THE GOBLIN (20th Century Fox, 1939) Directed by Allan Dwan; Produced by Harry Joe Brown; Screenplay by Bian James and Sid Silvers from the original play by Ralph Spence; Camera, Edward Cronjager; Art Direction, Richard Day and Lewis Creber; 59 minutes
With: The Ritz Brothers, Lionel Atwill, Bela Lugosi, Anita Louise, Edward Norris, Patry Kelly, Joseph Calleia, Wally Vernon, Paul Harvey, Art Miles.
Tonight's Halloween horror triple bill is admittedly a matter of quantity before quality, with rarity the linking denominator. "The Gorilla" was last shown in New York in 1951 (on a brief 42nd St. outing) and has since been withdrawn due to expiration of rights to the original play. The Bob Hope "The Cat and the Canary" is in a similar situation, although once the very ambitious new British remake has gone into release, probably early next year, one can expect to see the Hope version again. "The Gorilla" however, doesn't have a lot of commercial mileage left in it to justify extension or renegotiation of the rights, so it will remain as one of the filmic living dead. It was made in 1939 to cash in on the new horror film vogue started by "Son of Frankenstein", and many of the old chestnuts were being re-roasted at that time, including of course "The Cat and the Canary". Both of these films, incidentally, though strong on comedy content, were given the adults only "X" certificate by the British Board of Film Censors - more, one suspects, to discourage the genre, of which the British censors disapproved, than because the films horror content was strong. "The Gorilla" was a flop by Fox, received, as in 1939, and a talkie only three years later. In both versions (apparently lost) the emphasis, as in the 1939 remake, was on comedy. Smartly directed by Allan Dwan, it could have been a first-rate light horror film if allowed to keep to its basic plot line. Very good lighting, camerawork and sets, and amusing if obviously red-herring performances from Lugosi and Atwill, establish the right mood quickly, and the occasional scenes involving the Gorilla have quite a grim quality. However, the film starred The Ritz Brothers, zany comics whose acceptance was very much a matter of individual taste. They could be very funny when they tried, as they did in their last film "The Last Days of Pompeii" a tongue-in-cheek remake of "The Three Musketeers". Unfortunately, "The Gorilla" was one of their last films for Fox, and as so often happens with with final films, nobody at Fox felt like building them up for their next studio (Universal to reap the benefit. The comic material that they have to work with here is zero, and being good trouper, they thus work twice as hard in their own particular vacuum, merely accentuating the paucity of comedy by bringing the film to periodic halts for sustained mugging and backchat. Nevertheless, their energy remains, and the film has enough production value and good names to make it a diverting hour.

Five minute intermission

THE GHOUL (Gaumont British, 1933) Directed by T. Hayes Hunter; Screenplay by Rupert Downing from the play and novel by Dr. Frank King and Leonard Hines; Produced by Herbert Krampe; 59 minutes
With Boris Karloff, Dorothy Hyson, Ernest Thesiger, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Anthony Bushell, Ralph Richardson, Kathleen Harrison, D.A. Clarke-Smith, Jack Hain.
For years, "The Ghoul" was one of the most sought after horror films. It disappeared, even in England, only a few years after its original release, never to re-emerge. Claims that it had been found invariably petered out - or the discovery turned out to be, inevitably, "The Mad Ghoul". Adding to the frustration were fascinating stills, and entirely contradictory reviews of the film itself, in which no two critics could seem to agree on either its content or its merit. Karloff himself often expressed the view that he hoped it would stay lost, and indeed twice before he could understand that very personal reaction. It was made right after "The Old Dark House" and "The Mummy", a curious combination of themes and moods from both films, it was obviously not as good as either of them. Moreover, Karloff only appears (albeit very effectively) in the first two and the last two reels, and his dialogue is quite limited. To an actor of his stature, it must have seemed merely a routine boogy-man role. Happily however, its rediscovery is a very pleasant surprise - except for print quality. It is a very tattered print, and the sound is not good. Our facilities at the New School can probably compensate for this. It had a lot of that itself is, alas, probably there for perpetuity. No material at all is left in England, and this is an Eastern European archive, with subtitles that have, for the most part, been blacked out. It's the kind of print we would normally never run, but since it is all there, or is ever likely to be, we must be grateful for the chance to see it under any conditions.

While it's not up to the standard of the best Hollywood horror films of the period, it's surprisingly adept and effective for a British exploration of the genre, and comparison with a second-level Hollywood film like "Murders in the Rue Morgue" would not be inapt. The sets are handsome (though production stills show them to be quite simple and economical, their values enhanced by the lighting and camerawork) and the Gothic mood is well sustained by a good musical score and Krampe's Germanic camerawork.
Incidentally, there are two or three players who qualify for the titular description, but Karloff isn't one of them. It's also a mute point as to why an elderly English gentleman should look and walk like the Frankenstein monster! In terms of plot, the film (and the novel and play on which it is based) is often very close to farce, and were it not for the Karloff presence, it might well veer more in that direction. In fact, in 1961 it was remade as a knockabout comedy in the "Carry On" tradition under the title "What a Carve Up!" (a slang expression with a pun application to the film's content) and released here as "No Place Like Homicide". A "straight" remake was recently made in England, but appears to have virtually no connection with the original.

Even this original version has its pronounced comedy elements, and some of the acting - particularly Hardwicke as a grotesque Dickensian caricature - suggests that the performers were having a little fun on their own. Despite all the red herrings and the interweavings of the occult and the supernatural, the plot is quite a good one, and the cast a standout. It could all have been a good deal better with some other director at the helm. T. Hayes Hunter, who incidentally had been Griffith's successor at Biograph in 1912, was a prolific but not very distinguished director, and he wastes much of the potentialities of "Mary Shoul". Ernest Thesiger's role is a case in point - full of ambiguities and inconsistencies. Thesiger is a good and fascinating actor, but here he is left to flounder on his own, with none of the guidance from a mad director role; and a director that he certainly enjoyed in his two films for James Whale.

Apparently, apart from being only a minor talent, Hayes was also something of a major tyrant; when I screened the film a few years ago in London for Dorothy Hyson and Kathleen Harrison, two of its cast members, they were quite vehement in their description of Hunter as being something of a combination of von Stroheim and Lang - without of course the extraordinary talents that those gentlemen possessed to make up for their lack of diplomacy in dealing with actors. Incidentally, this was Ralph Richardson's first film.

-- Five minute intermission --

THE MONSTER (MGM, 1925) Directed by Roland West; Scenario by Willard Mack and Albert Kenyon from the (1922) play by Crane Wilbur; Titles by C. Gardner Sullivan; Camera, Hal Mohr; 72 minutes

With Lon Chaney, Gertrude Olmstead, Johnny Arthur, Hallam Cooley, Charles Sellon, Walter James, Enute Erickson, George Austin, Edward McWade, Ethel Wales. Piano Score Arranged and played by STUART ODERMAN

It comes as something of a shock to find Chaney not getting star billing in this film, and sharing featured billing with Johnny Arthur, a singularly unfunny comedian, though useful enough in small character bits. However, Arthur probably earns his billing in terms of footage if not talent; he does have the bigger role, though Chaney makes the most of his and another role, and though it is conceived on zany lines, manages to install an uneasy sense of menace. Another comedy-thriller from the stage, it abounds in clutching hands, hooded figures, sliding panels, and all the tricks of the trade. It's admittedly disappointing as a Chaney vehicle, and perhaps more so as a film directed by Roland West. Possibly we were so spoiled by his talksies - "Abi", "The Bat Whispers" and "Oursir" - that we expected even more from his silents, and admittedly after "The Monster", expectations for his silent "The Bat" don't run as high. Nevertheless, "The Monster" is typical West in many respects, particularly with its stress on night shooting and long shots (which made it virtually unseeable when it surfaced on an MGM tv series a few back), and its wild and woolly mixture of all-out melodramatics and rural comedy is unusual, to say the least. In spirit it's close to the Roger Corman version of "The Raven", and what hurts it most is the couple of reels of padded by-play, especially at the beginning, before Chaney makes his entrance and we really get down to business. Still, it's a lot livelier than most of the Chaney-Browning films, and has the right spirit for a Halloween presentation.

William K. Everson

Program ends at approx. 11:10 p.m.

Next week's program: THE DEVIL TO PAY (1930) with Ronald Colman, Loretta Young and Myrna Loy; COME AND GET IT (1936) with Edward Arnold, Frances Farmer, Joel McCrea, Walter Brennan