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| Chaplin, Charles (1889-1977) |
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| Charles Spenser Chaplin was born in London, England on April 16, 1889 and died on Christmas Day, 1977 at home in Corsier-sur-Vevey, Switzerland. He has been famous across the world since his Tramp persona first hit screens in 1914, and besides earning numerous film awards, he was knighted in 1975. Chaplin took to the stage in 1898, and came to the US in 1910 on tour with a British vaudeville troupe. In December 1913, he joined the Keystone Pictures studio in Hollywood with whom he made hits like *The Kid* (1921) and *The Gold Rush* (1925). *Modern Times* (1936) is his last ‘silent’ film, interweaving intertitles and spoken words for satiric effect. *Limelight* (1952), his most autobiographical film, did badly at the box office because of his alleged Communist sympathies. His final three features were also poorly received. Nonetheless, Chaplin embodied the essence of modernism. *The Little Review*, where James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) was first serialised, published an admiring article calling him ‘the Mob-God,’ a figure who embodied the gestalt of the times (1916). |
| Charles Spenser Chaplin was born in London, England on April 16, 1889 and died on Christmas Day, 1977 at home in Corsier-sur-Vevey, Switzerland. He has been famous across the world since his Tramp persona first hit screens in 1914, and besides earning numerous film awards, he was knighted in 1975. Chaplin took to the stage in 1898, and came to the US in 1910 on tour with a British vaudeville troupe. In December 1913, he joined the Keystone Pictures studio in Hollywood with whom he made hits like *The Kid* (1921) and *The Gold Rush* (1925). *Modern Times* (1936) is his last ‘silent’ film, interweaving intertitles and spoken words for satiric effect. *Limelight* (1952), his most autobiographical film, did badly at the box office because of his alleged Communist sympathies. His final three features were also poorly received. Nonetheless, Chaplin embodied the essence of modernism. *The Little Review*, where James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) was first serialised, published an admiring article calling him ‘the Mob-God,’ a figure who embodied the gestalt of the times (1916).  When WW I broke out Chaplin did not enlist, which momentarily dipped his appeal; he returned to popularity in the post-War period with hits like *The Kid* (1921) and *The Gold Rush* (1925). Chaplin grew restless with the Tramp persona and wanted to leave it behind (Casseres, *NYTimes*, 12/12/1920), but it was not until *The Great Dictator* (1940) that he abandoned it. This was also his first sound film. Chaplin was late to embrace talkies, believing speech would detract from his films’ universal appeal. *Modern Times* (1936) is his last ‘silent’ film, using both intertitle, spoken words, and a gibberish song. He was exiled from the US at the height of McCarthyism in 1953. *Limelight* (1952) and his final features were poorly received at the box office.  Chaplin embodied the essence of modernism in his person and his work. *The Little Review* published an admiring article calling him ‘the Mob-God,’ a figure who personified the gestalt of the times (May 1916). Notable among his fans are playwright Bertolt Brecht; author Jack London, whose short story ‘The Road’ was inspired by the Tramp; and playwright Samuel Beckett, who initially wanted Chaplin for his film, *Film* (1964) (Buster Keaton played the role). Chaplin admired and befriended H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw, and also the writer Max Eastman.  With the Tramp character, Chaplin manifested the modernist fascination with social outcasts and derelicts that traces back to Charles Baudelaire (see: ‘Le Vin de chiffoniers’/ ‘The Rag-Picker’s Wine’), and continues with Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Beckett, and to an extent, George Orwell. Although not a Freudian, Chaplin’s psychologically-nuanced acting echoes modernism’s interest in the unconscious. Modernists are simultaneously fascinated and guarded towards new technology; Chaplin was the same, embracing film but resisting sound. To critics today, Chaplin’s films are ambivalent in their politics. François Truffaut declares that ‘one could say that Charlot is a ‘marginal’’ (Bazin xxiii) and Maland calls *Modern Times* a ‘cultural artefact of the mid-Depression years’ (257). Chaplin’s work now looks iconic instead of doctrinaire. List of WorksFull Length Features *The Kid* (1921)  *A Woman of Paris* (1923)  *The Gold Rush* (1925)  *The Circus* (1928)  *City Lights* (1931)  *Modern Times* (1936)  *The Great Dictator* (1940)  *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947)  *Limelight* (1952)  *A King in New York* (1957)  *A Countess from Hong Kong* (1967) |
| Further reading:  (The Mob-God)  (Charlie Chaplin's stolen body found)  (Casseres)  (Lynn)  (Maland)  (Milton)  (Truffaut) |