

Virtual December 1, 2020 (41:14)

Charles Chaplin: **THE GREAT DICTATOR** (1940, 125 min)

*Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.  
Cast and crew name hyperlinks connect to the individuals' Wikipedia entries*



[Vimeo link for ALL of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the Fall 2020 BFS](#)

[Vimeo link for our introduction to \*The Great Dictator\*](#)

Zoom link for *all* Fall 2020 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions:

<https://buffalo.zoom.us/j/92994947964?pwd=dDBWcDYvSlhPbkd4TkswcUhiQWkydz09>

Meeting ID: 929 9494 7964

Passcode: 703450

**National Film Registry – 1997**

**Nominated for five Academy Awards:**

**Outstanding Production, Best Actor, Best original screenplay, Best Supporting Act (Oakie) and Best Original Score.**

**Directed, written and produced** by Charles Chaplin

**Original Music** by Charles Chaplin and Meredith Willson

**Cinematography** by Karl Struss and Roland Totheroh

**Film Editing** by Willard Nico and Harold Rice

**Art Direction** by J. Russell Spencer

**Set Decoration** by Edward G. Boyle

**Special Effects** by Ralph Hammeras

**Special Photographic Effects** by Jack Cosgrove

**Stunts** by Buster Wiles

**Meredith Willson**...musical director



**Carmen Dragon**...orchestrator

**Meredith Willson**...conductor

**Charles Chaplin**...Hynkel - Dictator of Tomania / A Jewish Barber

**Jack Oakie**...Napaloni - Dictator of Bacteria

**Reginald Gardiner**...Schultz

**Henry Daniell**...Garbitsch

**Billy Gilbert**...Herring

**Grace Hayle**...Madame Napaloni

**Carter DeHaven**...Bacterian Ambassador

**Paulette Goddard**...Hannah

**Maurice Moscovitch**...Mr. Jaeckel

**Emma Dunn**...Mrs. Jaeckel

**Bernard Gorcey**...Mr. Mann

**Paul Weigel**... Mr. Agar

**Chester Conklin**...Barber's Customer

**Esther Michelson**...Jewish Woman

**Hank Mann...**Storm Trooper Stealing Fruit  
**Florence Wright...**Blonde Secretary  
**Eddie Gribbon...**Tomanian Storm Trooper  
**Rudolph Anders...**Tomanian Commandant at Osterlich (as Robert O. Davis)  
**Eddie Dunn...**Whitewashed Storm Trooper  
**Nita Pike...** Secretary  
**George Lynn...** Commander of Storm Troopers (as Peter Lynn)



**CHARLES CHAPLIN (director)** (b. Charles Spencer Chaplin, April 16, 1889, Walworth, London, England – December 25, 1977, Vevey, Vaud, Switzerland)

### Academy Awards

- 1973 Best Music, Original Dramatic Score – *Limelight* (1952). Shared with: Ray Rasch, Larry Russell (The film was not released in Los Angeles until 1972. Under the Academy rules at the time, this permitted it to be eligible despite being 20 years old.)
- 1972 Honorary Award – For the incalculable effect he has had in making motion pictures the art form of this century.
- 1929 Honorary Award – *The Circus* (1928) For versatility and genius in acting, writing, directing and producing *The Circus*. Though

nominated for best actor, the academy decided to remove Chaplin's name from the competitive classes and instead award him a Special Award.

Chaplin directed 72 films, some of which are: 1967 *A Countess from Hong Kong*, 1959 *The Chaplin Revue*, 1957 *A King in New York*, 1952 *Limelight*, 1947 *Monsieur Verdoux*, 1940 *The Great Dictator*, 1936 *Modern Times* (as Charlie Chaplin), 1931 *City Lights*, 1928 *The Circus* (as Charlie Chaplin), 1925 *The Gold Rush*, 1923 *A Woman of Paris: A Drama of Fate*, 1923 *The Pilgrim* (uncredited), 1922/I *Pay Day* (short) (as Charlie Chaplin), 1922 *Nice and Friendly* (short), 1921 *The Idle Class* (short) (as Charlie Chaplin), 1921 *The Kid* (as Charlie Chaplin), 1919 *The Professor* (short) (unconfirmed), 1918 *Shoulder Arms*, 1918 *Triple Trouble* (short) (uncredited), 1918 *A Dog's Life* (short) (uncredited), 1918 *Chase Me Charlie*, 1918 *How to Make Movies* (short), 1917 *The Cure* (short) (uncredited), 1917 *Easy Street* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *Behind the Screen* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *The Pawnshop* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *The Count* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *The Fireman* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *The Floorwalker* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *Police* (short) (uncredited), 1915 *Burlesque on Carmen* (uncredited), 1915 *A Night in the Show* (short) (uncredited), 1915/I *Shanghaied* (short) (uncredited), 1915 *The Bank* (short) (uncredited), 1915 *A Woman* (short) (uncredited), 1915 *Work* (short) (uncredited), 1915 *The Tramp* (short) (uncredited), 1915 *The Champion* (short) (uncredited), 1914 *His Prehistoric Past* (short) (uncredited), 1914 *Getting Acquainted* (short) (uncredited), 1914 *His Trysting Place* (short), 1914 *His Musical Career* (short) (uncredited), 1914 *The New Janitor* (short) (uncredited), 1914 *His New Profession* (short) (uncredited), 1914 *The Face on the Bar Room Floor* (short) (uncredited), 1914 *Laughing Gas* (short) (uncredited), and 1914 *Caught in the Rain* (short).

**KARL STRUSS (director of photography)** (b. November 30, 1886, New York City, New York – December 16, 1981, Santa Monica, California) won a best cinematography Oscar for *Sunrise* (1927, shared with Charles Rosher). He shot 144 films, some of which are 1959 *Counterplot*, 1959 *The*

*Alligator People*, 1958 *Machete*, 1958 *The Hot Angel*, 1958 *The Fly*, 1957 *The Deerslayer*, 1957 *She Devil*, 1957 *Kronos*, 1956-1957 “Broken Arrow” (13 episodes), 1955-1956 “My Friend Flicka” (19 episodes), 1956 *Mohawk*, 1954 *Two Nights with Cleopatra*, 1953 *Funniest Show on Earth*, 1953 *Tarzan and the She-Devil*, 1953 *Mesa of Lost Women*, 1952 *Limelight*, 1952 *Tarzan's Savage Fury*, 1952 *Rose of Cimarron*, 1951 *Tarzan's Peril*, 1950 *The Texan Meets Calamity Jane*, 1950 *The Return of Jesse James*, 1950 *Rocketship X-M*, 1949 *Tarzan's Magic Fountain*, 1949 *Siren of Atlantis*, 1948 *The Dude Goes West*, 1947 *Heaven Only Knows*, 1947 *The Macomber Affair*, 1946 *Suspense*, 1946 *Tarzan and the Leopard Woman*, 1945 *Bring on the Girls*, 1944 *And the Angels Sing*, 1943 *Riding High*, 1941 *Caught in the Draft*, 1940 *The Great Dictator*, 1939 *The Star Maker*, 1939 *Island of Lost Men*, 1939 *Some Like It Hot*, 1938/II *Thanks for the Memory*, 1937 *Thunder Trail*, 1937 *Double or Nothing*, 1936 *Go West Young Man*, 1936 *Hollywood Boulevard*, 1936 *Anything Goes*, 1934 *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 1933 *Disgraced!*, 1933 *The Girl in 419*, 1933 *The Story of Temple Drake*, 1933 *Tonight Is Ours*, 1932 *Island of Lost Souls*, 1932 *The Sign of the Cross*, 1932 *Forgotten Commandments*, 1932 *World and the Flesh*, 1932 *Two Kinds of Women*, 1931 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1931 *The Road to Reno*, 1931 *Up Pops the Devil*, 1931 *Skippy*, 1931 *Kiki*, 1930 *Abraham Lincoln*, 1930 *Lummox*, 1929 *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1929 *Coquette*, 1928 *The Battle of the Sexes*, 1928 *Night Watch*, 1928 *Drums of Love*, 1927 *Sunrise*, 1927 *Babe Comes Home*, 1926 *Forever After*, 1926 *Meet the Prince*, 1926 *Sparrows*, 1925 *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, 1924 *White Man*, 1923 *Maytime*, 1923 *Daughters of the Rich*, 1923 *Poor Men's Wives*, 1923 *The Hero*, 1922 *Rich Men's Wives*, 1922 *Fools First*, 1921 *Fool's Paradise*, 1921 *The Affairs of Anatol*, and 1920 *Something to Think About*.

**ROLAND TOTTEROH (director of photography)** (November 29, 1890, San Francisco, California – June 18, 1967, Hollywood, California) nas 38 cinematographer credits, some of which are 1948 *Song of My Heart*, 1947 *Monsieur Verdoux*, 1940 *The Great Dictator*, 1936 *Modern Times*, 1931 *City Lights*, 1928 *The Circus*, 1925 *The Gold Rush*, 1923

*A Woman of Paris: A Drama of Fate*, 1923 *The Pilgrim* (uncredited), 1922/I *Pay Day* (short), 1921 *The Kid* (uncredited), 1919 *The Professor* (short) (uncredited), 1918 *Shoulder Arms*, 1918 *A Dog's Life* (short) (uncredited), 1917 *The Immigrant* (short) (uncredited), 1917 *Easy Street* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *Behind the Screen* (short) (photography), 1916 *The Pawnshop* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *The Vagabond* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *The Fireman* (short) (uncredited), 1916 *The Floorwalker* (short) (photographed by - uncredited), 1915 *A Night in the Show* (short) (uncredited), 1915 *Work* (short) (uncredited), 1913 *The Dance at Eagle Pass* (short) (as Rollie Totheroh)



**JACK OAKIE... Napaloni - Dictator of Bacteria** (b. Lewis Delaney Offield, November 12, 1903, Sedalia, Missouri – January 23, 1978, Los Angeles, California) has 100 acting credits, some of which are 1966 “Bonanza”, 1966 “Daniel Boone”, 1963 “The Real McCoys”, 1961 *Lover Come Back*, 1959 *The Wonderful Country*, 1958 “Kraft Theatre”, 1956 *Around the World in Eighty Days*, 1951 *Tomahawk*, 1950 *Last of the Buccaneers*, 1949 *Thieves' Highway*, 1948 *When My Baby Smiles at Me*, 1945 *That's the Spirit*, 1944 *Bowery to Broadway*, 1944 *Sweet and Low-Down*, 1944 *It Happened Tomorrow*, 1943 *Something to Shout About*, 1942 *Iceland*, 1941 *Navy Blues*, 1941 *The Great American Broadcast*, 1940 *Little Men*, 1940 *Tin Pan Alley*, 1940 *The Great Dictator*, 1938 *Thanks for Everything*, 1938 *Annabel Takes a Tour*, 1938 *The Affairs of Annabel*, 1937 *Fight for Your Lady*, 1937 *The Toast of New York*, 1936 *That Girl from Paris*, 1936 *The Texas*



*Rangers*, 1936 *King of Burlesque*, 1935 *The Call of the Wild*, 1934 *Murder at the Vanities*, 1933 *Alice in Wonderland*, 1933 *The Eagle and the Hawk*, 1932 *Uptown New York*, 1932 *If I Had a Million*, 1932 *Madison Sq. Garden*, 1932 *Million Dollar Legs*, 1932 *Dancers in the Dark*, 1931 *Touchdown*, 1931 *Dude Ranch*, 1931 *The Gang Buster*, 1930 *Sea Legs*, 1930 *The Sap from Syracuse*, 1930 *Hit the Deck*, 1929 *Fast Company*, 1929 *Street Girl*, 1929 *The Man I Love*, 1929 *Chinatown Nights*, 1929 *Sin Town*, 1928 *The Fleet's In*, 1928 *Finders Keepers*, and 1923 *His Children's Children*.



1943 *Watch on the Rhine*, 1943 *Mission to Moscow*, 1943 *Sherlock Holmes in Washington*, 1942 *Reunion in France*, 1942 *The Great Impersonation*, 1942 *Nightmare*, 1942 *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror*, 1942 *Castle in the Desert*, 1942 *Four Jacks and a Jill*, 1941 *Dressed to Kill*, 1940 *The Philadelphia Story*, 1940 *The Great Dictator*, 1940 *All This, and Heaven Too*, 1940 *The Sea Hawk*, 1939 *We Are Not Alone*, 1939 *Essex and Elizabeth*, 1938 *Marie Antoinette*, 1937 *Madame X*, 1937 *Under Cover of Night*, 1936 *Camille*, 1930 *The Last of the Lone Wolf*, 1929 *Jealousy*, and 1929 *The Awful Truth*.

**HENRY DANIELL... Garbitsch** (b. Charles Henry Daniel, March 5, 1894, London, England – October 31, 1963, Santa Monica, California) appeared in 94 films, including 1964 *My Fair Lady*, 1962 “77 Sunset Strip”, 1962 “Combat!”, 1962 *Mutiny on the Bounty*, 1962 *The Chapman Report*, 1962 *Madison Avenue*, 1961 *The Comancheros*, 1961 *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, 1960 “Shirley Temple Theatre”, 1960 “Wagon Train”, 1960 “Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color”, 1959 *The Four Skulls of Jonathan Drake*, 1959 “Maverick”, 1958 “Westinghouse Desilu Playhouse”, 1958 “Alcoa Theatre”, 1952-1958 “Kraft Theatre”, 1957 “Matinee Theatre”, 1957 *Witness for the Prosecution*, 1957 *The Story of Mankind*, 1957 *Les Girls*, 1957 *The Sun Also Rises*, 1957 “Schlitz Playhouse”, 1956 *Lust for Life*, 1956 *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, 1956 *Diane*, 1955 “Jane Wyman Presents The Fireside Theatre”, 1955 *The Prodigal*, 1954 “Lux Video Theatre”, 1954 *The Egyptian*, 1951-1952 “Lights Out”, 1951 “Armstrong Circle Theatre”, 1951 “Studio One in Hollywood”, 1950 *Buccaneer's Girl*, 1949 *Siren of Atlantis*, 1948 *Wake of the Red Witch*, 1947 *The Exile*, 1947 *Song of Love*, 1946 *The Bandit of Sherwood Forest*, 1945 *Captain Kidd*, 1945 *Hotel Berlin*, 1943 *Jane Eyre*,

**BILLY GILBERT...Herring** (b. William Gilbert Barron, September 12, 1894, Louisville, Kentucky – September 23, 1971, Hollywood, California) appeared in 220 films, some of which are 1962 *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, 1962 *Paradise Alley*, 1956-1961 “The Red Skelton Hour” (5 episodes), 1954 “My Little Margie”, 1953 *Down Among the Sheltering Palms*, 1949 *Bride of Vengeance*, 1948 *The Kissing Bandit*, 1947 *Mickey and the Beanstalk* (short), 1945 *Anchors Aweigh*, 1944 *Three of a Kind*, 1943 *Shantytown*, 1942 *Arabian Nights*, 1942 *Valley of the Sun*, 1941 *One Night in Lisbon*, 1941 *Reaching for the Sun*, 1941 *Model Wife*, 1940 *No, No, Nanette*, 1940 *Tin Pan Alley*, 1940 *Seven Sinners*, 1940 *The Great Dictator*, 1940 *The Villain Still Pursued Her*, 1940 *A Little Bit of Heaven*, 1940 *Scatterbrain*, 1940 *Queen of the Mob*, 1940 *Safari*, 1940 *His Girl Friday*, 1939 *Destry Rides Again*, 1939 *Rio*, 1939 *Million Dollar Legs*, 1938 *Peck's Bad Boy with the Circus*, 1938 *Breaking the Ice*, 1938 *Army Girl*, 1938 *Maid's Night Out*, 1937 *The Firefly*, 1937 *Broadway Melody of 1938*, 1937 *The Toast of New York*, 1937 *Captains Courageous*, 1937 *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, 1937 *Espionage*, 1937 *Sea Devils*, 1936 *The Big Game*, 1936 *My American Wife*, 1936 *Grand Jury*, 1936 *The Bride*

*Walks Out*, 1936 *Poor Little Rich Girl*, 1936 *Three of a Kind*, 1935 *Coronado*, 1935 *A Night at the Opera*, 1935 *Paris in Spring*, 1934 *Nifty Nurses* (short), 1934 *Peck's Bad Boy* (uncredited), 1933 *This Day and Age*, 1933 *The Girl in 419*, 1933 *Maids a la Mode* (short), 1932 *Hot Spot* (short), 1932 *Pack Up Your Troubles*, 1932 *Blondie of the Follies*, 1932 *Million Dollar Legs*, 1932 *Spanky* (short), 1932 *The Tabasco Kid* (short), 1931 *The Pajama Party* (short), 1931 *First Aid*, and 1929 *The Woman from Hell*.



**PAULETTE GODDARD...Hannah** (b. Pauline Marion Goddard Levy, June 3, 1910, Whitestone Landing, Long Island, New York – April 23, 1990, Ronco, Switzerland) 1972 “The Snoop Sisters”, 1964 *Time of Indifference*, 1961 “The Phantom”, 1956 “The Errol Flynn Theatre”, 1954 “Sherlock Holmes”, 1954 *Charge of the Lancers*, 1953 *Paris Model*, 1953 *Sins of Jezebel*, 1953 *Vice Squad*, 1952 *Babes in Bagdad*, 1949 *Anna Lucasta*, 1949 *Bride of Vengeance*, 1947 *An Ideal Husband*, 1947 *Unconquered*, 1946 *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, 1944 *Standing Room Only*, 1943 *So Proudly We Hail!*, 1942 *Star Spangled Rhythm*, 1942 *Reap the Wild Wind*, 1941 *Nothing But the Truth*, 1941 *Hold Back the Dawn*, 1940 *North West Mounted Police*, 1940 *The Great Dictator*, 1940 *The Ghost Breakers*,

1939 *The Cat and the Canary*, 1939 *The Women*, 1936 *The Bohemian Girl*, 1936 *Modern Times*, 1933 *The Bowery*, 1932 *Pack Up Your Troubles*, 1932 *The Mouthpiece*, 1931 *Ladies of the Big House*, 1931 *The Girl Habit*, 1930 *Whoopee!*, and 1929 *The Locked Door*.

**from *World Film Directors. Vol. I. Edited by John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co., NY 1987. Entry by Gerald Mast.***

CHAPLIN, Sir CHARLES (SPENCER) (April 16, 1889-December 25, 1977), Anglo-American clown, star, director, producer, writer, and composer, was born and raised in the working-class London districts of Walworth, Lambeth, and Kennington. His parents, both music-hall entertainers, had fallen on hard times. Chaplin's baritone father, also named Charles, had taken to the bottle and to beating his fragile soubrette wife, Hannah. Before Chaplin was three, his father deserted the family for another woman, leaving Hannah to sink into the insanity that marked the rest of her life. The young Chaplin and his older half-brother, Sydney, lived for a while with Chaplin senior and his mistress, and in 1898 Chaplin was briefly reunited with his mother, whom he adored. However, he spent his childhood mostly in public charity homes and on the streets, where he quickly learned the power of money and propriety, while carefully observing the little jobs and stratagems that allowed the least fortunate members of society to survive.

According to Chaplin. He made his music hall debut at the age of five, taking his mother's place on stage one evening when she lost her voice. His career began in earnest in the summer of 1898. Though he was not from Lancashire, he became one of the Eight Lancashire Lads, a children's music troupe that toured England's provincial music halls. The featured role of Billy in *Sherlock Holmes*, first with H.A. Saintsbury in a 1903 tour of the provinces, then with its original American author and star, William Gillette, brought Chaplin to London's West End. In 1907 he joined Fred Karno's Pantomime Troupe, England's most accomplished company of physical farceurs (whose alumni also included Stan Laurel). By 1908 Chaplin had risen to be Karno's star attraction, specializing in his dexterous portrayal of a comic drunk—a routine he would recreate in

films over the next forty years. Between 1909 and 1913 Chaplin accompanied the Karno troupe on tours to Paris and the United States. On his second tour he received an offer to join Mack Sennett's Keystone Company in Hollywood. Mabel Normand, Sennett's leading comedienne, Adam Kessel, co-owner of the Keystone Company, and Sennett himself all take credit for discovering Chaplin in the Karno act.

Chaplin arrived on the Sennett lot in December 1913 with a contract for a year's work at \$150 per week. He had been making only \$50 weekly as a star of the music hall stage. His first reaction to the movie business was a combination of shock and dismay. Accustomed to the temporal continuity of stage comedy, Chaplin couldn't understand how a scene or routine could be cut into non-chronological pieces. Compared with the careful comic craftsmanship of the Karno crew, he found Sennett's method careless, sloppy, and crude.

Working frantically to produce at least two comic reels a week, Sennett never invested time in deepening the texture or complicating the structure of gags. The Sennett style showed less interest in comic observations of human behavior than in run, bash, smash, and crash.

"Chaplin was used to a slower, subtler, and more individual pantomime,"

according to Theodore Huff, his first major biographer. Chaplin's first Keystone comedy, *Making a Living* (1914), dressed him in a stereotypic English music hall outfit, then kept him racing across the frame for an entire reel. But his second Keystone film, *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, was the comic revelation in which Chaplin assembled his trademark Tramp costume for the first time—bowler hat, reedy cane, baggy pants (borrowed from Fatty Arbuckle), floppy shoes (borrowed from Ford Sterling).

Like many Keystone films, *Kid Auto Races* was improvised around an actual event—the racing of homemade cars on a weekend afternoon. The

Tramp arrives to watch the races but meets an unexpected challenge—a movie camera and crew recording the event, presumably for a newsreel. In an unstructured half-reel of improvised clowning, Chaplin plays two comic games with the supposed newsreel camera: he makes himself the star of the newsreel and he resists any attempt of the camera crew to boot him out of its frame.

Chaplin's remaining Keystone films of 1914 come directly from *Kid Auto Races*. They demonstrate the Tramp's plucky refusal to be pushed around by anyone: any kick you can give me I can give back harder. And they demonstrate the way Chaplin can convert an inanimate object, like a movie camera, into a living opponent. ...

Most of his Keystones stick with familiar Sennett material—aggressive physical objects; a kick in the butt and a romp around the park, propelled by three states of inebriation: drunk, drunker, and drunkest. It was a period when, as



Chaplin later observed, you made a movie by taking Mabel Normand, a bucket of whitewash, and a camera to a park and improvising. Chaplin began to direct his films. Among the most interesting, pointing toward later work, was *The New Janitor*. Charlie, the lowly janitor of an office building, saves a pretty secretary from attack by a thief. In a deliberate irony, the thief turns out to be a

"respectable" employee of the firm, the handsome gent to whom the secretary was previously attracted. By protecting her from this apparent pillar of rectitude, Chaplin demonstrates that he is the worthier man and that society's conceptions of worth based on good looks and social graces are themselves askew. In many later films Chaplin's Tramp would demonstrate his moral worth by protecting a fragile, idealized woman against foes bigger, stronger, richer than himself.

By the end of his Keystone year, Chaplin had become so popular in America's nickelodeons that merely displaying the Tramp's wooden effigy with the words "I'm here today" would attract long lines

of loyal fans. Sennett offered Chaplin five times his 1914 salary, \$750 per week, for another year at Keystone, but the Essanay Company of Chicago offered Chaplin \$1250 per week, plus a \$10,000 bonus upon signing. Chaplin left Hollywood for Chicago. After two films he transferred to the Essanay lot in California, where he could escape both the winter chill and a hostile management.

Chaplin's year at Essanay was a transitional

period between the knockabout Sennett farces and the more subtle comedies of psychological observation and moral debate that mark the mature Chaplin....His sixth film at Essanay, *The Tramp*...was the first film in which Chaplin was fully conscious of both his Tramp persona and the relationship of that persona to the respectable social

world. As in *The New Janitor*, Chaplin's Tramp protects a frail woman from physical harm—this time from fellow tramps, members of his own "class." (The actress, Edna Purviance, joined Chaplin's troupe early in his Essanay year. She was to play the idealized woman in every Chaplin film for the next eight years, and she remained on the Chaplin payroll until her death in 1958.)....

This ending—the Tramp's disappointment and return to the road—would dominate Chaplin films for two decades, a recognition that the Tramp's life *was* the road, that singularity meant solitude....In his Essanay films Chaplin defined the central conflict for the Tramp as between the world of the "straight" and his own personal system of morality and value. The Tramp could resist (and implicitly criticize) the "straight" obsession with property because his needs were more elemental—survival, shelter, food, and love. And the Tramp could either flout or poignantly refine upon the niceties that meant so much to the respectable world. Chaplin's cinema style also gradually abandoned Sennett's mechanical reliance on editing—building scenes

quickly and cheaply from small snippets. Instead, Chaplin drew on the lesson of the musical soup in *His Trysting Places*, seeking the precise camera position to convey the essential view, tone, and meaning of an intricately choreographed routine: "With more experience I found that the placing of a camera was not only psychological but articulated a scene; in fact, it was the basis of cinematic style."

Chaplin's technique would always depend on

framing rather than cutting—the precise organization of persons, objects, and their movements within a stable, psychologically defined space. Chaplin met a key collaborator at Essanay, the cameraman Rollie Totheroh, who would shoot every Chaplin film—and only Chaplin films—until his death in 1946.

As Chaplin's comic theme and cinema style matured at Essanay, his



*Chaplin and Ghandi*

popularity grew at an astonishing rate. Essanay offered \$500,000 for another year of two-reel films. It wasn't enough. In late 1915 he signed a contract with the Mutual Film Company for \$10,000 per week and a bonus of \$150,000 upon signing. In return, Chaplin was to supply a dozen two-reel films which he would write, direct, and perform as he pleased. The contract for only twelve films—one per month—allowed Chaplin to slow his pace of production so as to invest more time in comic detail, structure, and observation (compared to thirty-five Keystone films in 1914 and fourteen at Essanay in 1915). The twelve Mutual films actually required eighteen months of work. Chaplin had begun to exercise his mania for perfection in the conception and complication of comic routines—rehearsing, shooting, and reshooting them until the extended sequences were perfectly executed by camera, cast, and star. By 1917, Chaplin was exposing 50,000 feet of film for a two-reel (2000 feet) Mutual comedy, an astonishing shooting ratio of 25 to 1, which would later swell to 100 to 1. (In comparison, major feature films today expect a shooting ratio of, perhaps, 9 to

1, with the shooting ratio for television about half that.)

The twelve Mutual films in 1916-1917 represented the fruit of Chaplin's experience with the twenty-minute comedy: comic gems of social commentary and psychological observation, of balletic chases and transmutations of inanimate objects into almost sentient beings—all built on an exact understanding of who the Tramp was, how he saw the respectable social world, and how it saw him..... With the close of the Mutual cycle in mid-1917, both Chaplin's life and career reached a

turning point. For four years he had done little but make films, steadily increasing his artistic control, confidence in his medium, understanding of his Tramp character, and popularity with his public. The new contract he signed in 1918 looked no different from previous ones but was to prove so: a \$1 million agreement with the First National Exhibitors Circuit. This alliance of theater owners, battling the growing power of film production

companies, contracted directly with stars like Chaplin for films. Chaplin built his own film studio in 1918 at the corner of Sunset Boulevard and La Brea Avenue in Hollywood. Like his previous Mutual contract, the First National agreement called for a dozen two-reel comedies in a year. In point of fact, it took Chaplin five years, during which he made just eight films, only three of which were two-reelers....Three First Nationals were three-reelers...one was four...and one was six. Chaplin was both slowing the pace of his work and extending the length of his comic explorations.

The public notoriety that became as much a Chaplin trademark as his bowler hat also reached him in 1918. Chaplin both benefited and suffered from the avid public interest in movies and movie stars during the decade following 1910, as Hollywood grew into the world's most powerful producer of cultural messages and images. With the

single exception of Mary Pickford, no movie star was as well known and well loved as Chaplin, the first twentieth-century "superstar" created by the century's global media. Even a Chaplin sneeze was news, and Chaplin did more than sneeze. In 1918 he toured the country with his friend Douglas Fairbanks, raising money for war bonds, a response to those who asked why Chaplin was not fighting for King and Country in the trenches. He was also married for the first time in 1918—to Mildred Harris, thirteen years his junior and "no intellectual heavyweight," in Chaplin's own words. The

marriage established a new Chaplin pattern—the surprise marriage to a very young bride (rumored to be pregnant), ending quickly in rancorous and highly publicized divorce—in this case in 1920.

In 1919 Chaplin and three other famous figures of the day, D.W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks, formed the United Artists Corporation to finance

and distribute their own films—the first concerted exercise of Hollywood artists on their own commercial behalf. Chaplin took a trip abroad in 1921, visiting England for the first time in eight years. He was amazed at the enormous crowds who sought a glimpse of him at docks and railway stations. Even the most distinguished men of the age—Churchill, Gandhi, H.G. Wells, Bernard Shaw—wanted to meet him. For a rising younger generation of European artists and thinkers, no one combined the popular appeal and the artistic insight of Chaplin, the ultimate artist of the people in an increasingly democratic society. The cultural critic Robert Warshow found it no hyperbole to call Chaplin "surely one of the few comic geniuses who have appeared so far in history."

Between travels through America, Europe, the marriage bureau, and the divorce court Chaplin worked with both intensity and brilliance. *A Dog's*





*Life*, which opened the First National series in 1918, was longer and richer than any film he had previously attempted. Demonstrating his ever-deepening understanding of the Tramp's moral values and social limits, Chaplin created his first tramp-surrogate, the mongrel

Scraps—an outcast who must fight to survive in a world of tougher, bigger dogs. ...The film's extended comic sequences show Tramp and mongrel working either separately or together toward the same end—usually something to eat. *Shoulder Arms* moved from the metaphoric to the topical—transporting the Tramp to the battlefield trenches of Europe. As he had done in *Easy Street*, Chaplin converted the serious and sordid into hilarious comedy—the daily struggle to survive against not only bullets but fleas, rats, and mud. As in *The Bank*, the Tramp's heroic triumph, capturing a German general, is followed by a rude awakening that reveals his heroism “over there” as mere dream.

After these two triumphs Chaplin suffered a major disappointment and his career seemed to mark time for two years. *Sunnyside* was the first Chaplin film not to find favor with his public, a sarcastic look at the Tramp in rural America. As he had done in *Easy Street* and *Shoulder Arms*, Chaplin exposed the uglier, dirtier side of life. *Sunnyside* is not at all sunny, a debunking of the rural idyll's claims to moral purity and Christian charity. Despite its failure, several sequences rate among Chaplin's most memorable: his dreaming himself into the role of an allegorical Pan, cavorting across meadows with classical nymphs; his comic failure to duplicate the style and manner of the handsome city slicker whom he sees as a rival for Edna's affections.

More than eighteen months elapsed before *The Kid* appeared, his longest and most ambitious film, a response to his crumbling marriage and the death of a stillborn child that, according to Mildred Harris, ended it. *The Kid* combined the Victorian

melodrama and pathos of *The Vagabond*, the tramp-surrogate of *A Dog's Life*, the vicious urban struggle to survive of *Easy Street*, and the allegorical dream of *Sunnyside*. In the film's opening sequence, Edna, an unwed mother, rejected by a callous artist-lover, gives birth to a child that she abandons, hoping it will find a legitimate, richer life with an adopted family. Although she considers suicide, Edna stays alive to become a successful actress and enjoy a reunion with the long-lost child. Chaplin makes explicit use of Christian symbolism, comparing the burden of the unwed mother to Christ's carrying the heavy cross.

The child's adoptive parent turns out to be the wandering Tramp, who finds the infant bundle in a garbage-filled alley....In the film's final sequence, when a desolate Charlie fears that Jackie has gone forever, Chaplin offers a dream-allegory of the Fall of Man, a pastiche of *Paradise Lost* that contrasts human aspirations toward the Good with the overwhelming realities and temptations of mortal existence. The lascivious temptress in this dream was played by twelve-year-old Lita Grey, who would become

Chaplin's real-life temptress—both his second girl-wife (in 1924) and his second ex-wife (in 1926). The ending in *The Kid* was much more felicitous. Edna alleviates the Tramp's despair, just as she had in *The Vagabond*, by returning for him and inviting him into her comfortable home for a joyous reunion with Jackie. The question that this ending avoids is whether the Tramp could in fact ever inhabit such a house.

The final film of the First National group, returns to this question....

Chaplin's first United Artists production was another daring departure. *A Woman of Paris* (1923) was not a slapstick farce but a witty comedy of manners set in the demimonde of Paris. The Tramp



does not exist in such a milieu, and Chaplin himself appears only briefly as a railway porter....The film was also Chaplin's farewell gift to Edna Purviance, her final starring role in a Chaplin film. Growing both stouter and older than the Tramp's fragile ideal, Edna once more plays a woman led astray by men. When Marie St. Clair (Edna) believes herself abandoned by her artist lover, she becomes the most famous courtesan of Paris, kept by its most elegant bachelor, Pierre Revel (Adolphe Menjou appearing for the first time in the role that was to become his specialty). Even without the Tramp, Chaplin's cinematic style depended on the dextrous manipulation of physical objects to reveal the slyly sexual intentions of their human handlers. This first elegantly stylish comedy of manners in the American cinema, reflecting Jazz Age interest in the rich and decadent, became a powerful influence on Ernst Lubitsch, the eventual grand master of the genre.

Chaplin's next four features for United Artists, his entire artistic output for the next decade, return to the Tramp and his conflict with "normal" American social expectations. The four films—*The Gold Rush* (1925), *The Circus* (1927), *City Lights* (1931), and *Modern Times* (1936)—form a distinct unit, which might be called Chaplin's "marriage group." All four return to the question posed by the ending of *The Kid*: under what circumstances might the Tramp marry and settle down with a woman in ordinary bourgeois society? The films suggest four different answers under four different circumstances. Having struck it rich in *The Gold Rush*, the Tramp becomes an acceptable mate for Georgia (Hale), who has learned the worthlessness of good-looking suitors who exploit her sexually. But in *The Circus*, Charlie fails to fulfill Merna Kennedy's vision of romance, embodied for her by the tightrope walker, Rex. After bringing the two lovers together, the Tramp takes his lonely leave, returning to the road once more. *City Lights* cannot supply an answer. Having fallen in love with a blind flower-seller



(Virginia Cherrill) who loved him for his kindness but imagined him as handsome and rich, Charlie fears that he will disappoint her once she recovers her sight. Though Charlie was her social equal when she was blind, how can the two share a life when she is able to see him, a lowly tramp? The film's poignant ending—"The greatest piece of acting and the highest moment in movies," according to the critic James Agee—closes on this unanswered question. In *Modern Times*, however, Charlie finds his female equal in the Gamin (Paulette Goddard), a homeless child of nature who, like Charlie (and Scraps and Jackie) belongs nowhere in organized society. Charlie and Paulette flee to the road—traveling together, away from the camera, toward some place beyond the horizon.

Chaplin extended the length and complexity of his comic routines at the same time that he deepened the conflict between the ethereal Tramp and the material world.

...Between *The Circus* and *City Lights*, the arrival of synchronized sound overthrew silent film production in Hollywood. Silence was not something imposed on Chaplin; it was the medium in which the Tramp lived—he had never even mouthed words. Chaplin made what seemed a radical decision in 1931 and a sensible decision ever after: to make *City Lights* as a silent mimed comedy with musical scoring and sound effects. A skilled though self-taught musician on the violin and cello, Chaplin himself composed the score for the film, as he did for all his sound films, as well as adding musical tracks to silent classics. Chaplin is the only film director to win an Oscar for composing, and one of two directors (Victor Schertzinger is the other) to write hit songs: "Smile," the theme of *Modern Times*, and "Eternally," that of *Limelight*.

In *City Lights*, Chaplin's music established and emphasized the film's variations in tone—the farcical adventures of the Tramp with a drunken millionaire, set to bouncy brass; the touching scenes

of the Tramp with the blind flower-seller, set to sentimental strings. In the music contrast was the thematic contrast. The millionaire, who enjoyed every material advantage, was spiritually barren—a loveless, suicidal drunk. The flower-seller, enjoying no material advantages whatever, not even sight, was spiritually rich (flowers had been a consistent Chaplin symbol of spiritual beauty since the 1915



*Essanay, A Night Out*). The Tramp could travel between the two extremes because the drunk millionaire was as blind as the girl to external appearances. The Tramp's journey between them represented the spirit of absolute selflessness, the Christ figure toward which this character's entire development had tended. He undergoes baptism (with the suicidal millionaire in a river), raises the dead (convincing the millionaire not to take his life), cures the blind, is denied three times (whenever the millionaire is sober enough to see), suffers crucifixion (prison), and resurrection (when he finds that the girl can see). Perhaps the film cannot end with a marriage because the vow of chastity accompanies that of poverty.

*Modern Times* can end with a marriage because the Tramp returns from the spiritual realm to the physical world of human survival—in modern, urban, Depression America....He had also secretly married Paulette Goddard in 1936 after a four-year romance. Perhaps the ending of *Modern Times* announced Chaplin's intention to resign the battle and retire to domestic comfort. He would not do so until after another marriage and another stormy decade.

Chaplin's final three American films were conventional dialogue films with unconventional twists: *The Great Dictator* (1940), *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), and *Limelight* (1952). In *The Great Dictator* Chaplin played two contrasting social roles (as he did in *A Night in the Show* and *The Idle Class*): a Jewish barber in the ghetto, resembling the

Tramp in manner and appearance; and Adenoid Hynkel, dictator of Tomania, a burlesque of Hitler whose toothbrush moustache infringed upon another Chaplin trademark. The film was made before the facts were known about the Nazi death camps, and Chaplin claims he never would have made it if he had known. His burlesque reflects general American opinion in 1940, treating Hitler as a maniacal clown. In its most

memorable sequence, Hynkel becomes a cooch dancer, performing a hypnotic bubble dance with a globe of the earth, the ethereal balloon of his imperial desires. For two decades Chaplin had depicted the Tramp's dreaming that collapses in the cold light of day. Here the Tramp's illusion becomes a dictator's delusion of grandeur, burst by a cathartic pin.

*Monsieur Verdoux* is another political fable.... Verdoux is a man with many lives and many wives, whose business is marrying and murdering for money. Having lost his job as a bank teller during the Depression, Verdoux marries rich, repellent, elderly ladies and kills them to support his beloved wife and child on an idyllic farm. The film draws explicit parallels between Verdoux's murderous trade and more acceptable professions—munitions manufacture, stock trading, banking—which have brought death and social chaos on a much grander scale....

Americans began to connect Chaplin's savage political positions on screen with his perceived political stance offscreen. For Chaplin it was a decade of continuous legal and public turmoil. Having appeared at 1942 rallies supporting a Russian counterattack on Germany (the Second Front), Chaplin became the target of right-wing suspicion and FBI investigation. Most items in J. Edgar Hoover's Chaplin file turned out to be morsels from the gossip columns of Louella Parsons in the right-wing Hearst press, many planted by Hoover himself. Conservative pressure groups asked why

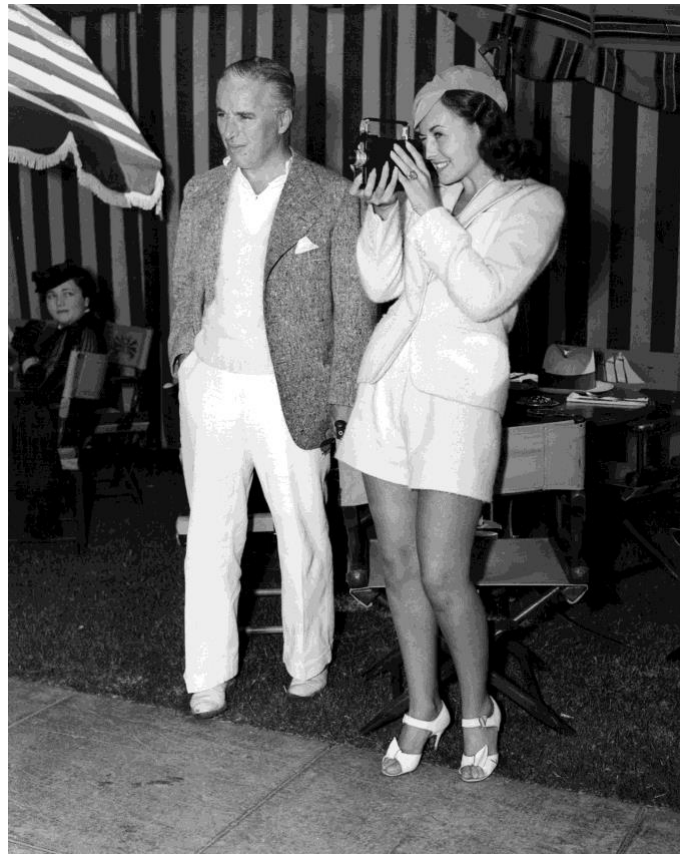
Chaplin should be permitted to make so many American dollars without becoming an American citizen. He even owed the Internal Revenue Service a significant amount in unpaid taxes on those profits. Chaplin was divorced from Paulette Goddard in 1942 and in 1943 married Oona O'Neill, the playwright's youngest daughter—the fourth time Chaplin (now 54) had married a much younger woman (she was 18). The marriage was almost simultaneous with Chaplin's most scandalously publicized legal battle: Joan Barry's 1943 paternity suit naming Chaplin as her lover of two years and the father of her child. Although Chaplin denied her claims and genetic evidence refuted them, the court ruled for Barry. *Monsieur Verdoux* was Chaplin's first box-office failure since *Sunnyside*.

Even amid public hostility in the 1952 America of Joseph McCarthy, the House Un-American Activities Committee, and Hollywood blacklisting, Chaplin made a final affectionate tribute to his art and its traditions. *Limelight* was another film in which Chaplin played multiple roles—or rather the same character at different times of his life. He is Calvero, now an old, drunken has-been, rejected by his audience (as Chaplin himself had suffered rejection), but, once, forty years earlier, a star music-hall comedian. The old man's dream sequences evoke memories and recreate routines of Chaplin's youth, classic music-hall sketches that suggest not only the Tramp but the entire tradition of comic mime from which the Tramp grew. Not accidentally, Chaplin's final routine in the film is what Warshaw called an "unendurably funny" comic duet with Buster Keaton, another silent clown-star with roots in the same tradition....

After completing *Limelight* Chaplin and Oona took the usual trip abroad for the film's European release. Not being a citizen, Chaplin needed advance permission to return to the United States. After a series of interrogations about his political beliefs, the State Department finally issued a reentry permit—only to revoke it as soon as the *Queen Elizabeth* left the dock in New York. Chaplin received a shipboard cable informing him that he would be required "to answer charges of a political nature and moral turpitude." While politely pretending to answer those charges in London, Chaplin quietly sent Oona back to America to liquidate his assets—from the Beverly Hills mansion to the United Artists company to the Sunset Boulevard studio. The Chaplin family moved to Switzerland, where they lived comfortably for

twenty-five years. The family eventually included eight children, the oldest—Geraldine—now an actress.

Chaplin refused to return to America for two decades—long after the State Department had relented—but in 1972 the Motion Picture Academy awarded him a conciliatory Oscar, and he made a triumphal visit to receive it. His feature films, which had also been withdrawn from American circulation for two decades (an exception was a brief New York retrospective in 1963), were released to a generation that had never seen them. In 1975 Chaplin, the former London street urchin and eternal



Tramp, was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II.

Chaplin made two last films in exile, *A King in New York* (1957), a bitterly clumsy satire of contemporary American culture, and *A Countess From Hong Kong* (1967), a sweetly clumsy return to *A Woman of Paris*, in color and Cinemascope, with Sophia Loren and Marlon Brando. Inhibited by low budgets, tight schedules, and a production team of



strangers, both films unintentionally revealed Chaplin's dependence on the unique way he had made films for forty years—in his own studio, at his own pace, as his own boss, with his own family of players and technicians.

Chaplin's ultimate accomplishment was not merely a long list of masterful comic films over a career of four decades but the creation of a cultural archetype who embodied the contradictions within twentieth-century industrial society—the battle between the material and the spiritual, the individual and the community, the natural and the artificial, the institutional and the spontaneous, the respectable and the moral. It is no small irony that the Tramp, this archetype of vital chaos, the elemental foe of social machinery and institutions, has been used in the 1980s to advertise the wares of an immense industrial corporation. That the Tramp would become a salesman for IBM computers was simply inconceivable in the 1916 of *Easy Street*, the 1936 of *Modern Times*, or the 1952 of his virtual deportation. Reflecting on Chaplin's achievement, James Agee observed that “of all comedians, he worked most deeply and most shrewdly within a realization of what a human being is, and is up against. The Tramp is as centrally representative of humanity, as manysided and as mysterious, as Hamlet, and it seems unlikely that any dancer or actor can ever have excelled him in eloquence, variety or poignancy of motion.”

**Michael Wood: “The Great Dictator: The Joker and the Madman.” (Criterion Notes)**

In 1938, Charles Chaplin deposited with the Library of Congress a script for a film to be called *The Dictator*, and told the press it was a project in which he would play a double role. He clearly had Hitler in mind, and a headline in the English newspaper the *Daily Mail* read, “Chaplin (and Moustache) to Satirise Dictators”—presumably, Mussolini was in the larger plan somewhere. Chaplin shot the movie during 1939 and showed an almost final version to friends in March 1940. *The Great Dictator*, as it was now called, opened in New York in October 1940 and ran for fifteen weeks, in spite of a great deal of Hollywood worry about offending the European dictators, with whom the U.S. was not yet at war. The London premiere took place in December 1940, in the midst of heavy German air raids over the city.



It was banned in occupied Europe and in Latin America.

Much had happened in the world while the film was being made. Hitler and Mussolini had formed the Axis, and Hitler had signed a nonaggression pact with Stalin, invaded Poland, Denmark, Holland, and Belgium, and occupied Paris and much of the rest of France. Was this a time to be funny about dictators? Even Chaplin, well into production, had his doubts—ultimately assuaged, we are told, by an encouraging message from President Roosevelt. Still, it must have been hard for Chaplin fans around the world to imagine how his style of comedy could tackle so ugly and resistant a subject. His most recent work, *Modern Times* (1936), widely thought to be both a masterpiece and an anachronism—an all but silent film in the age of sound—didn't seem to give any indication of what Chaplin was about to do with the medium or with international politics. Chaplin knew he was taking a double risk: of betraying the artistic persona he had built up over years as actor and director, and of trying (and failing) to laugh at what simply wasn't funny. His solution was to keep his old screen self and line it up with another—to twin the Little Tramp with Hitler. It was an audacious move, and it works

magnificently precisely because we are aware that it could misfire at any minute. The film's final speech, for example, is peculiarly perched on the edge of bathos. Chaplin pulls it off, though, not so much because of what he says as because of his careful staging of the saying. The Jewish barber, mistaken for Adenoid Hynkel, the dictator, apprehensively approaches the microphones, hesitates, and then begins to speak, not as either of them but as the actor-director Charles Chaplin, miraculously smuggled into his own film. He says some admirable things, but he doesn't talk well, the voice is too high and thin, and we may think for a moment that sound itself in film is apt to favor the wrong political side. If Chaplin talked for longer, or talked better, perhaps he would become a dictator. Indeed, even as Chaplin accepts and exploits the possibilities of sound in *The Great Dictator*, he may in part be using speech to remind us of the beauties of silence. There is a gag in the film that points wittily in this direction. At one point, we see Hynkel dictating, in the modest, office-bound sense. He is speaking aloud, and a typist is taking down his words. Or is she? He spouts a long sentence, and she knocks out a couple of letters. He offers a monosyllabic exclamation, and she types for several lines, clanging the carriage return as she goes. There is certainly more than meets the ear in this scene, and not just because the long-silent Chaplin has become verbose on film, only to be betrayed, it seems, by another technology. He is speaking a mock German that he has made up for the movie, a matter of fits and starts, of coughs, splutters, and sibilants, with occasional identifiable words like *Wiener schnitzel* and *sauerkraut*—more like a disease than a language. When the pen on his desk won't leave its holder, the dictator loses patience with the whole enterprise and reverts to alliterative, offensive English, saying he is "surrounded by nothing but incompetent, stupid, sterile stenographers." The joke, obviously, involves the Great Dictator's not being such a great dictator, but



it also makes sound itself helpless, a form of impotent fury.

There are other German words the dictator is fond of and that recur amid the gibberish: *straf*, as in the propaganda saying *Gott strafe England* (May God punish England), and *Juden*. He is especially fond of

saying, or yelling, these words together, and when he does, his face fills the screen like a blown-up mask of hatred. The Jews are to be punished, or destroyed as punishment for being Jewish. It's true that the dictator doesn't like brunettes either, but his adviser recommends going after the Jews first. Then he can deal with the brunettes and rule happily over a purely blond world,

himself the only dark-haired person in existence. He is so thrilled by the image of this blond universe that he climbs up a curtain and says he wants to be alone, like Greta Garbo. He then treats us to the famous scene of his semi-dance with the world as a balloon, to the strains of *Lohengrin*. The sequence is Chaplin at his best, graceful and foolish at the same time, but it's still startling to think of the historical figure of Hitler shadowing it. The casual mixing of horror and humor here and elsewhere in the film is very unsettling.

There is a continuing mystery about why *The Great Dictator* is so funny, about why it rocks us with laughter even if we've seen it often and think we know all its tricks. It's not funny all the time, and wasn't supposed to be, of course. But the great routines here—the balloon ballet, the man being shaved to the strains of Brahms's Hungarian Dance no. 5, the arrival of Napaloni/Mussolini's train to greet (or fail to greet) Hynkel/Hitler's welcome party, the two dictators in the barbershop—and the tiny touches, the skids around corners on one leg, the double takes, the collapsing chair, the crushed hat, the perfectly flung pie, the microphone that cringes on its stem when the dictator shouts, are all immortal, a conversion of the world itself into vaudeville, sheer knockabout comedy.

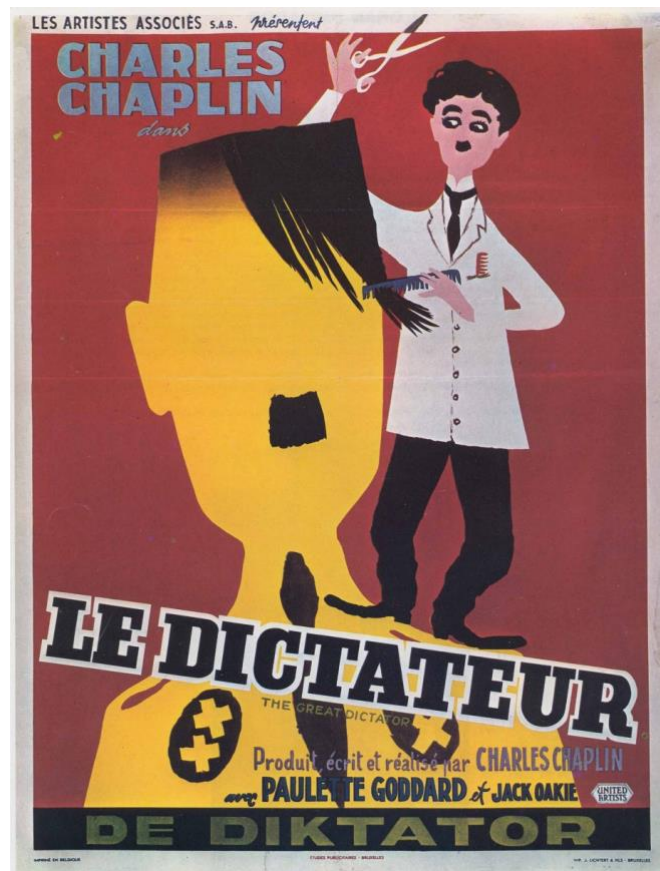
It's always slightly dizzying to watch Chaplin's brilliant imitations of lack of physical control, because he seems to be really falling over or colliding with inconvenient pieces of the world while acrobatically demonstrating how to escape doing so, or how to do so with consummate grace. But what is this vaudeville in the context of *The Great Dictator*? It's not satire or critical comment, and it's not sentiment, sympathy for the little guy, although critics have thought that Chaplin was aiming for both, and missing. It's not simple mockery either, the suggestion that dictatorships may be toppled by laughter. No, it's the sense that anyone can be a clown. The difference between Chaplin and the rest of us is that he makes a career out of looking ridiculous, and he's good at it, even stylish. And the distinctly troubling effect of Chaplin's becoming Hynkel is that he actually lends him some of his own allure.

Chaplin's nonsatirical point is that Hynkel doesn't really dictate, either to typists or to anyone else. He occasionally gives orders, but mainly he takes advice, cringes, daydreams, admires himself, loses his temper. He is too timid to talk to Napaloni on the telephone and constantly sheepish in his presence. There is a moment when the visitor is supposed to come through a door facing Hynkel and have to walk the humiliating length of a ballroom to reach his host. "Applied psychology" is what Hynkel's adviser Garbitsch calls this arrangement. Hynkel is delighted with the idea, strikes a pose, and waits. Napaloni enters through a door immediately behind him and slaps him cheerfully on the back, almost knocking him to the floor. This is not plotting or skill on Napaloni's part, just a well set-up joke masquerading as a bit of bad luck. But this is how the ridiculous works: it undoes our plans in whatever way seems most absurd at the time.

A bit of inspired casting placed Jack Oakie in the Napaloni role, since it's hard to imagine anyone

more capable of unsettling a nervous despot than this broad, beaming fellow (whom audiences would have seen alongside W. C. Fields in the 1932 *Million Dollar Legs*, among a lot of other very funny

movies), himself as despotic as could be. Henry Daniell was a great choice for Garbitsch/Goebbels too. By 1940, he had been grandly sneering in Hollywood movies for more than ten years, notably in *Camille* (1936). He makes us see the master of German propaganda as if he were a champion of mere sarcasm. We can find answers here to a pair of questions so often raised about *The Great Dictator*. Didn't Chaplin fail to be serious enough, even for a comedian? Worse, didn't he perhaps



mistake laughter and the movies for actual weapons, as distinct from domestic or commercial toys? In part, he did. He tried to reduce world history to a series of film characters and gestures, mostly borrowed from his own works. The storm troopers, for example, are versions of the big bully who had been pursuing Chaplin in films since his earliest days, since *Easy Street* (1917) and before. The Jews in *The Great Dictator* collectively become a form of the Little Tramp, touching, wily, and sane in a world of madness. Paulette Goddard repeats her role from *Modern Times* as the charming waif, this time Jewish. All this is entertaining but not much of an answer to the rise of Nazism, the invention of the Axis, and the event of the Anschluss. But Chaplin was up to something else, as the Goebbels depiction illustrates. The Nazis are not finally reduced to comic figures; they are promoted into representatives of a far wider human folly.

The greatness of the film lies in the bridge Chaplin builds between the little guy and the bully, so that in an amazing spiral, the thugs who pursue Chaplin as victim are under the orders of Chaplin the boss. He is his own persecutor, and at the end, he is the voice of resistance to his own mania. The effect is not to humanize Hitler but, in part—and this is an aspect of the film’s courage—to Hitlerize Chaplin. This strategy is wittily announced on a title card right at the beginning: “Any resemblance between Hynkel the dictator and the Jewish barber is purely coincidental.” This is true, in a way, since Chaplin plays both roles, which is not exactly a question of resemblance. The joke, though, if we linger over it, suggests very clearly what the film is after: its casting keeps connecting what its plot insistently separates. There are plenty of other instances of this kind of crossover. Chaplin as the barber waving a razor over the bare throat of a customer briefly looks more murderous than Hynkel ever does. Hynkel in his coy moments actually behaves like the barber. There is even a point in the final speech when Chaplin starts to rant like Hynkel, reminding us that rage in a good cause is still rage. And if we want some evidence from outside the film, we can listen to Charles Chaplin Jr.: “Dad could never think of Hitler without a shudder, half of horror, half of fascination. ‘Just think,’ he would say uneasily, ‘he’s the madman, I’m the comic. But it could have been the other way around.’” Not so simply, perhaps, and Hitler wasn’t only a madman, but the power of the identification within the film is extraordinary. There has been much debate over whether the Jewish barber is a late incarnation of the Little Tramp or a related but different Chaplin figure. The film itself carries a brilliant visual response to this question. When the barber gets ready to go out on a date with Paulette Goddard, he dresses up as the Little Tramp—hat, jacket, baggy pants, big shoes, the lot. Their outing is interrupted by a storm trooper raid on the ghetto, so that Chaplin is persecuted both as the Jewish barber and as his old iconic screen self—by a maniac Chaplin in a position of alarming power.

There is a complex bit of history behind this setup. *The Gold Rush* had been banned by Goebbels in 1935 because it did not “coincide with the world philosophy of the present day in Germany,” and Chaplin had been caricatured in various anti-Semitic

publications as the archetypical Jew, in spite of the fact that he wasn’t Jewish. “Jewish,” for the propagandists, meant crafty and inventive and possessed of all the unheroic advantages of the underdog, just the resources that Chaplin’s screen character had so often availed himself of. In *The Great Dictator*, he chose both to repeat his old act and to repeal it. His antifascist argument pursues the fascist in all of us, and the implication of his equation of the victim with the dictator is not only that the comic could have been the madman but that even the good guys and the persecuted, represented by the world’s best-loved clown, are not to be trusted with absolute power. Chaplin’s finest further touch, having made his dictator ridiculous, is to remind us of how much harm even ridiculous people can do. Nothing in the film is quite as frightening as the sight and sound of the ludicrous Hynkel casually ordering the execution of three thousand striking workers. We should know better, but we easily forget how lethal the ludicrous can be.



**“Mr. Chaplin Answers his Critics. The Comedian Defends His Ending of *The Great Dictator*.” By Charles Chaplin. *The New York Times*, October 27, 1940.**

When the critic of *The New York Times* wrote that *The Great Dictator* “came off magnificently,” he expressed his own opinion. He and I meant different things, though. He was looking at one end of the telescope and I the other.

*The Great Dictator* on the screen is pretty much what I meant it to be. I had a story to tell and something I wanted very much to say. I said it. I enjoyed saying it. I think it is funny when it should be funny. And more than I can tell you, I enjoy the



laughter of the audiences at the story. I am grateful and proud that it is liked by many of the critics and so popular with the public. To me, it does “come off.”

There is criticism, of course. There had to be. Could any two people ever agree on anything as personal in its viewpoint as *The Great Dictator*? I’ve never in all my life pleased everyone. As a matter of fact, I don’t know of anything that has ever completely pleased me. I enjoy criticism in pretty much the same way I do praise. It depends on the criticism and the praise—the intelligence, the perception, the understanding that goes into it. Either can be dull, and either can be heartwarming.

There is always a kind of praise or a kind of criticism that can’t be quarreled with or argued about. “It’s funny” or “It isn’t funny.” Who knows except you? Even the laughter may fool you. “It’s beautiful,” or “It isn’t beautiful.” We are a democracy, we are allowed a difference of opinion, and every single, blessed one of us is right. Thank heaven for that!

Questions created by the press have roughly had to do with these matters. First, can the tragedy that Hitler is to Europe be funny? Second, what about propaganda in the picture? Third, how do you justify the ending?

As to Hitler being funny, I can only say that if we can’t sometimes laugh at Hitler, then we are further gone than we think. There is a healthy thing in laughter, laughter at the grimmest things in life, laughter at death even. *Shoulder Arms* was funny. It had to do with men marching off to war. *The Gold Rush* was first suggested by the Donner tragedy. Laughter is the tonic, the relief, the surcease of pain. It is healthy, the healthiest thing in the world—and it is health-giving.

Second, as to the propaganda. *The Great Dictator* is not propaganda. It is the story of the little Jewish barber and the ruler whom he happened to resemble. It is the story of the little fellow that I have told and retold all my life. But it has a viewpoint, as much of a viewpoint as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or

*Oliver Twist* had in their time. Would sympathy be a better word than propaganda? Or hatred? I didn’t pull punches nor choose polite words nor attempt to temporize with something most of us feel so deeply.

Third, as to the ending. To me, it is a logical ending to the story. To me, it is the speech that the little barber would have made,—even had to make. People have said that he steps out of character. What of it? The picture is two hours and seven minutes in length. If two hours and three minutes of it is comedy, may I not be excused for ending my comedy on a note that reflects, honestly and realistically, the world in which we live, and may I not be excused in pleading for a better world? Mind you, it is addressed to the soldiers, the very victims of dictatorship.

It was a difficult thing to do. It would have been much easier to have the barber and Hannah disappear over the horizon, off to the promised land against a glowing sunset. But there is no promised land for the oppressed people of the world. There is no place over the horizon to which they can go for sanctuary. They must stand, and we must stand.



### **The Barber’s speech**

I’m sorry, but I don’t want to be an emperor. That’s not my business. I don’t want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help everyone if possible. Jew, Gentile, Black Man, White, we all want to help one another, human beings are like that. We want to live by each other’s happiness, not by each other’s misery. We don’t want to hate and despise one another. And this world has room for everyone, and the good Earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way. Greed has poisoned men’s souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical, our cleverness hard and unkind. We think

too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities life will be violent, and all will be lost. The aeroplane and the radio have brought us closer together. The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men, cries out for universal brotherhood, for the unity of us all. Even now, my voice is reaching millions throughout the world, millions of despairing men, women, and little children, victims of a system that makes men torture and imprison innocent people. To those who can hear me, I say do not despair. The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed, the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress. The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people. And so long as men die, liberty will never perish. ...

Soldiers! Don't give yourselves to brutes, men who despise you, enslave you, who regiment your lives, tell you what to do, what to think, and what to feel! Who drill you, diet you, treat you like cattle, use you as cannon fodder. Don't give yourselves to these unnatural men, machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men! You have the love of humanity in your hearts! You don't hate! Only the unloved hate, the unloved and the unnatural!

Soldiers! Don't fight for slavery! Fight for liberty! In the 17th Chapter of [St Luke](#) it is written: "the Kingdom of God is within man" not one man nor a group of men, but in all men! In you! You, the people have the power, the power to create machines. The power to create happiness! You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure. Then in the name of democracy, let us use that power, let us all unite! Let us fight for a new world, a decent world that will give men a chance to work, that will give youth a future, and old age a security. By the promise of these things, brutes have risen to power. But they lie! They do not fulfill that promise! They never will! Dictators free themselves, but they enslave the people! Now let us fight to fulfill that promise! Let us fight to free the world, to do away with national barriers, to do away with greed, with hate and intolerance. Let us fight for a world of

reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness.

Soldiers! In the name of democracy, let us all unite!"

Look up, Hannah. The soul of man has been given wings, and at last he is beginning to fly. He is flying into the rainbow, into the light of hope, into the future, the glorious future that belongs to you, to me, and to all of us.

### **Perspective:**

[Nazi Germany timeline](#)

[Concentration camp timeline](#)

[News footage of Hitler and Mussolini meeting 1934](#)

[News footage of Hitler and Mussolini meeting at train station 1937](#)

—**Treaty of Versailles 28 June 1919**

—24 Feb 1920 Nazi Party formed

—**29 July 1921 Hitler becomes its leader**

—4 November 1921 SA (Sturm Abteilung), the party militia, the brownshirts

—April 1925 SS (Schutzstaffel). Black shirts, initially Hitler's body guard, later the party militia

—20 August 1927 first annual party conference at Nuernburg

—**1929 Great Depression hits**

—**1932 Nazi Party wins 37.4% of the Reichstag election, becoming the largest party**

—30 January 1933 Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany

—27 February 1933 The Reichstag fire, resulting in banning the Communist Party, making the Nazis the majority party

—**23 March 1933 Enabling Act gave Hitler power to make laws without consulting the Reichstag for four years**

—29 March 1933 **Dachau** starts operating—a camp for political prisoners

—26 April 1933 **Gestapo**, the secret police formed

—October 1933 Germany withdrew from the League of Nations

—**1934 Leni Riefenstah's *Triumph of the Will***, documenting the 1933 Nuremberg Nazi Party Congress

—2 August 1934: President Hindenberg dies. Hitler combines role of President and Chancellor and calls himself Führer

—**15 November 1935: Nuremberg Laws** define German citizenship. Relationship between Jew and Aryans banned.

—July 1936 Sachsenhausen concentration camp starts operating

—**1938 Kristallnacht: Jewish shops and synagogues destroyed, after which Jews are fined for the destruction.**

—June 1938 first official execution in a concentration camp

—November 1938 over 26,000 Jewish men forced into concentration camp

—**1938-1939 Chaplin writes script of TGT**

—**15 March 1939 Hitler invades Czechoslovakia**

—**1 September 1939 Hitler invades Poland**

—**7 September filming of The Great Dictator begins.** Finishes six months later.

—31 December 1940 c. 53,000 prisoners in CC

—June 1941 murders of weak and ill prisoners begin

—September 1941 first mass gassing of Soviet POWs

—**20<sup>th</sup> January 1942 Wannsee Conference approves plans for the “Final Solution”**

—April/May 1943: Warsaw ghetto

### **Rogues’ Gallery: the real ones:**

Adolph Hitler & Benito Mussolini (Hynkel & Napolioni)



Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda (Garbitsch)



Hermann Göring, Reichsmarschall (Herring)



**(IGNORE THE HEADER ON THIS PAGE. IT'S A GLITCH THAT WON'T GO AWAY. GÖRING DID IT.)**

**THAT'S IT FOR THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, FALL 2020, SERIES 41!**

We'll be back with Series 42 on February 2, 2021. Here's our preliminary schedule. There may be some changes due to streaming issues. We'll get a confirmed schedule out in early January.

1926 Buster Keaton *The General*  
1931 William A. Wellman *The Public Enemy*  
1942 Orson Welles *The Magnificent Ambersons*  
1947 Vittorio de Sica *The Bicycle Thieves*  
1959 Yasujiro Ozu *Floating Weeds*  
1960 Alfred Hitchcock *Psycho*  
1972 Peter Medak *The Ruling Class*  
1979 Monty Python *Life of Brian*  
1989 Spike Lee *Do The Right Thing*  
1992 Clint Eastwood *Unforgiven*  
1993 Jane Campion *The Piano*  
2000 Joel and Ethan Coen *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*  
2002 Pedro Amodóvar *Talk to Her*  
1982 Ingmar Bergman *Fanny and Alexander*

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for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>...  
to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to  
[addtolist@buffalofilmseminars.com](mailto:addtolist@buffalofilmseminars.com)....

The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the State University of New York at Buffalo and the Dipson Amherst Theatre, with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation and the Buffalo News.



**See you in 2021!**

