Ungrounded leftism is not a fighting faith. Kennedy concedes the stability of the American political system and the inefficacy of academic critique to bring about political change. And if policy argument, left or right, is indeterminate and interminable, then there isn't even a vocabulary in which to justify leftist solutions to social or legal problems.

So finally Kennedy is a kind of faux radical. He has painted himself into a corner in which all he can do is mouth the populist slogans of a vanished era. Having acknowledged that judges frequently are constrained rather than free, he has surrendered the claim that law is ideology, retreating to the more modest claim that law has a lot of ideology in it—a claim exaggerated in his book by his unsupported belief that law is never stabilized by appeals to policy.

I don't doubt that some law professors are in a state of bad faith, that they may be half-aware that their arguments that some right or other is "in" the Constitution are spurious; but I have never met a *judge* who had this kind of queasiness. The reason is simple. For a judge, the duty to decide the case is paramount. He wouldn't be doing his duty if he said, "I can't decide this case, because I can't deduce the outcome from the orthodox materials of judicial decision-making." He decides as best he can, and in doing this he is doing law. For law is, among other things, the activity of judges in deciding cases.

It is true that the judge is not likely to be fully candid, in writing an opinion in a difficult case, about the degree to which he has had to rely on policy or personal values to decide the case, though Kennedy exaggerates when he says that judges always try to cast their decisions in a rhetoric of necessity or inevitability. (Later he retracts, by denying that he is "saying that all judges deny the role of ideology," though that is what he said, in the passage I quoted earlier.) But the lack of complete candor in a judicial opinion, as in any public document, especially an official one, is generally not hypocrisy or bad faith. There is a role for tact in public life. A judicial opinion is not a confessional document or a cri de coeur. A judicial opinion has to be acceptable both to the legal community and to the larger community that is affected by what judges do, and many of the members of both communities believe, in perfectly good faith, though erroneously, that legal materials are sufficient to resolve even the most difficult cases. (Those are the judges, by the way, who are most likely to be unconstrained activists. Hugo Black was a prime example.)

I keep coming back to Kennedy's lack of belief in the possibility of cogent policy analysis. It is the error that in the end undoes him. The unsentimental (and unironic, unecstatic, and undepressed) legal pragmatist on the bench admits that in difficult cases he cannot bridge the gap between the formal materials of the law and a sensible outcome without doing policy, and so he rolls up his sleeves and does policy, hoping that the bar or the academy will provide him with the resources for making sensible policy analysis. The pragmatist such as Duncan Kennedy, the one who thinks that the only thing you can do with an appeal to policy is to hide your ideology in it, has no resources for deciding a case, or advocating a policy change, in a way that will persuade the undecided. He is left stranded in the rubble of his transgressive artifacts.

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The Tramp Rush

BY ANNE HOLLANDER

Charlie Chaplin and His Times by Kenneth S. Lynn

(Simon and Schuster, 604 pp., $35)

By the end of 1919, when he was 30, Charlie Chaplin had already been internationally recognized as a unique cultural event—rather like Hitler, as Kenneth Lynn several times points out in this biography. Many other unique phenomena of the period, such as George Bernard Shaw and Nijinsky, soon hastened to welcome him into their company; and Hitler himself may well have trimmed his mustache to match Chaplin's, as Proust is also said to have done.

Chaplin rose to such a high level of international fame in just five years, from appearing in vulgar comic film shorts for Mack Sennett in 1914 to making his own personal brand of tragicomic movie in his own studio as a co-founder and co-owner of United Artists. In the spring of 1915, while working for Essanay Film Company, Chaplin had crystallized his film image for all time in a short called *The Tramp*, to the degree that later on, even if he played the part of a prospector, a waiter, a janitor, a pawnbroker's assistant or a fireman, those roles were plainly only disguises for the essential tramp character he really was, the true Charlie whom the world delighted to honor. His film costumes might vary according to circumstance, but some version of the too-tight coat, too-loose pants, too-big shoes, bowler hat and cane were the gear that the Charlie personage always assumed when he was being himself, uncoerced by the provisional plot. With these accoutrements went the subtle semi-clown makeup that never concealed but only emphasized the play of his face.

The image-fixing year 1915 was the first in which he was hailed as a "genius"; but by 1919, working completely on his own, he was commanding respect as an "artist." Chaplin has been called both ever since, but without ever losing the further attribute of being a sort of cultural marvel, not your usual brand of artistic genius. By 1925, Chaplin was the most famous man in the whole world, known by name and face to more people than were all heads of state, notorious criminals, or other celebrated performers.

And that, of course, was because of the movies, the silent movies, that were instantly affecting and intelligible everywhere. Chaplin's rise mirrored their rise, the tightening of their complicated grip on public feelings at every level at which visual art operates. Institutional distrust and dislike of Chaplin were also connected to a distrust of cinema itself, its possibilities for uncontrollable indecency, for unlimited propaganda, for unaccountable emotional sway over millions. The force in movies, and the amount of money to be made from them, were alike staggering to the American public; and at the same time the quality and the variety of artistry possible to them was a growing revelation to aesthetic understanding all over the world. Chaplin seemed to embody it all at once: insouciance, vulgarity, neediness, laughter, tears, the link between heartbreak and what we have come to call "grosses."

Thomas Mann and many other writers (Edmund Wilson, John Peale Bishop, Somerset Maugham, H.G. Wells), along with many great dancers and musicians and the odd scholar and scientist, were entranced by Chaplin and his films, as they were not by most other film people and theirs. The same was true of the society ladies and gentlemen and the political stars who took him up on both sides of the Atlantic. Chaplin did love all forms of high life and felt he belonged in them, as many movie people did not. The character of The Tramp obviously did, too, with his tattered courtesy and refined sensibilities forever intact in a universe of squalor and violence.

Despite the general adulation from creative folk, though, painters were noticeably not numerous among Chaplin's admirers. Picasso, for one, had no use for Chaplin's blend of sentimental pathos and crude comedy, though he is reported to have said that it might appeal to Chagall. In fact, although Chaplin was the acknowledged genius of a potent new visual art, the strictly pictorial capacities of the medium did not interest him. Chaplin is known for resisting the formal possibilities of cinema that Keaton was to explore; and he caused much pain to later associates with his obtuseness about camera technique. Chaplin wanted the camera for personal drama only, as if cinema were a pure extension of the stage and had no heritage in the history of art. Lynn himself is clearly uninterested in what might be called the illustrated history of America: the paintings, the prints and the engravings that perpetually created American visual expectations and enabled the movies from the beginning.

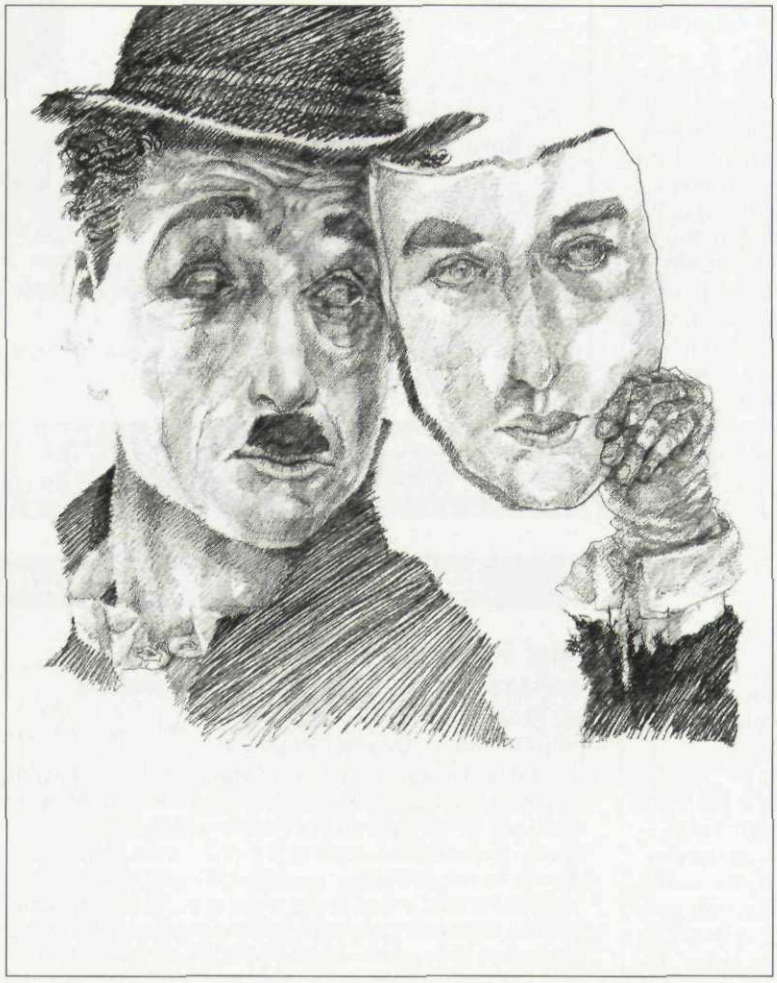
Some of Chaplin's personal success among so many people with serious pretensions was undoubtedly due to the clever fusion of the screen character with the man himself, something that Chaplin seems to have encouraged by displaying his acting techniques in social situations. He did it with versions of the clowning, flirting, mimicking, dancing, extemporizing and improvising that the beloved Tramp did, to keep the company in stitches and earn their exhausted gratitude, to play the true court fool with absolute license. "Charming" was the universal society word for him; and in the years of his rise "modest" and "unassuming" were also words that the reporters who interviewed him used about him, along with "hard-working"—the whole Horatio Alger list, in keeping with his well-known Humble Origins (vaguely Dickensian) and Successful Career, the rags-to-riches tale that needs a good boy for its hero. Later in life Chaplin could

no longer be called modest, but he repeatedly proved that active narcissism is immensely compelling.

Chaplin's international social rise was made possible by another great cultural change manifest in the breakdown of the old social categories after the Great War—the same breakdown that facilitated the career of Gabrielle Chanel during the same period. In the century just past, elegant society did not dine with comedians or dressmakers or violinists no matter how famous, or invite them to weekends at country houses. In the first third of this century, however, celebrities of all kinds began to mingle on terms of unprecedented equality, in a fluid mélange then called Café Society. The couturière or the film comedian, if they were "charming," could now sit around the swimming pool or play tennis or dine in evening dress with the Duchess and the Prince, along with an assortment of financiers and artists, promising politicians and performers, not all of them of known pedigree nor exactly honest. Hollywood had become a center of just such heady new mixtures, but they existed in many capital cities, and they were as exciting for the participants as movies were for the world.

The young Chaplin clearly worked hard at being constantly loved by any audience, journalists included, displaying his most acceptable self both on and off the screen, determined to seduce and to captivate everybody. Yet companions of his early years in show business, before he was a star, had often found him somber, irritable and inclined to solitude; since early boyhood he had been trained to sell himself to audiences, not to be genial to comrades. Most of his unrelenting work on films went into perfecting his own irresistible screen appearances in every detail: the bodily comportment and facial gestures, the perfect imitations both delicate and exaggerated of conventional behavior, the pathos, the irreverence, the appealing discomfiture, the dance, the walk, above all the timing. Once he became a public figure, all this could serve as well in off-screen life, and many came to feel that he was never not acting. So Chaplin had formidable inward demons to contend with, like other creative souls who arrange their public behavior as a continuous performance.

Kenneth Lynn's biography concentrates on the man in his era rather than in his art, except where the art illuminates both man and epoch. Lynn is most interested in the dark side, in the demons that gave Chaplin his well-known divided nature, his personal behavior both adorable and horrible, his movies both tacky and sublime. Apart from the objective greatness of Chaplin's films, which was largely the product of his carefully applied artistry, their most insistent power over people's feelings came from the uncontrolled operation of Chaplin's own unconscious, of which Lynn wants to discover the secrets, if only to fit him into the collective American psyche during its own Modern Times. He gives an absorbing explanation of late-nineteenth-century America's extreme loathing for tramps, for example, and he tells how that feeling about them later changed from fear and disgust to a romantic sort of envy and affection. With the help of quotations from Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Lynn reflects on how society marks out and expels certain things as Low, or Other, which nevertheless "return as the object of nostalgia and fascination." The stage, the slum and the savage are some other examples.



CHARLIE CHAPLIN BY DAVID SCHORR FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Tramps had become an ugly national phenomenon during the five years of economic depression after the Panic of 1873, when thousands of homeless men wandered over the country begging, stealing, vandalizing and worse. They came to be inveighed against as "incorrigible" and "depraved," truly base and hateful outcasts. By the 1890s, the worst depression of the nineteenth century had set in, and there were many more of them, more fear, and the crystallized belief that The Tramp was a generic figure of horror. He was used as a terrifying villain by sensational playwrights, and by D.W. Griffith in a film in 1909.

But a countercurrent of sympathy also served to render the figure comic after the turn of the century, so that tramps were also appearing as characters in printed cartoons and vaudeville skits; and Jack London had added an element of romance to the image of the tramp with lyrical reminiscences of his own spell of vagrancy during the '90s. By 1912, prosperity had in fact begun to alleviate the real problem. In that year Chaplin was already on his second tour in America with a London acting troupe, absorbing the conflicting emotional flavors then prevalent about tramps. In 1914, already at work in America, he would have learned that a large number of tramps had apparently been radicalized by political agitators and were creating violent disturbances, among them a bombing in a church.

Chaplin's screen persona in 1915 made him seem the tramps' advocate in a world openly hostile to them. Was this, asks Lynn, the beginning of his interest in championing the "wretched of the earth"? Chaplin's Tramp was eventually caught up in a general shift of feeling, and helped to tease out a secret American tenderness for the tramp's benign and superior form of lawlessness, the freedom from tight shoes and tight morals that

also fitted him for generous gestures and Robin-Hood-like adventures, even if they came comically or pathetically to ruin and exposed him as forever vulnerable.

Lynn is aware that there have already been hundreds of books on Chaplin, and obviously he felt that there were some things he need not do. This volume has neither a chronology nor a filmography, since those are to be found in David Robinson's biography of 1985. Nor has Lynn given us a separate bibliography; the sources are incorporated into the notes, so we can't check quickly on whether he's used a particular one, since they are not indexed either. But these are small, technical irritations. The point is that Lynn is not aiming to be definitive, but to fit his own book into the mosaic of Chaplin studies as an idiosyncratic critical contribution, especially with respect to tone and emphasis.

The tone is quite censorious, no doubt to counteract others' tendency to canonize Chaplin. The primary emphasis is psychological, however, and it allows for sympathy; and the remaining emphasis is sociological and literary. Lynn steadily relies on works of literature and cultural criticism contemporary with Chaplin's early career and from the preceding generation or two, in an effort to gauge America's sense of its own soul during the time it was preparing for the Chaplin phenomenon.

One aspect of this he finds manifest in the numerous and very popular female impersonators on the vaudeville stage since the 1880s. This situation underlay Chaplin's great triumph with drag acting in his early comedies, notably *A Woman* of 1915, a film so erotically campy that it was banned in Sweden. Lynn finds background for all this—and for Chaplin's swift rise to fame, insofar as it was due to his strong and ambiguous sexual appeal—in, of all things, Walter Lippmann's *Drift and Mastery*, which appeared in 1914 and treated what Lippmann perceived as the breakdown, already occurring before 1910, of traditional relations between men and women. Lippmann wrote that

> ... Man's sexual nature is chaotic through the immense change that has come into the relations of parent and child, husband and wife. Those changes distract him so deeply that the more "advanced" he is, the more he flounders in the bogs of his own soul.

And later, about the period after 1910, America "was being blown hither and thither like litter before the wind." Lots of drift, not much mastery. On the subject of sexual confusion, Lynn himself notes the direct effect of stage female impersonators on the stage style of Mae West, as others have done; her career in show business began about the same time Chaplin began in films.

Lynn is not only a student of American mores and attitudes, he is also a history professor. He has allowed himself to thicken the book's historical dimension with digressive accounts of the lives and the personalities of many subsidiary characters on the international scene of Chaplin's career, so that, all told, there is much more here than we need. Still, it is good to learn how cruel and brutal the American comic theater had been for generations, and its audience, too. The British comic stage of Chaplin's boyhood, on the other hand, had been loved and patronized by upper-class gentlemen and celebrated writers and painters as well as by the working class, and its themes were often artfully comic expressions of working-class discontent. Sennett's comic films with Chaplin simply continued with normal American brutality and nastiness to suit a crude public, until the comic film medium, with immigrant Charlie as chief exponent, was enriched and leavened with real feeling and finesse without sacrificing its potent old grossness. And then the American writers and gentlemen paid attention.

Lynn's earlier biographical books have been about William Dean Howells, Mark

Twain and Ernest Hemingway (the last two also wearing jovial masks to hide dark souls), and he repeatedly refers to Chaplin's work as "poetry," meaning, presumably, American poetry. He seems to imply that Chaplin's oeuvre has a natural family relationship to the works not only of Whitman and Melville, but also undoubtedly of Bret Harte and James Whitcomb Riley, of Edwin Markham and Ogden Nash. Lynn makes no reference to these; but he is patently entranced by Chaplin as an example of the variability and the waywardness of American taste and American style, its volatile combinations of original madness and serious hilarity, extreme crudity and rare delicacy, pretentious nonsense and hardness of head. He does mention Hart Crane, whose "Chaplinesque" is quoted in its entirety.

Chaplin was not an American. He wasn't born here, he didn't die here, he was never a citizen, and he lived in Switzerland for the last twenty-five years of his life, more than a third of his long career. He underwent his entire education and formation in London, and the unalterable core of his art was the tradition of the English music-hall pantomime, along with the deep memories of his English music-hall mother and his own early work on the English stage. But for his "poetry," of course, this all made him more American than being a native ever could. Chaplin is an American artist the way Balanchine is, a transplanted talent more robust and inventive here than he could ever have been back home, and much, much more successful. Chaplin's British accent had no existence, of course, in silent film. His movies made him famous as an entirely American comedian, with no perceived links to British sources at all.

The American professional scene on which Chaplin arrived and flourished soon included the novel requirement that movie stars be respectable. The theater had long been accepted as a raffish universe at every level, never a career for the virtuous. The demanding schedule that made normal life impossible, the backstage world and the long tours that fostered questionable intimacies, the commitment to constant falsity, the emotional strain and excess—everything about stage life traditionally led to occasions for sin, and people expected stage actors, serious or comic, to be amoral. It was very important, however, not to allow the huge American movie public to expect amorality from movie actors. If the stars were known to be depraved, people might stay away from movies as many did from theaters. It had to be emphasized that movies were made by the ordinary rules for work, with everyone quitting at the end of the day to go home for family dinner, and that movie stars were naturally home-loving and God-fearing, just like everybody else, only more so. To succeed in films, Chaplin would have to create and to maintain this fiction about himself, as all film actors did after early scandals had caused boycotts that seriously hurt the budding business.

One of the ways Chaplin did it was to create a respectable past for himself, with only respectable demons in it. Lynn critically examines Chaplin's *My Autobiography* (1964) mainly with a view to unraveling the gauze of romance that Chaplin was still drawing over early grim facts and feelings, even at that late date. Lynn the historian, by checking on the addresses at which they lived and when, painstakingly disproves Chaplin's insistence that he and his family lived in abject poverty, subsisting on his mother's sewing and her two sons' jobs in the theater. He also establishes pretty firmly that Chaplin's lovely and loving mother was, after an unsuccessful stage career, a kept woman and a part-time prostitute, and that he himself was not the son of his alleged father. Hetty Chaplin also went gradually insane, intermittently imposing unspeakable emotional burdens on little Charlie, and was ultimately institutionalized when he was about 14. Chaplin clearly never forgave her, nor himself, for being unable to rescue her from her life and her madness.

The thread of Lynn's story is the track of that whorish, spangled, dancing, and unbearably abandoning mother through Chaplin's career, on screen and off. Twice his movie star's need to look decent forced him to marry girls whom he had seduced and impregnated and would have preferred to abandon. He had a chronic, reckless hatred of contraception, wanting to be absolute master of all sexual circumstances, often telling girls not to worry, he couldn't have children. He loved very, very young and slightly hysterical girls, whom he would cast in show-business roles where they might wear dancer's costumes like his mother's, and whom he could help, master, mistreat and then feel mistreated by. Eventually, he was a tyrannical father and the demanding, inconsiderate husband of submissive Oona O'Neill, whom Lynn sees as delivering a vengeful slap at her own disapproving and abandoning father, Eugene, by succumbing to his near-exact and notorious contemporary.

Chaplin couldn't really stay out of trouble despite his conscious efforts to charm and manipulate the world, and he seems to have been as amoral as they come. Lynn not only compares him to Hitler, of whom he really was the exact contemporary (they were born four days apart), but points also to his obsession with Napoleon (Chaplin was very short), and his abiding need to be rebellious, dominating, and right all the time. Chaplin wished to defy oppressive institutions, but mainly so as to establish himself as oppressor-in-chief. As Lynn's account proceeds, it becomes more and more heavily laden with tales of Chaplin's bad behavior, his cruelty not only to many girls and other intimates, but also to the workmen on his Swiss house, to secretaries, to collaborators and cameramen who tried to intervene when Chaplin's sovereign rightness was clearly wrong. And his wickedness went further. After doing a scene holding a cat that unexpectedly scratched him, Chaplin didn't replace the cat; he had it killed and stuffed for the next take.

Lynn wants very much to emphasize that "moral turpitude," not Communist leanings, was the grounds on which Chaplin was finally denied re-entry into the United States in 1952, despite the widespread belief that he had been hounded

Gift

No wind in the world, everything still as a mirror
but facing away from you where you walk
head down, following the tracks in the sand that
are all that's left of the nightstalkers, ghosts now
gone underground with their hunger, hoping dusk
comes soon. Nothing to be seen or heard, the sea
not making the slightest ripple, vacant acres of glass
paving a way to islands which are light blue chimera
adrift on rafts of white mist—as if they were
low clouds, things of light and air only. So it's a gift
to come in the middle of the dunes upon a dark pool
with plant life thriving in it, and to find—to your tongue's
infinite surprise—sweet water under its skin of ice.

EAMON GRENNAN

out of the country for his politics. He had just been involved in a long and extremely sordid sexual scandal, which was only the most vivid of a sequence including both his divorces. Then, too, there had been a case of tax evasion. Lynn is an inexorable judge. He even follows the reach of Chaplin's badness beyond the grave, describing the wreck of Oona's widowed life as a wild-spending, boy-chasing drunk, once she lost her taxing, long-term job as Chaplin's slave.

Chaplin's famous and persistent left-wing political affiliation had differing effects according to the historical moment, and was another thing that he painted over in his autobiography. He was part of the Red Hollywood group in the 1930s, but he seems to have identified very generally with workers and the dispossessed, rather than being very precisely aware of Soviet policy and activity. He praised the purges as healthy cleansing devices—another bit that he deleted from his own account. It was alleged by one reviewer of the autobiography that Chaplin's pro-Soviet activism mainly showed the desire of an ill-educated man to get accepted as an intellectual, to hobnob with Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler so as not to get stuck with Marion Davies.

Chaplin's public political remarks were always rather woolly, though they were delivered at very specifically Communist events; and sometimes they were near-echoes of actual Communist rhetoric at its most bland. But when quizzed about his own exact loyalties, he would always say, I am a human being, not a Communist; or I am an artist, not a Communist; or I am a peace-monger. Although it was stated in 1952 by a former Communist District Organizer that in the 1930s Chaplin had been a loyal Party member-at-large, taking orders directly from the Central Committee, no sufficient evidence supported the claim. Lynn himself has latterly found no trace of Chaplin after pursuing inquiries in Moscow, and he allows us to conclude that the claim was false.

Chaplin eventually gave up discussing politics altogether, seemingly with relief, as if he had never really been seriously interested. It is true that he loved to be loved by intellectuals and to feel he was one of them; he carried Schopenhauer around with him, and Spengler, too, reading bits and pieces without much system. His critics on the left said that he "lacked ideological discipline," or indeed that he was the "accomplice of Capitalism in decline." He certainly lived very high and spent all his spare time with millionaires, intellectual or no.

The great artistic crisis in Chaplin's career was the advent of sound dialogue, which quickly sent all movie-making back to square one. Chaplin's cinematic sensibility, born of pantomime, was wholly bound up in the medium of powerful visual drama supported only by apt music. Dialogue might be part of the performance—people might be seen to speak—but the actual words conveyed should be minimal, easily compressed in short captions. This method works perfectly, as all true movie-lovers know, and the many hundreds of movies based on it had thirty years of galloping success behind them. But the bottom line finally won out. In 1926, the last year of entirely silent film, 50 million people a week went to the movies in America. In 1930, the first year of the total dominance of sound, 90 million a week went. So that was that.

Chaplin nevertheless finished *City Lights* in 1931 using no sound dialogue at all. It was his last silent feature with the full-time Tramp, but the Worker in *Modern Times* bears a close resemblance to him—and no wonder, since that film also had no sound dialogue even in 1936, the year of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *The Petrified Forest* and *Show Boat*. Chaplin was not going to give in easily, and he made the point in *Modern Times* by singing a highly communicative song made entirely of nonsense syllables. Meanwhile, in off-screen life, Chaplin's own utterances began to veer toward the homily or the harangue, to the point where he was lecturing Ramsay McDonald on domestic policy and Albert Einstein on economics. Unfortunately, so did his utterances when he finally spoke in his movies. Speechifying was his mode in *The Great Dictator*, *Monsieur Verdoux*, *Limelight*. But his best acting was still being done with the face and body and the inspired use of whatever props came to hand.

Chaplin was certainly aware of the flaws in many of his movies, though he had to believe that each was his greatest while it was being made. His true judgment is confirmed by his belief that *The Gold Rush* of 1925 was the best of them all, and the one he would like to be remembered by. It was made at the peak of his fame, and he worked to make it great. He shot 231,000 feet for a finished cut that was 8,498 feet long. Following Lynn's insight about Chaplin, the story seems to be the only one to fulfill his lifelong dream of saving and having his forever vanishing mother, not without great pain and risk but with ultimate success, and with a fortune to ratify the emotional triumph.

The cinematography and the direction, often uneven in Chaplin's films, have great harmony in *The Gold Rush*. There is a finely tempered interplay among the hot dance-hall crowds, the tiny people in the perilous snowy spaces, the outsider-looking-in moments, and the comedy-in-the-cabin routines, of which there are some in other movies but none better than in this one. None of the gags goes on too long, as they often do in earlier films such as *A Dog's Life*; none is too nasty or too grotesque.

As a showcase for The Tramp's soul, *The Gold Rush* is perfect. He can prevail in the most inimical surroundings imaginable, not the grim city or the harsh army but the impersonal frozen waste, laced with hidden gold, that can turn anxious, lonely, greedy people into beasts charging around the cage of their isolated little mining town. The lovely dance-hall girl whom Charlie secretly adores is repeatedly offended by the crudity of her steady admirer, but she is ready to settle for him out of boredom, until the real love she sees in the little tramp's heart opens her eyes to the possibility of finer things, and she rebuffs the hunk. But the tramp has vanished to find his gold-mine, and he only returns to sail home a silk-hatted if still love-hungry millionaire. The two

meet again by a fluke on the homebound steamer, and they are affianced within minutes, as if by a dispensation from Venus, with Charlie still playing the tramp (dressed in "his mining clothes" only for the publicity photo) so we know that she really loves him for himself, even though she quickly learns about the millions.

The movie is peppered with famous comic scenes, of Charlie turning into a big chicken in the eyes of his famished partner, of Charlie and partner in the teetering cabin, of Charlie doing the dance with the rolls, cooking and eating the shoe, waltzing attached to the dog; and finally millionaire Charlie. Here we have a glimpse of the high-life Chaplin, as he walks with suave grace in his fur-collared coat, treating servants with understated aplomb, his face handsome with muted melancholy, really looking for all the world like Proust. But he still unthinkingly scratches himself and picks up cigarette butts, and he removes his smoothly cut cloth coat only to reveal another whole fur coat underneath.

At certain moments in this movie, as also in *City Lights*, we can see Chaplin seem to stop acting and just quietly feel passion or anguish; and that appears to be his secret. We are all his at those moments, drawn by the erotic pull of strong male feeling intensified by helpless infantile and feminine need, held inactive in a limbo of despair. At the immensely satisfying end of this film, Charlie's pure sexuality has conquered the girl, the gold, the adversity. The force of true love incarnated in his mobile and infinitely resourceful body has proved irresistible. And so his mother has rejected her men and her dementia and come back to him at last.

After 1952, Chaplin lived in splendor in Switzerland, playing himself as a king in exile. Lynn nevertheless finds evidence that he had long been meaning to go and live in Europe at the time he sailed over for the London premiere of *Limelight*, even if he hadn't been prevented from returning to the States. Both the American public and the American government had turned savagely against him during his long double trial resulting from Joan Barry's false paternity accusation; and he ultimately turned against them, especially as the McCarthy convulsions continued. A generation later, Americans had forgotten everything about him but his work, and in 1972 he was invited back to receive an Academy Award and other honors, and to accept a devoted public's irreversible love for the immortal Tramp. He was, of course, delighted to come.

ANNE HOLLANDER is the author most recently of *Sex and Suits* (Knopf).

The Penitent

BY CLARE CAVANAGH

Aleksander Wat: Life and Art of an Iconoclast by Tomas Venclova

(Yale University Press, 369 pp., $35)

"All poets," Marina Tsvetaeva once proclaimed, "can be divided into poets with history and poets without history." What Tsvetaeva had in mind were poets "with development" and poets "without development," writers who grow into their gifts as opposed to those writers whose earliest verses already bear the stamp of their mature literary personalities. But Tsvetaeva's own biography attests to the ways that history in a different sense, history with a capital "H," left its mark on the lives of East European poets in this century. Revolution, exile, war, privation, Stalinist oppression and finally suicide: the events that shaped Tsvetaeva's life will seem sadly familiar to the reader of Tomas Venclova's superb study of the great Polish writer Aleksander Wat.

Wat was a "poet with history" with a vengeance. The story of his poetic evolution cannot be divorced from the twentieth century's great traumas, which he experienced, as the Poles say, on his own skin. Wat, a Jew, was caught between totalitarian regimes, German and Russian. He lost family to Hitler's death camps, and he was himself given the grand tour of Stalin's elaborate apparatus of terror. "[I] bedded down in so many prisons! Fourteen!" Wat exclaims in a late lyric. "Enormous History, a mighty machine, and I had stuck my little foot in," he says, speaking of his early political activity, in his memoirs *My Century* (1977). The rest of him was soon to follow. Wat spent his postwar years (he died in 1967) assessing the scars, physical and psychic, left by his skirmishes with modern history in its totalitarian variant.

"My life was a patchwork affair," Wat remarks in *My Century*; and some critics have likewise seen his writing as a string of suggestive "unaccomplishments," brilliant fragments uncrowned by a magnum opus that would lend coherence to the whole. Wat himself would have agreed. He would have been satisfied, as Czeslaw Milosz comments, only "by a work titled *Everything About Everything*." He was forced to make do instead with a series of essays, lyrics and prose fragments—one of his favorite genres, Venclova observes, was "novel-notes," jottings toward unwritten prose works—squeezed out when health and history permitted. Venclova gives tantalizing tidbits of Wat's unfinished projects: a novel on Lee Harvey Oswald; a short story in which King Lear meets the KGB; a fictional rendition of Stalin's secret diaries (destined, Wat hoped, for the best-seller lists).

What was fortunate, though, to find champions, in his lifetime and after, who have struggled to bring his work to its proper audience. Or even to bring it into existence. His compatriot Milosz has not only written extensively on Wat and translated, with Leonard Nathan, many of his postwar lyrics. He also served as midwife to *My Century*, an autobiography unlike any other, one of the most powerful documents to emerge from Stalin's prisons. It is actually an edited transcript of tape-recorded conversations with Milosz, who instigated the project when Wat, plagued by chronic pain, found himself unable to compose the autobiography that would record for posterity his encounters with the "devil in history."

Tomas Venclova, a distinguished Lithuanian poet and critic now teaching at Yale, is no stranger to the plight of the dissident-exile that he describes in his study of Wat. He weaves Wat's life and writing into the meaningful whole that eluded Wat himself. For Wat, the poet's life and work, however flawed, were inseparable. He insists on the primacy of the poet's lived experience as the only legitimate voucher for artistic worth. A poem's value can be judged, Wat argues, only "by the price which the poet has paid for the poem, paid in his own flesh and blood—a question of biography which, according to the critics, should not be anybody's business."

Wat's concerns now seem conspicuously out of date. Modern scholars are