

CHARLIE CHAPLIN: THE MISUNDERSTOOD GENIUS

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Abstract

Charlie Chaplin – the name alone manages to conjure up images of the bowler hat-clad Tramp, the chorus girl he falls in love with and the scene where he tries to catch a falling flower in his top hat. Chaplin's silent films were some of the biggest hits of their time and have remained hugely popular ever since. The Tramp, his stoic character who endeared him to millions, has become one of the world's most recognisable figures. However, behind this image was a man whose life was stranger than fiction. The founder of Universal Studios, Carl Laemmle, once said of Chaplin: "He is like a diamond with flaws. There are things about him you can't explain." So, what exactly makes Charlie Chaplin such an enigmatic figure? His story includes alcoholism, paranoid delusions and an incredible amount of personal torment. Let us try to understand his ability, and what made him 'THE CHARLIE CHAPLIN' with an analysis of his notable works.

Keywords: Charlie Chaplin, Cinema, Filmmaking, Fiction

Charlie and His Early Life

Chaplin's childhood was a difficult one. His mother was an alcoholic and his father was often absent, their family living in poverty. Chaplin, who began his work as a child performer at the age of 5, was trained in acrobatics, ballet and all the other skills needed to become a successful stage performer. He also learned to play 12 instruments, including the violin and the piano, a skill which paid off in his later films.

As well as being a trained acrobat and dancer, as a child performer Chaplin learned to play 12 different instruments. When he was older, Chaplin's musical skills were even employed by the U.S. government. During the Second World War, Chaplin composed and performed the music for several propaganda films.

Chaplin married his first wife, 16-year-old Mildred Harris, when he was 20. The marriage lasted only 4 months, and they quickly divorced. However, soon after the divorce was finalized, she discovered that she was pregnant. Under pressure from the public, Chaplin's father was forced to accept paternity and pay for the child's upbringing. Chaplin's first child, a son called Charles Jr., was brought up in a boarding school, and Chaplin only saw him twice during his lifetime.

The Rise of Chaplin

During his long career, Chaplin was awarded two Honorary Academy Awards for his 'Invaluable Service to the Arts'. Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles and Walt Disney were all heavily influenced by Chaplin, and the Marx Brothers were even based on the comedian's personal life. *The Tramp*'s famous walk, in which his feet are turned out, was not intended to be comic. Instead, it was a subtle reference to the fact that Chaplin walked with his toes turned in.

In 1914, Chaplin was invited to join the Keystone company. However, the films he made there were not the type of material he wanted to produce, and he quickly left. Chaplin then founded the first independent film production studio in the world, called the Chaplin Studios. Chaplin's films were very successful at the box office, and the studio became a very powerful company.

When Chaplin was young, he dressed in Victorian-style clothing, which he bought from charity shops because he couldn't afford new clothes. He decided to give his Tramp character the same sort of clothes because he wanted to show that anyone could be poor.

Chaplin's films were hugely popular, particularly in America. His films, such as *Modern Times*, *The Great Dictator* and *City Lights*, were some of the most acclaimed films of their time. Chaplin also experimented with filmmaking, using a wide range of different cameras. However, while he was appreciated as an entertainer in America, he was not well received by everyone. His films were criticized as being too political, and he was even accused of being a communist. Eventually, Chaplin had to flee America, and settle in Switzerland, to escape the public outcry.

The Great Dictator and Chaplin

Ironically, one of history's most adored figures was born four days before one of its most hated, and Adolf Hitler remarkably resembled Charles Chaplin the clown. Some contend that Hitler purposefully modelled his moustache after Chaplin's, who had won the admiration and respect of audiences all over the world. Journalists and caricaturists of today took great pleasure in pointing out how similar the two guys looked to one another. In 1938, a song about Hitler was released in Britain and inquired, "Who is this Man?"

The five-minute speech that ends *The Great Dictator* is arguably its most well-known scene. Here, Chaplin takes off his comedic persona and addresses the entire globe, expressing his belief that people must stand up against autocrats and work together for peace. The last speech's aspirational tone and quality, as well as its underlying confidence in humanity, are its most memorable features. Although the darker sides of human nature may prohibit mankind from ever realising his utopian vision, Chaplin paints an optimistic future in broad strokes and leaves the implementation to others. One cannot help but be struck by Chaplin's prescient remarks and the attractiveness of his powerful indictment of all who desire to take power unto themselves to the detriment of everyone else, even though others may find his message cliché and even infuriating. As long as conflict taints human connection and despots

persist, *The Great Dictator's* final address is still relevant and beneficial in the twenty-first century.

There is evidence that Adolf Hitler saw the movie *The Great Dictator*, and he was horrified when he learned that Chaplin was working on it. Hitler watched the movie one evening in private, according to a spy who escaped Germany after working in the Nazi Ministry of Culture's film division. He watched the movie by himself the next night as well. All the agents could tell Chaplin was that. Chaplin added, "I'd give everything to know what he thought of that," as he related the incident. Whatever Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* may have meant to Hitler; the movie endures as one of the greatest and most influential pieces of cinematic satire.

Modern Times and Chaplin

The self-conscious farewell Chaplin gives to the pantomime of silent film, which he pioneered and helped develop into one of the great artistic movements of the twentieth century, is *Modern Times*. The music to *Modern Times*, although being a technically sound movie, includes relatively little speech. The majority of the soundtrack is composed by Chaplin himself, along with sound effects and a performance of the Tramp singing in gibberish. The Tramp only ever talked during this outstanding performance. In part because the Tramp's silence made him universally recognised, Chaplin shunned talking pictures. While simultaneously allowing the Tramp to "speak" in a way that is widely understood, Chaplin cleverly conveys the claim that communicating in any one language is useless in all others with the help of the gibberish song. It served as the Tramp's eulogy. With *Modern Times*, Chaplin put the persona to rest.

The significance of *Modern Times* may be higher now than it has ever been since it was initially released. The movie's twentieth-century theme—the fight to avoid alienation and maintain humanity in a contemporary, automated world—was prophetic for its day and strongly mirrors problems facing the twenty-first century. All who feel like helpless cogs in a world beyond their control should find comfort and support in The Tramp's struggles in "*Modern Times*" and the hilarious mayhem that follows. The movie is still regarded as one of Chaplin's best and most enduring pieces because of its universal themes and comedic ingenuity. The Tramp's ending, a tribute to Chaplin's famous persona and the silent-film era he ruled for a generation, may be even more significant.

City Lights and Chaplin

In addition to being Charles Chaplin's masterwork, *City Lights* (1931) is a rebellious act. The movie debuted four years after *The Jazz Singer*, which had ushered in the talking-picture era (1927). In its opening scene, *City Lights* audaciously parodies "talkies" while highlighting the elegance and craftsmanship of silent cinema. A comedic romance in pantomime, *City Lights* is Chaplin's most successful balancing act of humour and melancholy and the pinnacle of the Little Tramp persona.

City Lights perfection wasn't attained without suffering. It took two years to make the movie. Chaplin was troubled by his mother's death, anxious about the talking-film revolution, and

obsessed with the idea of conveying stories simply. However, despite all the challenges it faced during production, *City Lights* ended up becoming Chaplin's favourite of all his movies.

Many believed Chaplin had accomplished the impossible. Three years after the end of American silent film, he had already made a critically acclaimed and financially successful silent film. More astoundingly, "Life" magazine hailed the 1950 remake of *City Lights* as "the best movie of 1950." With *City Lights*, Chaplin is at the pinnacle of his abilities and bids a fond farewell to the pure art of silent filmmaking.

The Kid and Chaplin

One of Charles Chaplin's greatest works, *The Kid* (1921), is still regarded as both a critical and popular success. The movie, which skilfully combines comedy and pathos, is undoubtedly Chap-most intimate and autobiographical production. The movie's surroundings and themes are heavily influenced by Chaplin's own deprived childhood in London. Chaplin was inspired to create the story of the orphaned child and the lonely Tramp by the confluence of two events, one painful (the death of his young son) and one joyful (his fortuitous encounter with Jackie Coogan).

Undoubtedly, the death of three-day-old Norman Spencer Chaplin had a significant impact on Chaplin, and the resulting emotional suffering seems to have inspired him to become more creative, as he started holding child actor auditions at the Chaplin Studios ten days following his son's passing. During this time, Chaplin met Jackie Coogan, a four-year-old child actor, at the Orpheum Theatre in Los Angeles, where his father had just finished a peculiar dancing act. In the lobby of the Alexandria Hotel, Chaplin spoke with Jackie for more than an hour, although he never considered utilising Jackie in a movie. When Chaplin learned that Coogan had just signed with Roscoe Arbuckle, he was devastated at having lost the chance. Later, he learned that Jack Coogan, the boy's father, had been signed by Arbuckle.

Not only for Chaplin's pioneering use of tragic moments in a feature-length comedy, but also for the insights it offers into the creator, *The Kid* continues to be a significant addition to the art of film. Without a doubt, Chaplin had his own creative tenet in mind when he wrote the prelude to *The Kid*, "A picture with a smile—and perhaps, a tear."

The Gold Rush and Chaplin

There is a scene in *The Gold Rush* that perfectly sums up the whole mood of the picture. Chaplin's lone prospector, a barely veiled repetition of his classic "tramp," spears a pair of potatoes that he later converts into a pair of dancing feet after surviving near-starvation, deprivation, and isolation. A celebration of food in a world of need, Chaplin's use of his improvised props has a sense of elegance to it. He puts on a show with his presentation, and a performance needs an audience and the development of bonds. It's a time when the commonplace and return to routine are both celebrated. By focusing instead on the real experiences of the poor and the desperate, the movie highlights its deconstruction of the American pioneer.

The Gold Rush has surprisingly little money on display for a movie with that name. There are lots of weathered cottages, broken and worn-out equipment, and weathered faces, but there

isn't much evidence of what the movie is supposed to be about. In fact, the movie's opening sequences show murder, abandonment, and utter desperation—all of which are skilfully and ironically disguised as humorous routines. The image of Chaplin and his equally desperate companion eating boiling shoes while laughing uncontrollably adds to the desperation, yet it never completely masks the underlying trauma at the scene's centre. Every shred of leather chewed every bite taken grudgingly conceals a murder committed in the Arctic wastes and an uncertain future. Chaplin's transformation into a chicken in front of his famished buddy is very funny, but the suggested murder attempt it foreshadows is less so. What a waste of gold.

The movie *The Gold Rush* isn't a complete success, but that doesn't mean it isn't fantastic. It combines whimsy and sadness with a keen appreciation for life below the poverty line, just like so much of Chaplin's work from the 1920s and 1930s. It takes pleasure in subtle humour to evoke empathy for its characters and, eventually, for all people who endure suffering like Chaplin did as a youngster in London. Even though the movie is about the lives of American pioneers, its creator's own experience of need and poverty still casts a shadow over it. It is an escape dream that is strongly felt and never put aside because it is based on prior traumas. Therefore, it is a movie about character and space. It also dramatises blind luck and the buffoon in a gentle vengeance fantasy. In other words, it embodies Chaplin perfectly.

Chaplin and the Later Years

Although Chaplin's paranoia is often considered to be a symptom of alcoholism, many people in his life, including the FBI, believed that there was something much more sinister behind his fears. Chaplin believed that a secret society was out to get him, and that he was being persecuted for his political beliefs. He even went as far as to say that Adolf Hitler and Jewish people were trying to get him, believing that they were connected to this secret society.

Chaplin's paranoia reached its peak and he decided to flee America to avoid the public scandal. He settled in Switzerland, but he later moved to Britain.

After his exile, Chaplin was still extremely popular, but his films were no longer being shown in cinemas. Chaplin was offered an Honorary Academy Award in 1931, but he declined the offer because he wanted to be recognized for his films. However, in 1957, nearly 20 years after his last film, Chaplin was awarded an Honorary Academy Award.

Conclusion

Chaplin's life was full of both tragedy and triumph. His childhood was a difficult one and so was his personal life. However, despite all this, he was still able to become one of the most successful entertainers of his time. Chaplin's films were hugely influential, and during his lifetime, he was praised for his comedic talent. Chaplin's films are still popular today, and he is still considered to be one of the most important figures in the history of cinema. Although Chaplin's life was filled with tragedy, he was also able to find happiness, and his films continue to be enjoyed by millions of people today.

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