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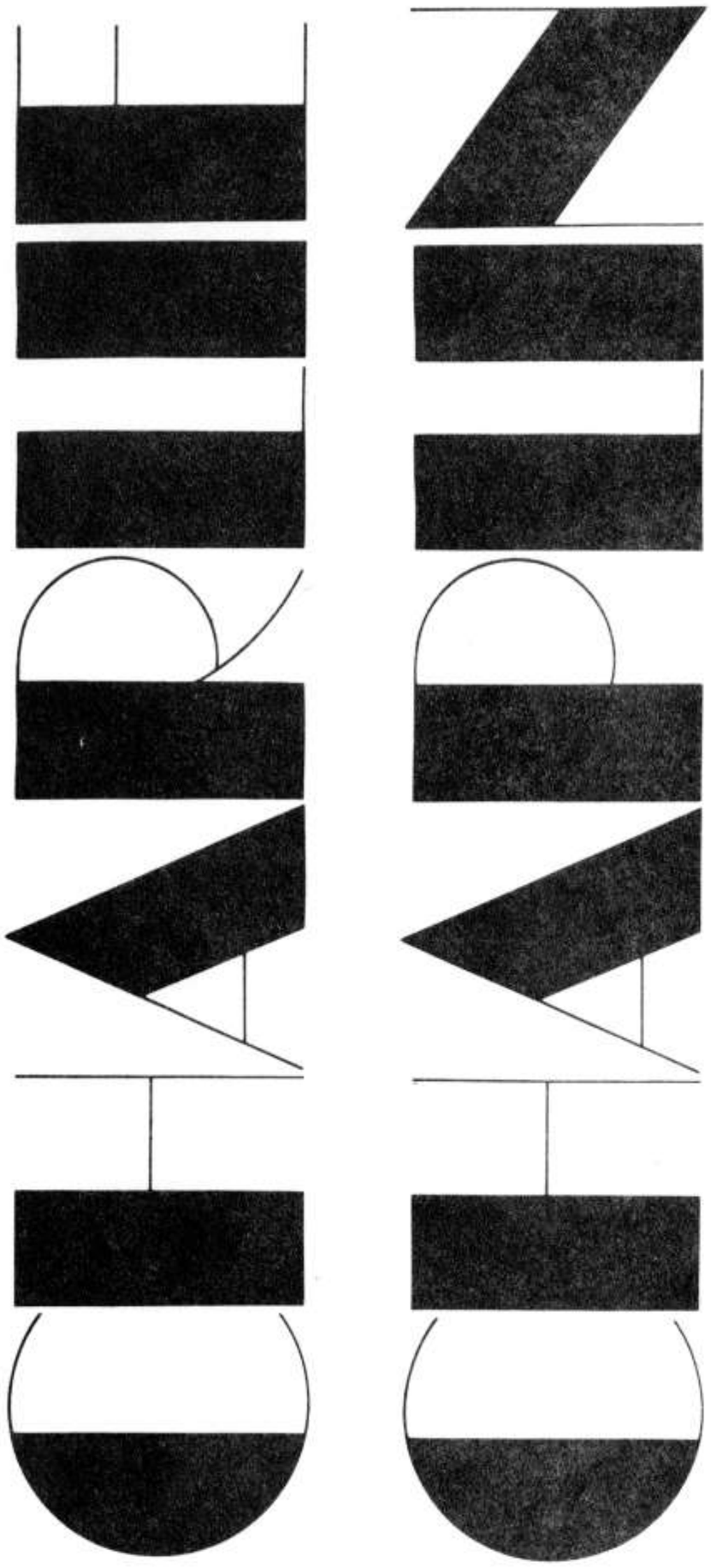

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A Series of Feature Classics

THE CHAPLIN REVUE
by Gilberto Perez Guillermo

Hugh Kenner, in one of the excellent things he has written about the screen comedians, asserted that, in silent movies, "comedy was the realistic art, which went into the streets; the serious pictures of that era are today madly unreal, whereas Keaton, Langdon, Lloyd and Chaplin engaged an actual world." One can find no better examples of this comic realism than the three short films that make up *The Chaplin Revue*.

A DOG'S LIFE (1918), SHOULDER ARMS (1918) and THE PILGRIM (1922) all engage an actual world. It is not a question of location shooting, the photographic reproduction of appearances; it is a question of truth, the convincing rendering of essential realities. In this sense, A DOG'S LIFE, although it was shot in the studio, does go into the streets; it is fundamentally true to the reality of that world of urban poverty which had such a hold on Chaplin's imagination. And, in this sense, SHOULDER ARMS, a comedy about the First World War made while the war was still being fought, does go into the trenches; and THE PILGRIM gives us a true picture, bitingly satiric, of that setting so often romanticized in the movies, the American small town. If you want to know what rural America was actually like, you should go to THE PILGRIM rather than to TOL'ABLE DAVID or TRUE HEART SUSIE, even though in either of those movies you will find a much more extensive photographic record of what rural America *looked* like; as you should go to SHOULDER ARMS, not to HEARTS OF THE WORLD or THE BIG PARADE, for a truthful rendering of the experience of the war, however transformed in its externals; and as you should, for urban realism, go to A DOG'S LIFE rather than, I would argue, to GREED or THE CROWD.

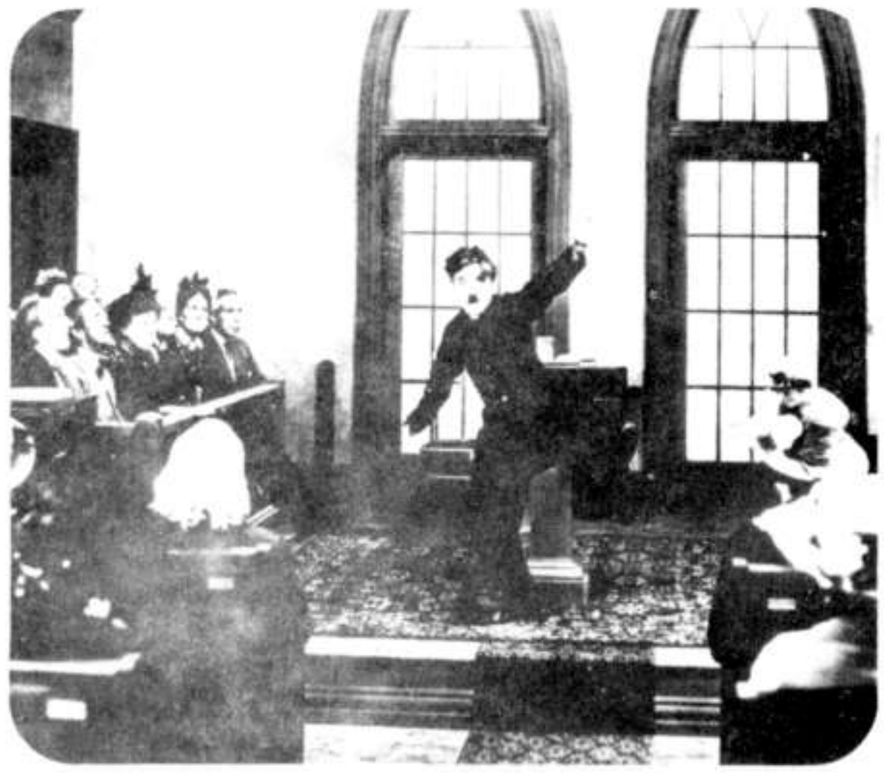
Consider SHOULDER ARMS. What is realistic about it? Surely it is as stylized as THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI, surely the sets and the acting are as unlikely as those in the German Expressionist picture, to be mistaken for things in the real world. SHOULDER ARMS is, if anything, more set-bound than CALIGARI, in that it is restricted to fewer sets. Much of the picture, in fact, takes place in a single set, the one depicting the French trenches—and this set is photographed always from the same angle. It is a stylized set, with the trenches rendered as a perfectly straight ditch; the camera always points along the direction of the ditch to give a stage-like frontal view. All this, you may feel, is too stagey. But it captures the essence. What other camera angles are needed to show us what a trench is like?

When Charlie first arrives at the front, the camera moves, following him, in a straight line along the ditch, and then back with him as he turns around and retraces his steps. That camera movement maps out the world: there is no other direction to move in, no other place to go. The one set, seen always from the same angle, conveys not only the monotony and constriction of the world of the trenches, but also its peculiar stability, the fact that it is a place where men make their everyday existence; the extreme conditions of war turn into a kind of normality. This is the source of much of the comedy in SHOULDER ARMS: men casually have their lunch while bombshells explode around them; they use the steady fire above the trenches to open a bottle of wine.

Elsewhere in the picture we find the same comic conception: an intolerable situation is treated as if it were normal. When bedtime comes with the trenches flooded, Charlie goes to sleep in his bunk —which is completely under water—as if nothing were amiss, as one goes to sleep every day. Similarly, a half-destroyed house is (until it finally collapses) still lived in, with the characters behaving as if everything were in its place, pretending that missing walls are still there. All this, while funny—it is behavior comically inappropriate to the given situation—is also fundamentally realistic: turning the extreme into the everyday is true to the experience of war.

Chaplin's movies are all actor-centered, as has many times been said. They all take their life from the Chaplin character. But it is not true that they are mere vehicles for the actor; at their best, as in these three shorts, they are quite well-wrought dramatic constructions. (A cogent case is made for Chaplin as a dramatist in Eric Bentley's essay, "Charlie Chaplin and Peggy Hopkins Joyce.") What is true is that they are constructions around the character: everything in them is defined in relation to the character. So to say of these three shorts that they are fundamentally realistic is to say that

SHOULDER ARMS. *All photos: Museum of Modern Art/ Film Stills Archive, unless otherwise credited.*



THE PILGRIM. *photo: Columbia Pictures.*

their conception of the Chaplin character is realistic.

This is not to be taken as meaning that in Charlie we recognize someone we might come across in life; still less that Charlie is representative of the average man. (MODERN TIMES has been criticized because Charlie is not representative of the workers, as if he were intended to be, or had to be for the movie's social criticism to be meaningful.) Charlie is obviously not a representative doughboy in SHOULDER ARMS. Precisely because he is not, he is able to bring out the basic truth in a situation as a character closer to the average soldier would not have.

Consider the opening scene in the movie. Charlie at drill, with his waddling gait, wide-apart feet and preposterously large shoes, can scarcely be expected to march in line with the other soldiers ("Put those feet in!" the sergeant commands) or do an about-face without tripping over his feet. The oppressiveness of army regimentation comes across more vividly because of Charlie's singularity. One is justified in calling universal, as many have done, a character so little representative, because his singularity serves to point up a general truth, something all soldiers experience.

Consider, for another example, the church sequence in THE PILGRIM. Charlie is an escaped convict disguised as a clergyman and mistaken, in a small Texas town he goes to, for the new minister the local congregation was expecting. Needless to say; the Sunday service he conducts is anything but representative. Yet here again the singularity of Charlie's position serves to get at a more general reality: built around it is an incisive satire on small-town churchgoing. When Charlie, the escaped convict impersonating a minister, imitates the deacon's saintly gestures as being what the situation calls for, he brings out by this not only the pompous hypocrisy of the deacon himself, but the hypocrisy of churchgoing generally. The escaped-convict-Charlie supervises the collection of money at the service with the keen eye of a swindler, making sure the collection misses no one in the room, and afterwards hefting the collection boxes to estimate what the take has been.

Charlie's behavior, so little like the way clergymen actually conduct themselves, satirically implicates them nevertheless: he makes us see something of a swindle in every church collection. For his sermon Charlie does a (quite wonderful) pantomime of the David and Goliath story, after which he returns several times to bow before the congregation like a music-hall performer before his audience. THE PILGRIM was banned in Pennsylvania for being offensive to the ministry; the only wonder is that Chaplin didn't run into more trouble than he did over this daring movie.

THE PILGRIM was the last short film that Chaplin made. I find the Charlie of the full-length films that followed—THE GOLD RUSH, THE CIRCUS and CITY LIGHTS—a less realistic, more romantic character than the Charlie we get in *The Chaplin Revue*, and the films themselves, built as they are around the character, less realistic consequently. There are those who, objecting to the episodes with the blind flower girl in CITY LIGHTS because they consider them sentimental, have thought the movie would be better without them. But CITY LIGHTS is all of a piece, and admirably constructed: all of it responds to a more romantic—more sentimental, if you like—conception of the Chaplin character than we get in, for example, another city film, A DOG'S LIFE. I don't mean merely that Charlie is sweeter and more lovable in the later film; he is sweet and lovable enough in the earlier one. But even getting a job is an instance of sweetness for the Charlie of CITY LIGHTS—something he does to help the blind girl pay the rent—whereas for Charlie in A DOG'S LIFE a meal is always a precarious accomplishment, snatched at when street vendors are not looking and cops are not around, and a job is something one tries to get in order to survive.

The more sordid settings of the earlier film—next to them, the settings of CITY LIGHTS tend to look laundered—have a stronger physical presence, evoke a greater sense of tangible reality. Yet they are no less manifestly studio constructions, and if anything they are more stage-like than the settings of the later film, rather in the way that the set of the trenches in SHOULDER ARMS, as I described it, is stage-like. What, more than their artificiality, makes the settings of SHOULDER ARMS and A DOG'S LIFE resemble the stage is the quality of their space: if feels circumscribed, self-contained, like the space

THE KID, With Jackie Coogan.

PAY DAY.

of the theater. The space in all Chaplin films feels peculiarly like the theater; it is not the open space characteristic of the cinema, not a space that gives the feeling of extending idenfinitely beyond what we see at any given moment. (It is not, in André Bazin's word, centrifugal. How could it be when everything in it is centered around the actor?) But the stage-like quality is stronger, the sense of a circumscribed space more consistent, in Chaplin's short films than in his full-length movies.

The shorts have a remarkable spatial integrity which is somewhat lost in the features; the clarity of their spatial arrangement is admirable. Chaplin never uses many close-ups; but in the features, as compared with the shorts, he tends to photograph things from a closer distance. In the shorts he often returns to long shots that encompass the whole area where the action takes place. This area is never very large—with Chaplin we never get the extreme long shots we get with Keaton—and the recurring long shots give the impression of surrounding it, of marking out a space, so to speak, outside of which the action will not stray.

The opening scene of A DOG'S LIFE is an interesting example. There the area of the action is never shown whole in one shot, but is encompassed instead in two basic long shots that divide the space between them, one showing one side and one the other side of a fence next to which the down-and-out Charlie usually sleeps. Cutting from one side to the other—as when Charlie, chased by a cop, rolls back and forth under the fence while the cop has to go around it—allows the action to be displayed with great clarity as it unfolds within the given, delimited space.

The stage is a circumscribed space that is kept apart from nature. Walter Benjamin wrote that a working clock is intolerable on the stage, because astronomical time is incompatible with theatrical time. Things on the stage are props; they are not real, they stand for the real things in the world outside. Even if you put a real tree up on the stage, Bazin argued, it ceases to be a tree and becomes the emblem for a tree. No doubt this is what happens within the circumscribed space of Chaplin's films: a straight ditch stands for the trenches, the dingy sets of A DOG'S LIFE stand for actual sordid city streets. Chaplin's realism does not consist in showing real things but in finding convincing emblems for them.

All this, while true, fails to account for the peculiar conviction the emblems can carry. Food on the stage is always a prop, like Bazin's tree, even if it is real food and even if the actors really eat it: there is always the feeling that the eating is a show put on for our benefit. But in the movies, where trees are real, we tend to believe much more in the eating the characters do. What of the many scenes in Chaplin's movies (there are two in A DOG'S LIFE) where the usually hungry Charlie eats something, or attempts to? There is in them a vivid sense of food, a physical sense of a sausage or a plate of beans as something that satisfies hunger. We believe in the food Charlie eats, or is prevented from eating, as we never believe in food on the stage; eating done within that circumscribed space of Chaplin's movies feels real as no stage eating does. Somehow nature is not kept off that surrounded space as it is off the stage: attribute it to that mysterious power the camera possesses to invest the things it reproduces with a quality of reality. The studio-made world of Chaplin's films feels more present and concrete, more tangible and substantial, than stage sets, however naturalistic, ever do. The very clarity of spatial arrangement that serves to give an enclosed, stage-like quality to the settings of such a film as A DOG'S LIFE serves also to establish them more palpably as material objects—with a strong quality of presence unlike anything on the stage. There are real toads in Chaplin's films that the imaginary gardens of the theater can never accommodate.

THE KID (1921)
by Gary Carey

In 1918 Chaplin signed a $1,000,000-plus contract with the new First National Company to make eight two- or three-reel films. Although it made him the highest paid actor in film, this contract was less generous than it sounds. Chaplin had to pay for production costs out of the million dollars. (The company agreed to pay him extra if he made a film longer than three reels, a clause Chaplin took ad-

vantage of when THE KID evolved into a feature-length film.) Chaplin's first two films for First National, A DOG'S LIFE and SHOULDER ARMS, were enormous successes. But SUNNYSIDE and A DAY'S PLEASURE, which followed, did not do well at the box office; low-keyed and atypical, they did not please the comic's fans. Both First National and Chaplin agreed that his next effort must regain the affection of the Tramp's public. A poll taken at this time showed that only 5% of audiences did not dote on Chaplin. Like most polls, this one was highly misinformative; there was a much larger segment of the audience who did not like Chaplin. Women in particular found the Tramp crude, dirty, lazy—a poor example to their menfolk. Mothers worried over their sons' adoration of Charlie; all their lessons on moral uprightness were defeated by the example of the Tramp's greasy life-style.

Legend tells us that Chaplin first conceived the idea for THE KID when Jackie Coogan winked at him in a hotel lobby. Perhaps this encounter did give him the specific idea for the film, but Chaplin had for some time been considering a project to win the approbation of American motherhood. THE KID has occasionally been dismissed as a shameless ploy to achieve this end; Kenneth Tynan, for example, wrote that it would be more palatable if Chaplin had treated Coogan as W.C. Fields was later to handle Baby Leroy. And at the time of its release, THE KID was criticized as vulgar, the offending scenes including one in which Charlie lifts a baby's clothing to check its sex and another when he experiences diaper problems. Still, even the most antipathetic mother must have succumbed to Chaplin's genuinely sweet relationship with Coogan—the first and best of the cherubs with dirty faces—and been touched by the pathos of the child's and the Tramp's temporary parting. These scenes are imbued with an honest sentiment, something of a rarity in the history of the American film.

The charge of sentimentality often levelled against THE KID could be dismissed were it not for the frame story, which drips off the screen with mawkishness. The film begins as Edna Purviance, carring a baby in her arms, leaves a welfare hospital. "Her only sin—motherhood," a title explains, and then we see Christ bearing his cross. Back to Edna, wandering through a park. "Alone and without resources," the subtitle reads. Next, Edna watches a bride and groom leave a church. It is a loveless match, we gather, when a rose petal falls from the wedding bouquet and is crushed by the loutish groom. A close-up of Miss Purviance follows. She stands against a church window, her head outlined by a stained-glass halo. Fortunately, Edna soon abandons her baby and leaves the picture to become a famous opera diva. But she keeps turning up, and every new appearance is an occasion for a Griffithesque aphorism or symbol. (For example, one return is heralded by the insert of a book entitled "The Past," which opens to a chapter called "Regrets.")

These scenes are further hampered by indifferent photography, awkward introduction of symbolic inserts, and the inadequacy of Miss Purviance. Nontheless, this section is of interest since it seems to have served as a sketch for Chaplin's next feature, the historically important A WOMAN OF PARIS. In the later film Miss Purviance is abandoned, as she is in THE KID, by her artist-lover. She goes to Paris where she slips into the shadows of the demi-monde. Eventually she repents and becomes a social worker. (In THE KID the opera singer also takes up social work.) A WOMAN OF PARIS has its share of mawkish moments, including uplifting titles ("The road to happiness is in the service of others") and a morally inspiring ending. But by this time Chaplin had gained technical assurance and was able to redeem the hackneyed story by the deftness of his visual wit.

THE KID also falls short of A WOMAN OF PARIS in story construction. (This was never Chaplin's forte: in fact, A WOMAN OF PARIS is arguably his best-constructed film.) Usually it doesn't matter that Chaplin's films, like Topsy, seem to have just grown. Often his features are little more than episodes loosely organized around a vague central idea, but it hardly matters when the episodes are funny and there is unity of tone. THE KID comes dangerously near failure on the latter point. One feels the shift between the sections of the film, happily so when Edna departs and Charlie enters; distractingly so, when the Tramp dreams his courtyard has become heaven. Thematically, this fantasy is irrelevant to a plot which, after dawdling somewhat, begins to wind to a tight conclusion; stylistically, it tips the balance between the realistic and the fantastic too far, too quickly in favor of fantasy. Indeed, there seems to be no reason for this sequence—except that it is the best thing in the film. With its Florine Stettheimer angels and Mélie's devils, it is a dazzling blend of sophistication and primitivism, one of those exquisite sequences in Chaplin's films that are, in the words of André Bazin, "sufficient unto themselves, smooth and round like an egg."

Jean Cocteau remembered this sequence when he wrote his play *Orphée*. At the end of the play there is a stage direction: "The scene shifts to Heaven"—a feat of stagecraft that has frustrated anyone attempting to produce *Orphée*, since it must be performed lickety-split before the audience's eyes. It must equal the magic of that cinematic dissolve that takes the Tramp from tenement doorstep to heavenly abode. One is prepared for the shift in *Orphée*, because window-pane wings of the archangel Heurtebise (who, in a conscious Cocteau imitation of Charlie's short-lived job in THE KID, assumes his terrestrial guise as a glazier) have always hinted that Heaven was in the next room. Is Charlie's glazier meant as a similar preparation for the fantasy sequence is THE KID? Has Charlie always been, in fantasy or in fact, the Kid's guardian angel?

It's hard to decide how much Chaplin consciously put into his films, and how much sprang from his unconscious—or our own. Cocteau, at least, believed Chaplin was in full control of his art. In the preface to his play *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*,

written shortly after the Paris premiere of THE KID, he wrote: "The secret of the theatre, which calls for rapid success, consists in laying a trap, thanks to which one-half of the audience will rollick at the door, so the other half can take seats inside. Shakespeare, Molière, the profound Chaplin, know this very well." Cocteau—who was no less misunderstood, and no less profound, than Chaplin—was of course talking about himself. But, as he was that rare man who could be both vainglorious and wise in the same dazzling epigram, I am provisionally ready to let his be the final word on Chaplin and THE KID. Who has said anything better?

THE GOLD RUSH (1925)
By William Paul

THE GOLD RUSH is a watershed film in Charles Spencer Chaplin's long career. After it Chaplin was to make only features, and the time between each of his film was to grow longer and longer. The long wait between features proved fruitful for Chaplin because in that time his vision was expanding, the emotional expressiveness of his works growing deeper. The maturity of his later films stems in large part from Chaplin's finally realizing an ability to go beyond himself to other characters as something more than expressive projections of his own personality. Charlie walks down the road *together with* Paulette Goddard at the end of MODERN TIMES—something unthinkable in the earlier films—and THE GREAT DICTATOR ends with a radiant close-up of Goddard, herself an independent presence in the film.

By contrast, Georgia Hale in THE GOLD RUSH seems almost extraneous to much of the action. Lacking the vibrant independence of Goddard, she exists almost entirely as an excuse for Chaplin to express his emotions. The ending of the film—which takes place on a luxury liner, where Georgia meets Charlie, now a millionaire but still in his tramp clothes, and tries to hide him—is particulary unsatisfying in this respect. The film never makes clear exactly what Georgia's feelings are in this scene, if they do indeed extend beyond a simple, generous concern that a poor, helpless stowaway might be caught. But, for THE GOLD RUSH, and in fact for most of Chaplin's films preceding it, it really isn't important what Georgia—or Edna Purviance in the earlier films—happens to feel at this moment. It is Charlie's emotion that dominates the scene, as it is his emotion that becomes the *raison d'être* of the scene.

THE GOLD RUSH is a culmination of everything Chaplin had done up to that point. With its close relationship to the short films, THE GOLD RUSH might seem Chaplin's most perfectly realized work, while the later films appear increasingly more fragmented. But (in contrast with Buster Keaton's more organically structured films) all of Chaplin's films, shorts and features alike, can be easily broken down into a series of near-autonomous set pieces. The one unifying force in all Chaplin films is simply Charlie himself, and if there is an apparent loss of unity in the later films it derives from the real gains in the expansiveness of Chaplin's vision. As in the earlier films, the world of THE GOLD RUSH is defined solely by Charlie's presence in it.

THE GOLD RUSH begins with a kind of miniature documentary on miners in the Yukon—seven brief shots set off from the rest of the film by an iris fade-out, all of it filmed in real exteriors to show the real hardships of the miners. Following this quasi-documentary footage a title announces: "Three days from anywhere. A lone prospector." Chaplin then introduces his tramp character walking with his distinctive gait quite unsuitably along the edge of a cliff in what is clearly a studio shot. Other popular comedians of the time, like Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd, would never have "cheated" with a studio shot when real locations were readily available, because both (especially Keaton) were concerned with physical truth.

But Chaplin deals with psychological truth, and there really isn't a question here of whether or not he thought he could "get away with" a studio shot: intentionally or not, the studio shot creates an entirely different feeling from a real exterior. The contrast between the documentary-location shots of the miners and the fictive-studio shots of Charlie establishes an aura of security around the little tramp that, no matter how much in danger he might be, never leaves him throughout the film. Keaton and Lloyd often get into situations so dangerously real that their films frequently seem more like adventures than comedies. The threat to Charlie, however, is never so real. As he continues to walk along the edge of the cliff at the beginning of THE GOLD RUSH, a bear begins to follow him, but before he can even recognize the presence of danger the bear turns into a cave and leaves him undisturbed.

The world in which Charlie operates in THE GOLD RUSH then is a metaphorical world, the real world continually filtered through and always expressing Charlie's sensibility. The real world, with all its attendant hardship and tragedy, is never far away—as the opening shots point out—but Charlie's world is

THE GOLD RUSH, with Georgia Hale.

THE GOLD RUSH.

always more hopeful, more optimistic, because Charlie himself is so resilient. Whereas Keaton constantly changes his character to fit the needs of a constantly changing world, Chaplin in THE GOLD RUSH, as in the earlier films, reshapes the world to suit Charlie's character. Chaplin's unfairly criticized visual style then is solely directed towards this end: his *mise-en-scene* might be very simple, occasionally crude, but it is really more expressive than is usually admitted, more elemental than elementary. In fact, Chaplin's images of the external world become the most poetic precisely when he is dealing most directly with Charlie's emotions.

Consider Charlie's first appearance at the Monte Carlo Dance Hall, his first return to civilization after his long sojourn in the snowy wilderness: in a master shot of the dance hall we see Charlie standing in the center of the frame, his back to the camera, gazing at a group of dancers seen hazily in the background of the shot. The New York Times critic in his review of THE GOLD RUSH was particularly impressed by Chaplin's "acting with his back" at this moment, his ability to express loneliness through the way he held his head and sholders. As impressive as Chaplin the actor is here, Chaplin the director also manages a high degree of expressiveness, establishing an important contrast between the two key elements of the image: Charlie a dark mass against a lighter grey background, Charlie standing in repose before a frenetically moving crowd. The emotion expressed at this moment, then, is not exactly loneliness. The two masses—dark, clearly-defined Charlie versus grey, undefined crowd—are two disparate to permit merger, Charlie himself too individualistic, too determinedly an outsider to want to be integrated into the world around him.

At the time of the GOLD RUSH premiere, Chaplin told newspaper reporters a revealing story from his childhood—revealing most of all because he could still remember it so vividly more than twenty years later. He had gone to another boy's birthday party, misbehaved there and, as punishment, was put off in a corner where he wasn't allowed to partake in any of the fun. Finally, three boys took pity on him and brought him some cake and ice cream. The point is that Charlie can't exactly function in society, but he also can't function without it. What Charlie wants most of all is recognition and love, and he'll do anything he has to do to try to win them. If there is a sad quality in this shot it derives from the fact that no-one in the dance hall recognizes Charlie. The film eventually reverses the static-dynamic contrast of the earlier shot. Just before he and Big Jim are to set off in search of their gold mine, Charlie receives a love note from Georgia—which was actually intended for another man. In his excitement he runs all over the dance hall, even climbing up to a second floor balcony where Georgia stands, as the rest of the crowd stares at him frozen in their amazement. Charlie, still isolated, is now the one to move about as the stilled crowd watches him.

The contrast in the one shot of the dance hall echoes a contrast implied by the two chief settings of the film: the wilderness, especially the ledge Charlie walks along at the beginning and the ledge his cabin teeters over towards the end, is set against the constantly teeming bustle of the town and the dance hall. In some ways, Charlie—alone and homeless in the wilderness—is really more at home there, so that the ledge becomes expressive of Charlie's character: life on the edge of the universe is life reduced to its most primitive state, dominated by the most basic need of hunger. And Charlie in THE GOLD RUSH is a character who is chiefly defined by his hungers, both for food and for love. One wouldn't expect a character defined solely by his wants to be especially likable, but Charlie is appealing precisely because of the simplicity of his emotions, as the emotional directness of Chaplin's acting style endows Charlie with a sense of childlike innocence.

There is always such an abundance of detail in a Chaplin performance that his acting might be described as rococo. Yet Chaplin's every gesture, every facial expression is so economical that he always seems to make a necessity of unnecessary movement, transforming his whole body into the expression of one emotion. As he eats a chicken leg after going without food for days, Charlie's whole body expresses his satisfaction, from the way his shoulders are pinched together right down to his wiggling fingertips. Charlie stands out in both the rural wilderness and the urban crowds because of his emotional directness. His innocence lies in the fact that there is nothing hidden in him; every emotion he feels finds an external expression in his body.

For all this emphasis on basic human needs, there is nonetheless a transcendent quality

glimpsed in THE GOLD RUSH. While it's fairly easy to anthologize different parts of THE GOLD RUSH, the two most famous set pieces in the film, in fact the two most frequently anthologized—the Thanksgiving Day dinner of the boot and the dance of the rolls—are precisely the two that gain the most in meaning from their juxtaposition. In the first, Charlie turns a shoe into food; in the second, he turns food into feet. The movement from the first scene to the second is a movement to food transcending its own function. In the same way, Charlie—by going beyond his basic needs, by transforming the rolls into something more than simply food—transcends himself. His body even disappears against the black background so that only his large face is left suspended over the two small roll-feet, a moment all the more magical because one of the most physical actors in films suddenly loses his corporeality.

It is in this one aspect, in this transcendent quality, that THE GOLD RUSH might be seen to look ahead to Chaplin's later films. If his earlier films seem more optimistic, it is because of Charlie's resilience; yet it is precisely this characteristic that grows weakest in the later films. No matter how tough the environment nor how oppressive the society in the early films, Charlie is never defeated because of his internal strength. In the later films, however, escape (in MODERN TIMES and THE GREAT DICTATOR) and finally death (in MONSIEUR VERDOUX and LIMELIGHT) become the only options left. The progression from the dinner of the boot to the dance of the rolls anticipates a progression in Chaplin's career to the more spiritual quality of the later films, from the basic hungers of physical existence to the expression in art of man's need to transcend these hungers.

CITY LIGHTS (1931)
By Stanley Kauffmann

Some notes on a recent viewing:

As in THE KID, the slums are not American. They might be London or a continental city, but American slums never had the archways and courts and outside staircases that Chaplin likes and needs. He knew London slums; he never really knew American poverty. Writing in 1931, Francis Fergusson said of Chaplin in this film: "He is not a star with a perfunctory vehicle, but he is an artist who has managed to set a comic legend in streets and among characters that we all know." Not true of the poor folks' streets.

★★★

But the poor folks are, in a sense that Fergusson presumably did not mean, "characters that we all know"—characters right out of Victorian melodrama. The blind girl and her grandmother are not remotely intended to be realistic. The millionaire is much more so—a man with a comic quirk (amiable when soused, distant when sober) that gives him at least some psychological validity. But with the girl and her grandmother, Chaplin was pulling out theatrical stereotypes as knowingly—one may say, defiantly—as Griffith had done eleven years earlier in WAY DOWN EAST. This conscious use of stock figures is a call for the audience's collaboration, a communion in genre that long antedates the invention of film.

★★★

The latest revival of an old widsom tells us that Chaplin's feature films are not really features, they are only collections of sketches, stitched-together one-reelers. For this enlightenment (so far as it is true and enlightening), much thanks. The important points, it seems to me, are that a richer context of plot and character gives even the isolatable sketches more force, and that the sketches themselves are usually better and better performed than most of the earlier one-reelers. The boxing sequence in CITY LIGHTS is better than the boxing in THE CHAMPION because we know more about the Tramp and why he is fighting. And the Chaplin of 1931 is sixteen years better than the Chaplin of 1915.

★★★

By innuendo, there is a surprising amount of homosexual joking in CITY LIGHTS. When Chaplin behaves winsomely with his boxing opponent before the fight, hoping to soften his heart, the pug gets worried and goes behind a curtain to change his pants. When Chaplin is in bed with the millionaire, he pats the other man reassuringly like a patient wife. When the millionaire gives him the money for the girl, Chaplin kisses him ecstatically, and the millionaire mimes violent dislike. "Don't do that."

I can't remember this element in another Chaplin picture. I can't explain it here, but the hints are inescapable.

★★★

Theodore Huff tells us that Chaplin had a lot of trouble with Virginia Cherrill and tried to replace her during the lengthy shooting. This backstage story makes the results all the more astonishing. Chaplin got an extremely good performance from her. Without it, the last scene would have been impossible. When the (even more) ragged Tramp stares happily at her through the shop window, she says to her assistant, "I've made a conquest," with just the right touch of haughty pleasure, the slight air of cruelty in the formerly maimed person made whole. A moment later, when she takes his hand and recognizes him by touch, she becomes her former self, but larger. He says, "You can see now?" Her face—on the reply, "Yes, I can see now"—is beautiful. The film has to end with a close-up of Charlie—we'd feel cheated otherwise—but, dramatically, the last scene is hers.

Chaplin did not always succeed as a director, or discoverer, of actresses. Merna Kennedy in THE CIRCUS is a dud, as is Marilyn Nash in MONSIEUR VERDOUX. But when he succeeded, as with Georgia Hale in THE GOLD RUSH and Cherrill here, he transformed them into something they never touched again.

★★★

De Sica worships Chaplin. Did he get the water-dousing in MIRACLE IN MILAN from the blind girl dousing the Tramp?

Chaplin seems to have kept an eye on René Clair. Everyone knows about the relation between A NOUS

LA LIBERTÉ and MODERN TIMES. (There was an abortive plagiarism suit by the producers of the former against Chaplin.) And there's a moment in CITY LIGHTS, when a young man in a cloth cap calls for his girl in the courtyard of the blind girl's house, that is a sharp quick reminder of SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS. Clair's film is 1930, Chaplin's 1931. Just time for a nudge, perhaps?

★★★

Sentiment is the burden and the blessing of Chaplin's work. The durability of the sentimental passages may be a chief secret of his survival. Of his one-time peers, only Keaton—who really *is* his peer—is still as affecting. Langdon's THE STRONG MAN, seen again recently, is a coy bore, begging pitifully for pathos. Lloyd's GRANDMA'S BOY, also seen again recently, is very much better, often funny, but never really touching. With Chaplin, the tears still flow at his command.

In the beginning of CITY LIGHTS, when he discovers that the girl is blind, the film seems to stop for a moment. In the last scene, when he gazes at her so selflessly, so *happily,* he says more than in that whole last speech of THE GREAT DICTATOR.

All during his career, Chaplin was spanked for his sentiment. Rigorous critics were always "seeing through" it. But after one has seen through it—not really such a difficult job—one sees that its transparency is part of its effect. The sentimental climaxes are contrived, the other characters are stock, but the moment is *true,* just as in an opera with an incredible libretto and trumpery people, the validity of a good aria makes a moment true. There is a quantum leap from the contrivances that make the moment possible to the height of the moment itself, and in that moment we forget what led to it.

Our age is suspicious of feeling, even more so than the "sophisticated" Twenties. Yet, after we have rocked with laughter, wondering how this or that scene can be so funny yet *again,* the crowning miracle is that, against our foreknowledge and our clear perception of the cardboard and tinsel, he makes us cry. Now we can see that it is as great an achievement as his ability to be funny.

And it is becoming a rare experience. One can envision, without relish, a future theater-film world in which one has to go to Chaplin films in order to cry.

MODERN TIMES (1936)
by David Denby

When I was a graduate student at Stanford a few years ago, I saw MODERN TIMES with a group of students involved in a long, difficult protest against university complicity in the Vietnam War. Like so many striking students in America during the late Sixties, we were using a film series to keep up morale. It's a rotten way to use movies, and that night's experience with MODERN TIMES showed why. Before the movie started one student stood up and said that Chaplin was a great modern radical and that MODERN TIMES was his most explicit attack on capitalism. I felt this was nonsense, but nonetheless kept silent and waited for the reaction. It was all fairly predicable: vast amusement during the factory satire; ironic cheers when the Tramp picks up a red flag and inadvertantly leads a left-wing parade; surprise and outrage when he thwarts a jailbreak; bafflement when he tries to get back into a jail as a refuge from life outside; general apathy when it became clear that Chaplin was somewhat less committed to social revolution than, say, Che Guevara. The disappointment was acute, and after the film some of the students solemnly decided that Chaplin "hadn't really gotten it together."

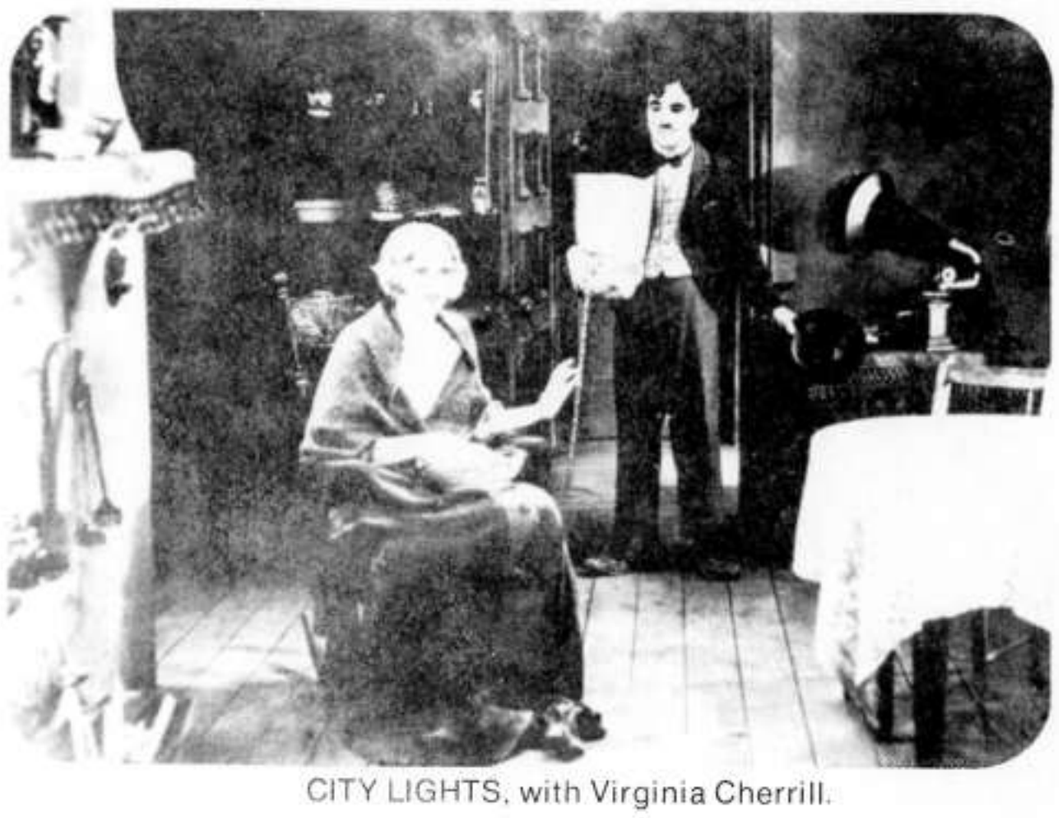
It's impossible, of course, to find anything more than a very coy flirtation with radical politics in MODERN TIMES. The film derives its power from its rejection of twentieth-century urban life, but that rejection is largely aesthetic and moral, and we are hard put to deduce any specific political line from it. For Chaplin, modern times are hard times, and like Dickens' great novel, the movie is in part an attack on the killing rationality of industrialism—the mechanical rationality which, humanly, is so deeply irrational. But it's the production line that Chaplin satirizes, not capitalism per se, and I hope I am not naïve in assuming that, despite his occasional fellow-travelling, Chaplin would feel the same way about the working day in a steel mill on the Volga.

The movie expresses the greatest possible revulsion from the public, external side of modern life—the anxious, demeaning, exhausting business of factories, strikes, riots, police, etc. The Tramp's natural fastidiousness has never expressed a stronger judgment of things as they are; but when his existence becomes unbearable he doesn't turn to protests or organizing his fellow-workers (how could the Tramp organize anything?), but to purely anarchic escape—madness and disruption and fantasy—and to a private world of loyalty and companionship. Still, when the Tramp and "the gamin" walk down the road at the end, it is not for want of trying to enter society. In MODERN TIMES, the Tramp makes his most determined attempt to lead an ordinary life; we remember the film, among many reasons, because it suggests that even the most conventional desires—for a home and a job—can be problematic, even hopeless, in a world no longer suited for human accommodation.

Like THE GOLD RUSH and so many other Chaplin movies, MODERN TIMES wrests its comedy from a background of starvation and disaster. Chaplin has said that his humor depends on getting the Tramp in and out of the maximum amount of trouble, and perhaps we continue to honor him as the greatest of modern comedians because the Tramp's difficulties are always so much more extereme than anyone else's, and his resistance so much more heroic. Certainly, for those of us who grew up on the paltry suburban discomforts of film and television comedy in the Fifties and Sixties, the poverty and dereliction in the Chaplin comedies will always provide an occasion for awe.

THE GOLD RUSH, with its hunger and greed and its great images of freezing whiteness, is one of the high points of American cinematic naturalism,

CITY LIGHTS, with Harry Myers.



CITY LIGHTS, with Virginia Cherrill.

whereas in MODERN TIMES the terrible threats to life and sanity are conveyed through heavy stylization. The factory set—with its clean "impersonal" facades, immense dials and levers, and two-way television communication—has a definite science-fiction, futuristic look, and at first we may be a bit puzzled since Chaplin makes no attempt to set the rest of the movie in the future ("New Ford V-8 for 1935," a billboard teasingly proclaims behind the starving hero and heroine). Afterwards, we realize that Chaplin has used futurism as the most accessible metaphor for the inhumanity of technology. He doesn't need the grime of a real factory because it's the essential character of mass production that he's getting at. Henry Ford had introduced the assembly line roughly twenty years before MODERN TIMES was made, but the shock of that invention—it's implication of man's final, utter subordination to the machine—must still have been strong enough to make people wonder if the future had not invaded the present and robbed it of its human grace.

With his genius for seizing on the leading characteristic of a situation and extending and exaggerating it into satire, Chaplin emphasizes the almost obscene physical intimacy in the new relationship between man and machine. The feeding machine is undoubtedly the most hilarious contraption in the American cinema, but this is truly a case of hilarity releasing dread. The machine reminds us of an electric chair or some other torture device, and its physical violation of Chaplin's body is as frightening as it is funny. In a counterpart to the feeding machine, Chaplin is fed into the machine, swallowed whole like a modern Jonah. The Henry Ford type of factory may have been the immediate inspiration for MODERN TIMES, but this particular fantasy of being eaten by a machine—with its disturbing mixture of horror and voluptuousness—had apparently obsessed Chaplin since boyhood.

In his autobiography he describes an encounter with a printing press at the age of ten: "It started to roll, grind, and grunt; I thought it was going to devour me. The sheets were enormous; you could have wrapped me in one. With an ivory scraper I fanned the paper sheets, picking them up by the corners and placing them meticulously against the teeth in time for the monster to clutch them, devour them and regurgitate until they rolled out at the rear end. The first day I was a nervous wreck from the hungry brute wanting to get ahead of me."

Obsessed with their own intentions and uninterested in Chaplin's, the students I mentioned before missed out on the true radicalism, the true bitterness, of MODERN TIMES. One of the greatest of American comedies is also one of the most pessimistic. Give the stress of modern work and society, the movie only holds out three choices: jail, insanity, escape. The Tramp had often been called a representative of common humanity, but after MODERN TIMES it became painful to think of him that way; for if the Tramp embodies us all and there is literally no place for him except on the outside, then we are not at home either.

THE GREAT DICTATOR (1940)
by Stephen Harvey

Seeing THE GREAT DICTATOR immediately after Chaplin's utterly captivating MODERN TIMES can indicate how much more separates these two illustrious works than the mere chronology of four years. To be sure, both films clearly reflect the humanity and ingenuity of the supreme artist who created them. Yet there remains an enormous disparity in Chaplin's conception and his audience's perception of the two works. MODERN TIMES is brilliant *and* exhilarating, sweeping the viewer along by the seemingly spontaneous flow of invention granted only to the artist who knows at every moment exactly what he wants to do and how he is going to do it. THE GREAT DICTATOR, however brilliant, is more exasperating than exhilarating. The film seems to veer into six different, unrealized directions at once, with moments of supreme inspiration perched uneasily beside others of startling banality.

THE GREAT DICTATOR is *the* transitional film in Chaplin's later work—an amalgam of hilarity and horror that links two enormously dissimilar films. But more important is its position as perhaps the most experimental of Chaplin's works, and its resultant mixture of experiments succeeding beyond expectation with those that lie stillborn on the editing table. Chaplin's confrontation with the challenge of sound, as with almost every new element to be found in THE GREAT DICTATOR, is a mixed blessing. The scathing humor in Chaplin's parody of Hitler is due largely to the actor's superb vocal resources; and Hitler-Hynkel's first speech to his subjects is so memorable—both in itself and in translating Hitler's personality into comic terms—that, for me at least,

MODERN TIMES.

THE GREAT DICTATOR.

newsreel footage of Hitler now suggests the record of some provincial actor doing a maladroit impression of Chaplin's Hynkel.

Nevertheless, practically all the film's other outstanding comic sequences are conceived in silent-film terms. Chaplin had been refining his physically filmic humor to perfection for more than twenty-five years. Indeed, THE GREAT DICTATOR boasts several examples of individual comic *sequences* adapted from earlier Chaplin films: the opening, which recalls SHOULDER ARMS, and the pudding sequence, which suggests the Tramp's dining on fillet-of-rubber-sole in THE GOLD RUSH. With dialogue, however, Chaplin was starting from scratch. As a creator of visual humor Chaplin may be unsurpassed, but as a writer of witty banter he is merely competent. It's not that the verbal humor in THE GREAT DICTATOR isn't funny, just that it pales in comparison with the rest.

This aspect of the film reminds me of Garbo's performance in ANNA CHRISTIE: the gestures are majestic, the voice uncannily eloquent; but the cumulative effect is one of overkill. In both films, unnecessary words destroy ineffable images. One embarrassing example in THE GREAT DICTATOR occurs when Paulette Goddard delivers an impassioned monologue to the immobile camera. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if they stopped hating us?" she cries. "With all the hardships and the persecution, I love it here. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they'd let us live and be happy again?" This speech is not only insipidly written and unconvincingly declaimed, it is also redundant; every syllable of it had been expressed already by the simple, visual evidence of the Storm Troopers' oppression. By refusing to believe that, as far as dialogue was concerned, "less is more," Chaplin wound up with too much that was, perversely, not enough. Goddard's single epithet "Pigs!" (after the Nazis dirty her white laundry) is more moving than any of the film's anti-Fascist tirades.

THE GREAT DICTATOR also presents some marked thematic departures from Chaplin's previous work. For the first time since the 1921 IDLE CLASS, Chaplin provide himself with two principal roles: Adenoid Hynkel, Chancellor of Ptomania, and the Tramp, here oddly individualized because of his dialogue. On one level, THE GREAT DICTATOR gave Chaplin his great opportunity for a tour-de-force performance, and the advantage he took of it makes the film the acting triumph of his career. He accomplishes perfectly the transformation from Jewish barber to demagogue and back again—a feat achieved with the simple addition of some grey to the barber's temples and (in psychological rather than cosmetic makeup) with a schizophrenic sublimity that manages to bestow on Hynkel some of Hitler's elephantine grandeur as well as a touch of the Tramp's elfin grace.

Unfortunately, the existence of two protagonists forced Chaplin to develop two parallel stories, and thus clutter THE GREAT DICTATOR with unsatisfying plot devices. Because the transcendence of Chaplin's humor always derived more from comic turns than from plot turns, the film lacks the spontaneity and unforseen invention that made his earlier work—up to and especially including MODERN TIMES—so distinctive. THE GREAT DICTATOR is structurally rigid; it often delights but rarely surprises.

A far more crucial thematic weakness is the film's topical nature. Chaplin's universality is a fact no less true for being a truism. MODERN TIMES, for example, meets with the same rapturous response today as it did thirty-five years ago because, although its roots were planted in the arid soil of the Thirties Depression, its depiction of the soullessness of industrial civilization remains as pertinent—and as "universal"—as ever. THE GREAT DICTATOR is more obviously of its time, place, and political mood. Fascism has not exactly disappeared from our midst, but viewers a generation removed from Nazi megalomania may be forgiven if they find the film's impact softened, its vision blurred.

What's more disturbing is Chaplin's own spiritual remoteness from the material. He seems to have approached it second-hand, and as a result THE GREAT DICTATOR lacks that special resonance of personal experience which emanates from every frame of his previous work. Chaplin had know poverty, loneliness, and the poignance of misguided love; he had not known, or even observed, anti-Semitism on Hitler's millennial scale. The Jews' plight here isn't nearly as agonizing as that of, say, "the kid" because Chaplin's sentimentality is more conjured up at will than irrepressibly unleashed from the soul. Even the ghetto milieu looks false, created not from bitter memory (as with THE KID) but from an art director's blueprints. Against such a studio-backlot background the ghetto characters are at pains not to seem artificial. And although we now know, as Chaplin couldn't have, that Nazi con-

centration camps do *not* resemble overcrowded army barracks, the effect is still to make a contemporary tragedy seem more quaint than incisive.

In another way—temporally—Chaplin was too close to his subject. The decades between Chaplin's poverty-stricken childhood and his creation of such masterworks as CITY LIGHTS and MODERN TIMES gave him the distance he needed to transform a desperate life into comedic art. But the Nazi threat, an event contemporary with the film's production, obviated any possibility of distance on Chaplin's part. Thus, a struggle—between his instinctive comic sensibility and his rational sensitivity to Hitler's horror—pervades THE GREAT DICTATOR and keeps its from achieving the seamless serenity of MODERN TIMES or, for that matter, the macabre misanthropy of MONSIEUR VERDOUX. The film's transitions between straight-forward Storm Trooper brutality (their attack on Goddard) and the Nazi-as-farceur scenes (their whitewashing of Charlie's shop with the word "JEW") are awkward at best, and often nonexistent. Which sequences are supposed to amuse? And which ones appeal? I don't know; and neither, I think, did Chaplin.

It may finally be helpful to see THE GREAT DICTATOR as Chaplin's INTOLERANCE. Both films attempt to stretch their creators' already unparalleled range with weighty themes and complex structural techniques; and neither film can be said to have entirely succeeded. Yet, as with Griffith and INTOLERANCE, we would have been far poorer had not Chaplin decided to confront Fascism on his own terms in THE GREAT DICTATOR. Audacious experiments such as these have extended the medium, and made it exciting. And the blemished masterpieces that have resulted are often the most fascinating, if not fulfilling, of all.

MONSIEUR VERDOUX (1947)
by Foster Hirsch

Agee loved it, celebrating its virtues in a three-part piece which has become about as famous as a movie review can become. More guardedly, but still enthusiastically, Robert Warshow—in another famous piece—discussed the film as a reflection of the *zeitgeist* and in reference to The Tramp. But in its 1964 release, when the critical and public reaction was as generally ecstatic as it had been hostile seventeen years earlier, Dwight Macdonald loudly and clearly declared: look, the Emperor has no clothes. Is MONSIEUR VERDOUX that bad? Is it that good? Macdonald's carping is really quite uncharitable, and Agee's generosity is quite excessive: he makes the film fancier and deeper than it really is. Warshow was closest to the truth, I think. He suggested that Chaplin was not in complete control of the material and that as a result the complexities of the subject are not tidily handled.

The film's ambiguities or, if you will, its confusions, its contradictory impulses, begin and end with the conception of Monsieur Verdoux himself. Verdoux is a nice, respectable, solid bourgeois: he's got the house in the country, he looks after the wife and kid. A quiet former-bankteller. A dapper boulevardier. A murderer. A compartmentalized man who separates his business from his personal ethics—and therefore he's a nice guy who kills rich old bags for reasons which in themselves we would all surely respect. But Verdoux can't be dismissed quite so easily. He is not merely using evil for ultimately good purposes; it's clear soon enough that the evil means are more important, closer to him, than his supposedly noble ends: he enjoys the hunt and the kill more than he enjoys being home with the family. And who could blame him? That wife and child are awfully dull.

Verdoux doesn't see the contradictions of his position. He never seems to realize that his scheme of protecting his family from all external threats has estranged them from him and made them helpless; his wife, rather heavy-handedly, is literally as well as symbolically crippled. We learn, in that cryptic reference late in the film, after the collapse of his enterprises, that he has lost his wife and child, but he has begun to "lose" them from the time he embarked on his wrong-headed plan.

No, it isn't the bourgeois ideals which keep Verdoux hopping on those trains as fast as he can. It's the pleasure of the "work" itself, the challenge of winning over and subduing pliant women, the sheer fun of role-playing. Verdoux is a consummate actor; he's so accomplished, in fact, that he's succeeded in hiding his true motives from himself. Verdoux, then, savors his role of master puppeteer. He's one up on everyone: the inept police, the uncomprehending priest, the helpless wife and child, the homely or dizzy or loud-mouthed victims. Charming, courtly, *in control,* Verdoux is better than any of them. We like this wrong-headed, double-dealing murderer as much as he obviously likes himself. And Chaplin works to insure our sympathy by seeing to it that the dapper, fastidious Verdoux commits all his murders off-stage. When he lets a pretty girl "go" because he recognizes in her a kindred spirit—one who would kill for love and who in fact loved a cripple—he seems a very humane maniac indeed.

But Verdoux is not altogether likable, and he is justly defeated; our response, and Chaplin's, to this devious character is tricky, shifting, ambiguous. The second time Verdoux meets the young girl—it's the film's most chilling moment, I think—he tells her to mind her own business. Before that encounter, we might have thought that Verdoux's relationship to her was the one uncontaminated, the one "single-layered" part of his life, but there are no such oases in Verdoux's world.

A contrast to Verdoux—and, for that matter, to his other victims—is Annabella, the character played by Martha Raye, and possibly the one *positive* character in the picture. Annabella is an embodiment of the life principle. She's stupid, all right, and she's common, but she has a ball. Her financial recklessness and her spontaneity suggest evident comparisons with Verdoux's pragmatic and artful manipulations. Verdoux doesn't like Annabella—not refined enough, too horsey—but *Chaplin* rather likes

her, I think, and he wants us to like her too, as well as to laugh at her. But whatever Annabella represents, Verdoux can't conquer it, and, like the loss of his wife and child, this marks a defeat for the ladykiller.

A crafty criminal, a poseur blind to the consequences of his game, a poetic, sensitive murderer: what are we finally to think of this complicated monsieur? In the last scenes in the courtroom and in the jail, Verdoux "speaks" and he seems to be speaking the film's message in the direct manner of the traditional *raisonneur*: those who kill thousands are heroes, those who are more selective, and kill only a few people, are murderers. Verdoux's methods are being aligned with those of capitalism and war, Verdoux's own doubleness—the benign bourgeois surface, the underlying ruthlessness—is being used as an indictment of the split between the means, on the one hand, and the professed ends, on the other, of the games of economics and politics.

Chaplin surely isn't suggesting that Verdoux would have been better off if he had followed Hitler's lead. In fact he isn't excusing Verdoux at all: Verdoux is misguided, he capitulates to the base level of his society. Like Arthur Miller's Willy Loman, he's after the wrong goals and he goes at them in the wrong way. Yet Chaplin's "conviction" of Verdoux is ambivalent. He after all allows him a heroic stance in the courtroom and the jail; Verdoux scores against the priest; he has that delightful, life-affirming moment when he sips the rum and walks proudly, in the sun, to his execution. The way those final minutes are directed and played, I felt morally uplifted, all the time wondering what was so ennobling about the imminent execution of a man who was no better than his times and who wound up with just what he deserved?

MONSIEUR VERDOUX is the first Chaplin film (excepting the special case of A WOMAN OF PARIS) in which the protagonist is not also the hero. Unlike the Tramp, he is overcome, by—he gives in to—external social pressures. That walk away from the camera at the end is an ironic variation on the Tramp's exit. The Tramp, though, walks, a free man, down the road of life; Verdoux, surrounded by towering guards, walks toward his death. He's a one-shot character, not available for future films, whereas the *continued* adventures of The Tramp signalled his resilience and his ultimate triumph.

It's certainly unusual to see a Chaplin character capitulating to, and incarnating, social evil—but that's where Verdoux stands. Since he is played by Chaplin, however, he is hardly a conventional villain; Chaplin brings to the character his own charm and gaiety and light. Chaplin-Verdoux and the rose in his first scene: has a murderer ever enjoyed a more ingratiating introduction? Chaplin gives us winks and assuring nods from time to time; like Verdoux, Chaplin is playing a part, and he wants us to like him in it. His performance is part satiric (he mocks the boulevardier), part pathos (the world-weary bankrupt), part heroic (the curious, complicating rebel-hero speeches at the end). For all its enormous resourcefulness, I don't feel that the various levels of the performance are entirely adjusted and coördinated, however, and in this it is like practically everything else in the film.

In form, as well as theme and central character, MONSIEUR VERDOUX is marked by antagonistic levels of intention. The fun scenes are undeniably the best: the great scene on the lake, Verdoux's plans sublimely frustrated; the beautifully timed sequence at the garden party, Verdoux feverishly trying to avoid Annabella; that lunge onto the sofa, the teacup remaining obediently in place; the hilarious and cruel scene in which Annabella's maid loses her hair. But then there's that long, uninflected scene with the young girl—Chaplin sentimentality at its worst, and a seeming reversal of the film's burlesque of the bourgeois. The scenes of Verdoux at home are presumably intended to be flat—and they sure are—but the same deadliness is all wrong for the meeting with the waif. And where did Chaplin find Marilyn Nash? She's awful—her voice monotonously mid-American, her eyes blank, her gestures mechanical, her tone and pacing at the level of a rank amateur.

Where *was* Chaplin during the opening scene with the squabbling family of one of Verdoux's victims? The poor actors, stranded by their director, are all broad, stiff, hopeless gestures and astounding vocal monotony. Why set the film in France if you're going to cast it with actors who constitute a survey of small-town *American* types? Chaplin would have strengthened the case both for and against Verdoux if he had provided him with less dotlish adversaries, and if the film had a genuine sense of time and place. Flat voices, papier-mâché backgrounds: was Chaplin being Brechtian, trying to bring the point closer to home by paradoxically setting his lesson in a foreign country? Or is the absence of atmosphere a means of reserving emphasis for character and theme? Or is it just plain, simple economizing?

Visually as well as vocally, then, the film is largely unsatisfactory, self-defeating. The insertions of the Eiffel Tower to let us know we're in Paris; the banal reliance on the train wheels to signal Verdoux's restless movement; the documentary insertions of Hitler and Mussolini and the stock market crash, which introduce a sense of the real world, and of historical specificity, not supported by the rest of the film—all indicate Chaplin's awesome lack of interest in the small, tedious necessities of filmmaking, in any facet of the film other than Verdoux himself.

Like the divided critical response to the film, and like its ambivalent title character, MONSIEUR VERDOUX is a work of decidedly unresolved antagonisms. If you want to be kind, you'd say that it is ambiguous and ironic; if you're less hospitable, you'd say it's confused and contradictory. A compendium of sometimes pleasing, sometimes inharmonious antitheses, the film is obvious and enigmatic, popular and esoteric, deliberate and curiously unpolished, flatfooted and fanciful, a deeply misanthropic (and misogynistic) statement which is yet enriched by the beauty and *joie de vivre* of the Chaplin persona.

MONSIEUR VERDOUX, with Martha Raye.

Embracing both slapstick and pathos, satire and sentiment, its theme too devious for popular audiences yet not thought-out enough for serious audiences, MONSIEUR VERDOUX is a cruel romance, a polemical farce presided over by a paranoid schizophrenic who is played by the most charming actor in the history of movies.

LIMELIGHT (1952)
by Emily Sieger

Charles Chaplin has always been among the most despairing of film artists. In film after film his Tramp character failed to capture the love and acceptance he struggled for. As time passed, Chaplin's films became less comic, the Tramp became less spontaneously joyful, and the expression of a co(s)mic exuberance gave way to an impression of tragic cynicism. With his increasingly bleak vision of the world, he found it difficult to allows the Tramp any happiness at all. Chaplin's murder-suicide of Charlie was the inevitable result. In his place Chaplin created a monster, but one who was all too much like Charlie: Monsieur Verdoux.

In that bitter "comedy of murders," Chaplin slaughtered not only some eminently disposable biddies but, more crucially and fatally, all the ideals that had sustained the Tramp. Love? Pity for cripples and an excuse for murder. Kindness? A chance for a girl to become a more successful whore. Exultant vitality? The repulsive voracity of Annabella Bonheur. All reasons have been devoured in a world fit only for murderers. Verdoux's "willed"-death is thus a triumph, an act of remarkable perception of the moral corruption and imminent physical destruction of the world—the old, "Charlie" world—the whole world.

And after Armageddon, what? In the new Chaplin world, where creation is impossible, invention is necessary; where love is impotent, art *must* be important. LIMELIGHT's critics have always noted—generally to condemn—the lengthy speeches about Life. But, if nothing else, Chaplin-Calvero's stifling garrulousness about living life for itself ("What do you want a meaning for? Life is a desire, not a meaning") suggests LIMELIGHT's ostensible theme. This is certainly the theme of the Tramp films, since Charlie, like Calvero, cared for desires, not meanings; and the audacious freedom of the Tramp's every movement implied a liberation from constricting thought. And yet, if Calvero is expressing the same feelings that move us so deeply in the earlier films, why should his words sound so empty, so meaningless, so terribly banal?

They sound empty because Chaplin, in his melancholy LIMELIGHT period, no longer truly *believes* that life can be lived for itself. He destroyed that idea in MONSIEUR VERDOUX, where he gave a lecture-demonstration on the worthlessness of existence. How, in VERDOUX's wake, could he create either a world in which life can be simply enjoyed, or characters like the Tramp who can inhabit and enrich that world? Chaplin needs all of Calvero's talk because the ideas he expresses aren't reinforced by the film's action. Not one person acts out of the pure love of living. Nowhere is it suggested—through gestures or glances or anything except the endless torrent of dialogue—that anyone can or should behave this way. The message of its scenario is doomed by the action of its characters and the dismal tone of its images.

LIMELIGHT's two major characters are spiritual and physical cripples who are unloved and lonely with no real love or friendship to offer. Calvero, a five-time loser at marriage, has drunk himself into a near-fatal heart attack; Terry (Claire Bloom) attempts suicide after the onslaught of an ill-defined psychosomatic illness. Calvero gets involved with Terry out of little more than inertia; he clearly feels nothing like love for her. Terry, on the other hand, vaults into hysterics whenever she says she loves him; later, she practically admits that her feeling for him is mainly that of pity and gratitude. A fine romance!

The meaning Calvero and Terry do find isn't anything Charlie could have understood: it is that only art can make life bearable. Indeed, Calvero becomes interested in Terry when she tells him she's a dancer and, in a dream performance, discusses the meaning of life in something like the Tramp's terms: generous and gentle, humorous and human. Little wonder that Calvero sighs so painfully upon returning from the enchantment of the dream to his grim reality. Chaplin may not have intended the contrast to be so striking, but Charlie couldn't help but be aware of it.

As if conscious of their own self-pitying dullness, all of LIMELIGHT's characters devote most of their

LIMELIGHT.

energies to the production of art. Like Neville (Sydney Chaplin), who sacrifices his last shilling for some music paper, they are motivated solely by love, or rather need, for their art. "This is where I belong," says Calvero, as he prepares for his final performance. Terry says, "But I thought you hated the theater." "I do," Calvero replies. "I also hate the sight of blood, but it's in my veins." For him, it would seem, art *is* life—or at least a tolerable substitute, and at most all one can expect.

Unable to give or accept love directly, Calvero and Terry rely on an artificial stimulant: applause. It's a sad business when they don't laugh, he says, but when they do, "it's a thrill." Yet in the next breath, he can condemn his audience as "a monster without a head, which never knows which way to turn." It's hard to tell whether applause reaches their hearts or only their egos. Like the earliest, most primitive incarnation of the Tramp, Calvero and Terry must be completely egocentric; unlike him, they have no joy to compensate for their loneliness. Lost in an Antartica of the soul, and unable to walk off hand-in-hand like Charlie and his girl in MODERN TIMES, they must surrender to the occasionally glorious but ultimately hollow sound of two hands clapping.

This half-arrogant, half-noble submission to their sullen craft functions as Calvero's and Terry's only means of surviving in a wretched, war-torn world. In the last, painful shots of LIMELIGHT, as the camera pulls away from Calvero's dead body to pick up Terry performing her solo onstage, Chaplin finally confirms what the actions and images of the film have tried to say. Not only does art give beauty and meaning to life, it transcends life itself. It is an uncertain way to live, and a hazardous one both emotionally and physically, but for the Chaplin of LIMELIGHT it seems the only way left.

A KING IN NEW YORK (1957)
by David Robinson

It is fifteen years since Chaplin made A KING IN NEW YORK and almost as long since anyone saw it; and of course it is extremely dangerous to write about a film from such long memory (even fortified with notes made at the time). Times change, we change, and sometimes there seems some mysterious change in the chemistry of the work of art itself. On the whole it is true time seems only to have enriched Chaplin's other films. THE CIRCUS was always reckoned the weakest of his silent features, but it looks marvelously fresh and funny in today's light; and who would have guessed that MODERN TIMES, after nearly forty years, would seem still so relevant to us and our current preoccupations?

Of course A KING IN NEW YORK was something different. Chaplin was already an old man, nearing seventy, when he made it. He had not directed a film for ten years; and he had never made a film in his native England, or worked there since he left it as a promising music-hall clown, before the First World War. He had never, for that matter, worked outside the security of his own studio. Since his last film, too, he had suffered vicious personal attack in the country which for so many years he had chosen as his home, and finally found himself an exile, a victim of the political hysteria of the times.

It was this last experience, lacerating as it was to him, that he sought to cauterize with comedy. He played King Shahdov, a Central-European monarch who seeks refuge in the United States. His ideals of the New World are somewhat rapidly dashed by a night on the town which includes visits to the cinema (CinemaScope was still new, and there was a joke about people's heads turning like spectators at a tennis match to follow the action) and to a restaurant. Charmed by a beautiful young advertising agent (Dawn Addams) he is persuaded to appear in television commercials after his Prime Minister has made off with the residue of the Royal treasury.

With money, life in America seems brighter, until he befriends Rupert McAdee (the infant Michael Chaplin), a ten-year-old whom he has previously met as the horrid prodigy of a progressive school. Now the child is a fugitive. His parents have been imprisoned for contempt of Congress after refusing the degradation of naming names before the House Unamerican Activities Committee. On account of his own association with the child, Shahdov is also called before the Committee; and after a farcical hearing in which he accidentally douses them with a fire hose, he is cleared. He decides to return to Europe and his estranged wife. Taking leave of Rupert, whom he has persuaded to return to school, he discovers that the boy has been broken: to save his parents he has named names. It will all pass,

A KING IN NEW YORK, with Dawn Addams.

Shahdov tells him in a vain attempt at consolation; one day the hysteria will end . . .

It is hard to believe that Chaplin himself could have felt so blandly philosophical about his own situation and the future. Yet this at the time seemed the odd paradox of the film. Where Chaplin was most immediately concerned, his film seemed least involved. Looking back, beyond the years when Chaplin's grand sentimentality and simplistic world philosophies seemed embarrassing because discordant with the mood of the times, we can see that the underlying strength of the early comedies was a very real sense of the rigors of life in mean streets; that the strength, too of MODERN TIMES, was a genuine and deep-felt concern over the direction contemporary urban life was taking. Yet all this was recollected or observed from the isolated tranquility of the peak of Chaplin's success. He was painfully close to the situations which provided the themes of A KING IN NEW YORK; yet the comedy now seemed somehow detached, without the central fiber of serious reality. He attacked his targets with no deadlier weapon than some easy superficial slapstick; the Unamerican Activities Committee was dismissed with a fire-hose. The tragedy of the times seemed to defy translation into comedy. Only in the later scenes, where the comedy gave way to pathos, and Shahdov recognized his own unwitting complicity with the adult establishment in breaking the child, did he seem fully engaged in the subject.

This at least is what stays in the memory after fifteen years. There were other disappointments, among them a distinct air of shabbiness about the film. Working in his own studio, Chaplin's economy over things like sets had resulted in a characteristic visual style, a supremely effective theater for his own performance. The settings of CITY LIGHTS and MODERN TIMES have a stylized nakedness that is Expressionist in effect. Working in London locations that were only too patently not New York, and staging a revolution with a handful of half-hearted extras, gave A KING IN NEW YORK the look of a British B-feature.

One also recalls uncomfortably jokes about progressive schools and commercial television that were already old and tired; another about plastic surgery that was rather nasty; some unhappy dialogue ("To part," he tells his estranged Queen, in a line worthy of LOVE STORY, "is to die a little.") But then one recalls other scenes in which the old brilliance of conception and performance, the qualities that Chaplin had brought intact from the London music halls which he had known at their Victorian apogee, were still intact: the hose scene, impeccably managed, if inadequate to its moment; some traditional farce with a bathroom keyhole; a chase in which he fled energetically from a supposed writ-server, only to find himself in the arms of a real one. There is a vaguer memory of Chaplin-Shahdov, debonaire, dignified even when subjected to absurd indignity; optimistic despite the doomed vagueness of his idealistic plans for helping mankind through the peaceful use of atomic energy; recalling the THE IMMIGRANT as he bravely continued his speech of thanks for the warmth of his welcome in America while the immigration authorities brusquely took his fingerprints; recalling too the Charlie of THE KID in his touching, protective moments with the boy. If and when we see A KING IN NEW YORK again, we shall probably discover it the least realized and least assured of Chaplin's films. But it is also sure that we shall not find in it an artist in dotage or decline.

FAVORITES

David Bordwell on The Circus

David Bordwell wrote five pieces for The Sound Film: An Introduction, *edited by Arthur Lennig. He is a graduate student in film at the University of Iowa, Iowa City.*

Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

– W. B. Yeats, *The Circus Animals' Desertion*

A revival of a Chaplin masterpiece is always welcome, but even more satisfying than the opportunity to re-see an acknowledged classic is the pleasure of discovering that an underrated film is really a triumph. The recent reappearance of Chaplin's THE CIRCUS [1928] provides an example of a rich film which has been overshadowed by its predecessor (THE GOLD RUSH, 1925) and its successor (CITY LIGHTS, 1931). True, THE CIRCUS lacks the superb economy of THE GOLD RUSH and it does not plumb to the depths of pathos of CITY LIGHTS. But its virtues are rather special, and, I think, ones which we, forty years later, are in a special position to notice. For THE CIRCUS is one of the few films in which Chaplin's nineteenth-century sensibility deals symbolically with art and despair in a truly twentieth-century way.

It is a commonplace that the contemporary cinema has begun to comment on art as well as life; in LOLA MONTES, 8½, PERSONA, and BLOW-UP, we see directors exploring the nature of cinema itself. In the light of this tendency, THE CIRCUS seems highly modern.

Charles Chaplin with Merna Kennedy and Henry Bergman.

Perhaps Chaplin's most objective analysis of his screen *persona*, it uses the circus as a metaphor for both Film and Existence. Like Bergman in SUNSET OF A CLOWN, Chaplin fills his circus with symbols that suggest both the depths of art and the bleakness of life.

From the star on the hoop that fills the iris in the very first shot to the crumpled-up star Charlie kicks away in the last shot, the film traces patterns of circularity. On the plot level, this pattern is enacted in the rhythm of changes in Fortune—the essence of comedy. Charlie wanders into a sideshow, broke. He unexpectedly comes into possession of a watch and a wallet. But then he is chased by a cop who assumes he has stolen them. He eludes the cop by sprinting into the Big Top and unexpectedly becomes the hit of the show. He is hired and meets Merna, the daughter of the bullying ringmaster. And so on. Bad fortune—a twist—good fortune—a twist—bad fortune—ad infinitum: but always, as in all comedy, survival. The recurring scenes—the nightly performances, the ringmaster's blustering—find their place in the rhythm we know must be completed by the circus' eventual departure for a new town.

On the level of symbolism, circularity visually pervades the film. Merna's hoop, the wedding ring Charlie buys, and the controlling symbol of the circus ring itself: we are witnessing the ceaseless cycle of futile love. At the end, the image is almost too powerful: Charlie is imprisoned by the circle in the dirt, trapped in the cycle of life. As he had strolled into the film facing away from us, so he leaves by walking off into the distance, as if the entire film were only a short pause along his way. The road will never end.

This idea of ongoing life, which comedy typically projects, is modulated by the idea of performance—an image from the world of art; in Chaplin's case, cinema. THE CIRCUS analyzes the nature of audience-attitudes toward comedy and contrasts Chaplin's art with another variety of screen comedy.

The star enclosed in the circle reminds us that Charlie is the star of both the circus and THE CIRCUS. Two audiences have come to enjoy his antics. But the circus audience sees only a graceful gnat chased by a burly cop, a racing bum frantically fleeing an enraged horse, an awkward naif who unwittingly exposes every trick in the magician's props. And this is all *we* normally see of the usual clown. But Chaplin has always given us more. THE CIRCUS audience sees also the pathos of the clown's hopeless love for the girl, his lyrical courtship, his fears of the mysteries of circus life. On the screen, we see an audience thirsty for fun (like ourselves) enjoying Charlie's performance, but we are also privy, as they are not, to the clown's private grief. The moment both aspects crystallize—the audience screams, "Where's the Funny Man?" and a title, *The Funny Man*, takes us to a sleeping tramp curled up in a chariot—we are forced to analyze our own response to the public side of Chaplin's art. Might he not be reminding us—at the time of his much-publicized Lita Grey divorce—of the ultimate loneliness of the artist's private life?

Similarly, Chaplin brings in another comedy style to highlight the uniqueness of his own. The Keystone-Kops chase that opens the film soon tapers

off into Chaplin's more intimate comedy of glances, gestures, and feelings. The circus clowns' routines rehearse the old Sennett comedies: their William Tell scene is grotesque and crude, and their lathering-the-customer bit harks back to Sennett's spectacles of tactility, in which mud, plaster, dough, oil, whipped cream, and anything else suitably gooey became substance for slapstick. (Is it sarcasm on Chaplin's part that both the screen audience and ourselves find these clowns spectacularly unfunny?) But the only custard pie Charlie flings is one he intends to toss *to* Merna and that accidentally splats the prop man. In Sennett, slapstick is a catharsis of repressed dislike; in THE CIRCUS, it is kindness veering out of control.

The contrast between the two styles finds expression in the scene in which the clowns try to teach Charlie their William Tell routine. When the clown with the bow turns, the other surreptitiously takes a bite from the apple and replaces it on his head. Funny, maybe, but without the mad logic and quiet warmth of Chaplin's art. Charlie's attempt at the routine subtly critiques and corrects the earlier version. As the bowman turns around, Charlie bites the apple and his face goes blank. The other clown, puzzled, asks why. Charlie pantomimes with a forefinger: a worm in the apple. Suddenly an anonymous comic prop has become a discrete object in its own right, a part of the physical world with a personality of its own. The comic turn comes closer to life when the pain is perceived as real; perhaps this is the essence of Chaplin's art. So it comes with a special grace and fitness that when the clown turns again, Charlie has gently replaced the apple with a banana. We approve: the substition has undermined the silliness of the whole gag and embodied Charlie's absurd resourcefulness. Charlie cannot be *taught* to be funny. The dichotomy between art and life blurs in these scenes with the clowns because Charlie's life is all one comic bit. For him, as for us, comedy takes on the larger meaning of an infinite cycle of rapture and melancholy, energy and lassitude, hope and despair.

THE CIRCUS also comments on love in life and art. Charlie is a creature of the earth, but Merna is of the air. Horses chase Charlie, but they let Merna pirouette on their backs. We see her on the trapeze while Charlie throws food up to her. His love, therefore, is doomed from the start: no mortal can love a goddess. The Girl is sublimely unattainable by the Tramp; she can be won only by another citizen of the air—the handsome Rex, as his name suggests, king of tightrope walkers. Yet Charlie's love seems almost heroic when compared to the conventional simperings of Rex and Merna. His Byronic passion overshadows their cliche romance as much as Charlie's gestures grandly magnify the movements of man's body. Still, Charlie doesn't give up. On release from the lion's cage, he darts up a flagpole for safety, so we know fear can drive him to heights; and it is the fear of losing Merna that impells him to replace Rex on the high wire and that provides the climax of the film.

Charlie's tightrope act compares the two varieties of love, shallow romance and genuine passion, as his William Tell act had contrasted shallow slapstick and the comedy of pathos. Rex need risk nothing to gain Merna's love, but for Charlie the tightrope becomes the testing ground for his dream. All goes well until, when his safety-belt breaks, Charlie flips on the edge of falling. The star-patterns on the tent mock him: he is a star, but even in peril, he remains the Funny Man, not a king. Charlie has just regained his footing when a swarm of malignant monkeys scrambles over him. They are emblems of sheer malevolence, representing the terrors Charlie has encountered during his career with the circus. Thus the high-wire stunt becomes a ritual daring of death, the testament of the total love for Merna that has kept him in the dangerous world of the circus.

He survives, of course; but now he knows he can never be a creature of the air. He must leave the circus, for his career is not in clowning but in loving. When he finally gives Rex the ring he had bought for Merna, he symbolically surrenders this dangerous world of love and death, futility and illusion.

Early in the film, Charlie had fled from the cop into a house of mirrors. His visual disorientation quickly became ours: which was the false surface, which the reality? The circus is equally deceptive. In the end, Merna marries Rex, and her father, having made a killing, forgives both of them and instantly becomes a good-natured, kindly sort. The very abruptness of the transformation points up the superficiality of the circus world. The lovers' happiness, purchased so cheaply, puts them where they belong—in the realm of conventional sentiment, be it the Circus, the Cinema, or Life. But Rex and Merna were always entertainers, professionals; the "show" must go on. Charlie's "act" was inseparable from his personality; when he was unhappy, he couldn't pretend to be funny. For him, art was part and parcel of life.

Since Charlie's depths are greater, then, we do not regret his leaving a world of such smooth, deceptive surfaces. We know he will survive. When, in the final shots, Charlie wads up the tattered star-hoop, flips it over his shoulder, and gives it his jaunty back-kick, he simultaneously bids farewell to Merna, his circus career, and the world of illusion. The glitter of the Circus, both Chaplin and Yeats remind us, conceals pain and misery; art is a spark stolen from suffering. It is this peculiarly modern idea, perhaps more esthetically pure than in any other Chaplin film, that, in the wake of the circus animals' desertion, leaves us with—to quote Yeats again—a poem "as cold and passionate as the dawn." ▩

THE CIRCUS
1928, United Artists, 72 minutes.

Director, Producer, Screenplay, Charles Chaplin; *Photography,* Rollie H. Totheroh; *Cameraman,* Jack Wilson and Mark Latt; *Art Direction,* Charles D. Hall; *Assistant Director,* Harry Crocker; *Laboratory Supervision,* William E. Hinckley.

CAST:

Charles Chaplin	*The Tramp*
Allan Garcia	*Circus Proprietor*
Merna Kennedy	*Equestrienne*
Betty Morrissey	*Vanishing Lady*
Harry Crocker	*Rex, the Tightrope Walker*
George Davis	*Magician*
Henry Bergman	*The Old Clown*
Stanley Sanford	*The Chief Property Man*
John Rand	*The Assistant Property Man*
Steve Murphy	*The Pickpocket*
Doc Stone	*The Prizefighter*