

# The Gentleman as Tramp

## Charlie Chaplin and the Birth of the American Film Comedy

**Lecturer:** PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Guest Professor

**Room and time:** AR-A 1093, Tuesdays 16-18

**Course type:** B.A./Lehramts-Seminar

**Modules:** Bachelor LKM M 2.2 Medienanalyse / Lehramt GHR 5.1 Textsorten

**First session:** April 5, 2011

**Course description:** This seminar deals with one of the greatest male screen legends of all time, Charlie Chaplin. "Chaplin was not just 'big'," one of his biographers notes, "he was gigantic" (Sieff, 2008). One of the most distinguished and influential filmmakers and actors of the foundational years of cinema, Chaplin was also one of the most controversial ones, in part due to his life-long involvement with progressive and left-leaning causes. The course will trace Chaplin's career from the early days at Keystone and his co-founding of the film studio United Artists to his break with the silent film in the 1930s and his banishment from America in the late 1940s. We will deal with Chaplin's extraordinary merits in the visual aesthetics of silent cinema and analyze his unusual acting techniques which culminated in the creation of his screen persona 'The Tramp.' How was the genre of the American film comedy (especially slapstick and screwball) influenced by Chaplin's cinematic works? How did Chaplin as a free-thinking, independent director inspire other artists? Films to be discussed in class include *The Kid* (1921), *The Gold Rush* (1925), *City Lights* (1931), *Modern Times* (1936), *The Great Dictator* (1940), and *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947).

**Grading:** For 5 or 7 CP: regular attendance, participation in discussions, at least nine entries in the discussion forum (1/3), oral presentation as part of an expert group OR short presentation of a keyword (1/3), and final paper (8-10/ 13-15 pages) (1/3). For 2 CP: attendance, participation in discussions, at least seven entries in the discussion forum (50%), oral presentation as part of an expert group OR short presentation of a keyword (50%).

**Deadline for Final Papers:** Friday, August 31 (Wednesday), 2011. Note: There is no extension of this deadline! Please throw papers into my box (2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the AR-H building) or send them in postal form. Do not send papers via email!

### Syllabus

- April 5**      **Introduction – Slapstick and the Birth of the American Film Comedy**  
Basic text (recommended):  
Richard Dyer MacCann, "Chaplin" (1997), 148-157.
- April 12**      **The Keystone Years**  
Main examples (required):  
*Making a Living* (1914, dir. Henry Lehrman, prod. Mack Sennett). Watch online!  
*Kid Auto Races at Venice* (1914, Henry Lehrman, prod. Mack Sennett). Please watch online!  
Additional materials (additional):  
Claudia Clausius, "Satire and Parody of the Early Films", from *The Gentleman Is a Tramp* (1989), 53-74.
- April 19**      **The Mutual Years**  
Main example (required):  
*The Immigrant* (1917, dir. Charlie Chaplin, prod. John Jasper). Watch online!  
Additional material (optional):  
Evan A. Lieberman, "Charlie the Trickster," *Journal of Film and Video* (1994), 16-28.
- April 26**      **Easter Holiday (Ostern)**  
*Relax and enjoy!*
- May 3**      **The Films for First National**  
Main example (required):  
*A Dog's Life* (1918, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online at YouTube!

- May 10**      **Chaplin's First Major Success**  
 Main example (required):  
*The Kid* (1921, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in several parts at YouTube or check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber).  
 Additional material (optional):  
 Constance Brown Kuriyama, "Chaplin's Impure Comedy," *Film Quarterly* (1992), 26-38.
- May 17**      **Slapstick and the Sensation Comedy – The Case of Harold Lloyd**  
 Main example (required):  
*Safety Last* (1923, dir. Fred C. Newmeyer, Sam Taylor, prod. Hal Roach). Watch online at YouTube!  
 Additional material (optional):  
 Arthur B. Friedman, interview with Harold Lloyd, *Film Quarterly* (1962), 6-13.
- May 24**      **The Era of United Artists and the Film Chaplin Wanted to Be Remembered For**  
 Main example (required):  
*The Gold Rush* (1925, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in five parts at YouTube or check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber).  
 Additional material (optional):  
 Claudia Clausius, "Double Perspective of Montage in *The Gold Rush*" (1989), 75-96.
- May 31**      **Social Criticism, Tragedy and Loss**  
 Main example (required):  
*The Circus* (1928, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in eight parts at YouTube or check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber).  
 Additional material (optional):  
 Jeffrey Vance, "The Circus: A Chaplin Masterpiece" (1996), 186-208.
- June 7**      **Illusion and Irony in Chaplin's 'Stroke of Genius'**  
 Main example (required):  
*City Lights* (1931, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in six parts at YouTube or check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber).  
 Additional material (optional):  
 Claudia Clausius, "Illusion in *City Lights*," from *The Gentleman Is a Tramp* (1989), 105-119.
- June 14**      **Pentecost Holiday (Pfungsten)**  
*Relax and enjoy!*
- June 21**      **The Red Decade – The Great Depression and Anti-Capitalism**  
 Main example (required):  
*Modern Times* (1936, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in nine parts at YouTube or check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber).  
 Additional material (optional):  
 K. Galanopoulos, "How Contemporary Are Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*?" (2007/08), 117-130.
- June 28**      **The Battle against Fascism and Totalitarianism**  
 Main example (required):  
*The Great Dictator* (1940, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in eight parts at YouTube or check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber).  
 Additional material (optional):  
 Adrian Daub, "'Hannah, Can You Hear Me?' Chaplin's *Great Dictator*, 'Schtonk', and the Vicissitudes of Voice" (2009), 451-482.
- July 5**      **Black Comedy and the Postwar Years**  
 Main example (required):  
*Monsieur Verdoux* (1947, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Watch online in twelve parts at YouTube or check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber).  
 Additional material (optional):  
 Claudia Clausius, "Inversion in *Monsieur Verdoux*," from *The Gentleman Is a Tramp* (1989), 143-158.
- July 12**      **Exile and Revenge**  
 Main example (required):  
*A King in New York* (1957, dir. & prod. Charlie Chaplin). Check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber).  
 Additional material (optional):  
 John Sbardellati and Tony Shaw, "Booting a Tramp: Charlie Chaplin, the FBI, and the Construction of the Subversive Image in Red Scare America" (2003), 495-530.