially contentious, with the show being **protested in China** and having its IMDB page **review-bombed by Iraqis**. The series, about a political assassination that leads to an international conspiracy, is admittedly quite reactionary, positing, in essence, that the entire world is plotting to destabilize the Korean peninsula. I got caught up in TEMPEST nonetheless, as it's a slickly mounted, well-paced series with a captivating turn by South Korean superstar Jun Ji-hyun and a good balance of violent action, human drama and "cut the red wire!" tension. DISNEY PLUS



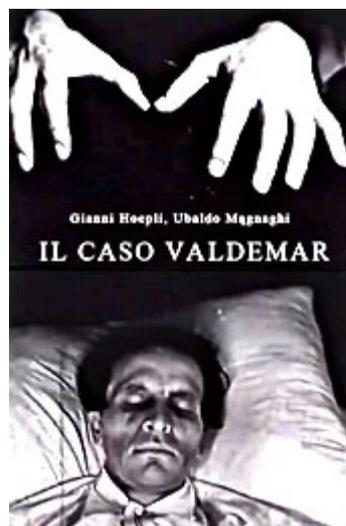
4. AKA CHARLIE SHEEN

A two-part documentary profile of Carlos Irwin Estevez, a.k.a. Charlie Sheen, which covers the part of his life we're all most interested in: the drug-induced meltdowns. Among the interviewees are Sheen's romantic partners Denise Richards and Brooke Mueller, both of whom have an old-beyond-their-years air, and his TWO AND A HALF MEN co-star Jon Cryer, who has no hair—because, he asserts, of Sheen's antics. The demons that powered his behavior are left unexplored, as is his film career, with AKA CHARLIE SHEEN functioning best as an extended E! TRUE HOLLYWOOD STORY. NETFLIX

3. BUCKET OF BLOOD

Not to be mistaken for the similarly titled Roger Corman cheapie, this is a 1934 adaptation of Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart." The dialogue, taken directly from the text, is notably flat, and spoken without much inflection by the actors. The emphasis throughout is on visual design, with the performances, particularly that of the lead actor Norman Dryden, oriented toward facial expressions (which in Dryden's case means a lot of overwrought glowering), while director Brian Desmond Hurst (1895-1986) displays a visual bravura that belays the fact that this was his feature debut.

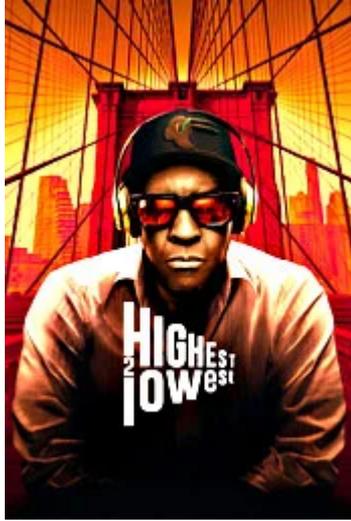
FILM



4. IL CASO VALDEMAR

A short Italian-made companion-piece, of sorts, to the earlier film. It's a 1936 adaptation of Poe's "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" whose directors Gianni Hoeppli and Ubaldo Magnaghi keep things lively, eye-catching and, in the final scenes, gruesome. It's said to be Italy's—and indeed the world's—first gore film, and the expressionistic visuals and make-up effects of Antonio Marini result in a memorable 12 minutes.

FILM



5. HIGHEST 2 LOWEST

Spike Lee remakes Akira Kurosawa's classic HIGH AND LOW (Tengoku to jigoku; 1963) with Denzel Washington as a music mogul forced into a moral quandary when a wannabe rapper (A\$AP Rocky) tries to kidnap Washington's teenage son (Aubrey Joseph), only to snatch the son of his limo driver (Jeffrey Wright) by mistake. As is his custom, Lee indulges himself to the fullest, making us aware of whatever happens to be on his mind at any given moment (manifested in gratuitous music video interludes, extraneous subplots and political sloganeering), which greatly lessens the suspense. What (nearly) saves the film is the work of Mr. Washington, who when he's fully engaged in his role, as he was here, is a megaforce to be reckoned with. APPLE TV



5. HISTOIRES EXTRAORDINAIRES

This 1981 French-Mexican miniseries consists of six Poe adaptations, each helmed by a top European or South American director. Unfortunately, only two of these mini films truly work: Ruy Guerra's "La Lettre Volee," based on "The Purloined Letter," and the **Claude Chabrol** (1930-2010) helmed "Le Systeme du Docteur Goudron et du Professor Plume," adapted (once again) from "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether." It strikes me as one of Chabrol's most interesting films of the 1980s, boasting feature film-worthy staging and visual clarity.

TV SERIES



Mugs Macabre

Mugs Macabre!

**EDGAR ALLAN POE Week
10-5 thru 10-11**



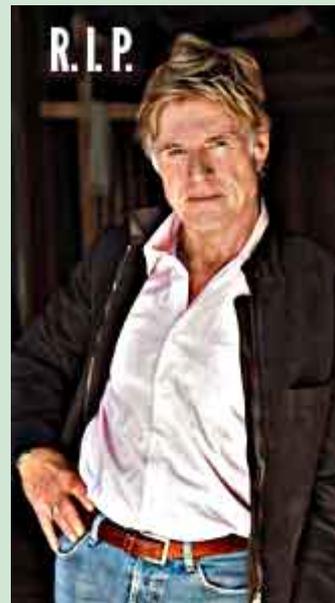
Edgar Allan Poe died mysteriously on Oct 7, 1849.

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- **SALT SALIVA SPERM AND SWEAT** (Film)
- **JOSH HARTNETT DEFINITELY WANTS TO DO THIS** (NonFiction)
- **TV Flashback: FANTASTIC TALES BY EDGAR ALLAN POE** (Commentary)
- **AND MORE!**



Insider Info

Back in the eighties I attended a **Clive Barker** book signing at Santa Monica's late **Change of Hobbit bookstore** (1972-1991). Figuring I needed to say something, upon reaching the front of the line I asked Mr. Barker who influenced him the most. His unhesitating answer: "**Poe.**"



I'm not sure I detect much **Poe** in Barker's writing (the **BOOKS OF BLOOD** story "The New Murders in the Rue Morgue" aside), but he deserves credit for acknowledging the writer whose 19th

Century imaginings remain the benchmark for all subsequent horror-fantasy. That, unfortunately, has not always been the case with modern writers, who may acknowledge Poe, but aren't always complimentary.

Take the late **E.L. Doctorow** (1931-2015), who was named after the man (with the E.L. standing for Edgar Lawrence) he called "our greatest bad writer" and "a drug-addicted, alcoholic delusional paranoid with strong necrophiliac tendencies." **Ralph Waldo Emerson** wasn't much nicer, stating Poe's writing was "almost without the first sign of moral principle...or the simpler affections of the human heart," while **T.S. Elliot** said of Poe that "The variety and ardour of his curiosity delight and dazzle; yet in the end the eccentricity and lack of coherence of his interests tire."

The late **Thomas M. Disch** (1940-2008) provided a memorable repost to Eliot's denigration: "May not 'the eccentricity and lack of cohesions of interests' that Eliot finds tiresome in Poe be a symptom rather of Eliot's narrowness than of Poe's too voracious appetite?" Yet Disch himself wasn't exempt from the Poe-bashing, as a chapter of his 1998 non-fiction study **THE DREAMS OUR STUFF IS MADE OF** is headed: "*Poe: Our Embarrassing Ancestor.*"

According to one commentator, "Poe's fame has been subject to curious undulations, and it is now a fashion amongst the 'advanced intelligentsia' to minimize his importance both as an artist and as an influence." The identity of that commentator? **H. P. Lovecraft**, circa 1925.

I'd say this proves Poe-bashing is nothing new, and that, judging by the fact that he's still being talked about (however unflatteringly) 176 years after his death, Poe's influence remains as strong now as it was in Lovecraft's day. As much as we might try and dismiss him, it seems that Edgar Allan Poe simply isn't going away.



Check out Adam's
recommendations in the
NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE.

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