



*Bert Schneider, Walter Matthau, Charlie Chaplin, Oona Chaplin  
and Richard Patterson, October 27, 1973, Vevey, Switzerland*

## **Making The Gentleman Tramp**

**Richard Patterson**

**I**n 1971 when Mo Rothman acquired the distribution rights to Charlie Chaplin's films, he enlisted the help of Bert Schneider to promote their release in the States. Bert used his position on the board of directors of the Academy to secure a special Oscar for Charlie and orchestrated Charlie's triumphant return to the US after twenty years of exile. For the Oscar show Bert asked Peter Bogdanovich to put together a montage of scenes from

Chaplin's movies. Peter in turn asked me to be the editor for it, since I had recently edited his documentary on John Ford.

The Oscar show was a classic and surely an historical moment for Hollywood. Soon afterwards Bert began plans for a documentary on Chaplin both as a means of promoting the re-release of his films and as a way of capitalizing on the fact that he had access not only to Chaplin's movies but to Charlie himself. Initially he asked Peter to do it and plans were made to shoot an interview with Charlie.

Peter's career had taken off like a rocket due to the success of *The Last Picture Show*, and he was not interested in doing another documentary. The chance to interview Chaplin was obviously something he could not pass up, however; and he agreed to shoot the interview without committing to anything more.

Bert made arrangements through Oona to film the interview at Charlie's home in Switzerland. Pierre Cottrell put together a French crew for the shoot with Nestor Almendros, who had shot the three films Pierre produced for Eric Rohmer.

The interview was not a success for a variety of reasons. There were brief moments when Charlie seemed to relax and respond naturally, but on the whole he found it too difficult and was unable or unwilling to tell the kind of stories Peter was obviously hoping to elicit.

Peter generously suggested that Bert talk to me about making the documentary. The first thing I did when Bert asked me to make some kind of proposal for a documentary on Chaplin was to read *My Autobiography*. I immediately saw that Charlie's life was a great subject for a movie, and I saw a lot of obvious connections between the events of his life and the films that he made.

I told Bert two things: I wanted to make the documentary about his life rather than about his films, and I was more interested in making a film with emotional impact than in doing something cerebral or analytical. I was not interested in telling people what to think about Chaplin; I wanted to enable them to experience him both as a performer and as a person.

The key to my conception of the film was the idea that clips from Charlie's movies could function as dream sequences in the story of his life. I saw it as an opportunity to make a narrative film that orchestrated an audience's emotions in the same way as a dramatic feature. I was delighted and amazed when Bert suggested I take a look at *Song of Summer*, a BBC documentary by Ken Russel on Delius using actors to recreate a period in his old age.

Another thing I made clear to Bert before we started was that I had no interest in shooting interviews with Chaplin or anyone else. My instincts told me that the kind of emotional involvement I wanted an audience to feel would be punctured by people talking to the camera. I do not generally respond strongly to "talking heads" on a movie screen. Interviews work best when one is more interested in the person being interviewed than the subject matter of the interview. As a narrative technique interviews can only offer a mediated experience, and the presence of the interviewee is often a distraction from ones involvement in the story.

On the other hand I often love voice-overs in movies and believe that a disembodied voice can create a sense of interior psychic space or a degree of intimacy that is rarely possible when the person is seen speaking. It was clear to me from the outset that dramatized voice-overs offered a more effective way to achieve the result I was after than interviews. The voice could be interpreted as a voice Charlie might have heard either literally or in his imagination. It could help create a sense of the times and draw the viewer into the story.

Bert was understandably interested in salvaging as much as possible from the interview footage that had been shot. Peter had begun the interview with a really nice shot of Charlie responding to music playing on a tape recorder, and I saw that it might be used as part of a different kind of sequence. I told Bert that what was needed for the ending of the film was footage of Charlie relaxing with friends or family at home. Together we came up with the scheme of shooting footage of Walter and Carol Matthau visiting Charlie and

Oona. Carol and Oona had gone to school together and were still close friends. This tied in with the idea of having Walter be the narrator for the film, a suggestion which was fine with me and which would presumably add commercial appeal to the film.

Since there was no distribution set for the film, I agreed to do a version which could be a 90 minute television special with the narrator on camera after the main commercial breaks. To my mind this was always an alternate television version of the film, and I preferred not having the narrator on camera. I had no great difficulty structuring the story to fit into the confines of a 90 minute television special, although I did feel that having to give the film two "teasers" resulted in it having three beginnings rather than one. I kept the teasers in the theatrical version with the idea that they really did no harm; and, if they helped draw some viewers into the film before it started, so much the better.

The one thing I proposed doing which was not possible was shooting scenes with actors to recreate Charlie's childhood. I envisioned doing this with a few brief impressionistic scenes, but Bert said both that the Chaplins would not agree to it and that it was not economically feasible. I accepted this but devoted a lot of effort to recreating Charlie's childhood with found materials. The Dickensian themes in Charlie's early years appealed to me so much that I had difficulty accepting the fact that it was not possible to do everything I wanted to do within the confines of the documentary. We even recorded some period music using an arranger and conductor who had worked on the scoring of Chaplin's silent shorts. There was a screening of a rough cut with Bert at one point when he was able to say to me, "The stuff on his childhood is not working;" and I finally realized I needed to find a much more concise way to convey the essential ideas.

I always felt I had a remarkable relationship with Bert. Bert took care of all the legal, financial and logistical aspects of the production and made me feel that he trusted me to make the film. He was able to give me valuable input when

he viewed various rough cuts of the film, and I never felt that he was pressuring me to do anything that was not in the best interest of the film. I thought at times that he had a very different perspective on Charlie and his films than I did, but in retrospect I suspect it was more of a difference in the way we verbalized our reactions. I might want to wax philosophical or pursue psychoanalytic metaphors; Bert was much more down to earth and direct. Most importantly, though, Bert knew how to make things happen. He could enlist the aid of Walter Matthau, make arrangements for a shoot in Vevey with Nestor Almendros, get Laurence Olivier to agree to record passages from Chaplin's autobiography, ask Jack Lemmon to record a reading of Chaplin's Academy citation - whatever it took.

The other person who opened the doors that made the film possible was David Shepard, the archivist for the AFI who had overseen the production of Peter's documentary on John Ford. As soon as I began working on the film I contacted David, and he gave me introductions to a host of people in Europe as well as the United States who were invaluable resources. He knew where to find virtually everything that was available.

One book that inspired me more than any other aside from Chaplin's autobiography was Parker Tyler's book *Last Of The Clowns*. I am sure I knew better than to mention this to anyone else involved in the production. Tyler's book is idiosyncratic to put it mildly, but it encouraged me to think about the way in which Charlie acted out dreams in his public persona as well as his films and to go with my instincts about connections between his films and his life.

I also viewed Harry Hurwitz's documentary on Chaplin, *The Eternal Tramp*, which had been made several years earlier. It was constrained by the fact that he did not have access to any of Chaplin's films except the early shorts made for Keystone and Mutual, and it helped me realize what an extraordinary opportunity I had on my hands.

The title for the film was taken from the passage in his autobiography where Chaplin describes how he explained his newly found character to Mack Sennett:

*"You know this fellow is many-sided, a tramp, a gentleman, a poet, a dreamer, a lonely fellow, always hopeful of romance and adventure. He would have you believe he is a scientist, a musician, a duke, a polo player. However, he is not above picking up cigarette butts or robbing a baby of its candy. And, of course, if the occasion warrants it, he will kick a lady in the rear - but only in extreme anger!"*

I liked "gentleman-tramp" because it seemed to capture contradictions in Chaplin's life as well as his screen character.

The film was made in 35mm and, for reasons I never questioned, the production was based in London where I was lucky to find John Laing as an assistant editor and Thelma Schaverien as a researcher. Bert also sent Artie Ross, his associate producer, over to help with the preparations for a weekend of shooting at Charlie's home in Vevey using the same crew that had shot the interview. The plan was to shoot as much footage as possible that could look like coverage of the Matthauss visiting the Chaplins.

Bert's arrangements for the shoot were made with Oona, who felt it was best not to discuss it at all with Charlie before we arrived. Bert and I went to Vevey a day earlier so that we could have a relaxed, purely social visit with Charlie and Oona. There was no discussion of plans for filming, but Charlie knew I was making the documentary. He was very sweet, and we viewed some home movies of a trip to London while he commented briefly on events from his youth.

We started shooting Saturday morning with a sequence in which the Chaplin's driver picked up the Matthauss at the hotel and drove them up to the house. Nestor shot some footage of the Matthauss chatting in the car on the way to the house even though we could not silence the camera and knew we would have to re-record the sound if the footage proved useful. The sequence ended with a handheld shot following the Matthauss into the entrance hall of the house without seeing anything inside the house.

At this point Oona told Charlie that we wanted to shoot a few shots of him. We set the camera up on the lawn in the

yard beside the house and chose an angle for a shot of Charlie and Oona walking off into the autumn landscape. I knew that if we only got one shot of Charlie, this would be the one to get. It was a fairly obvious shot - a reference to the ending of *Modern Times* and a natural conclusion to the love story of Charlie's later life; but in one of those moments that is extremely rare in film production everything conspired to make it work better than one might have expected. The weather was beautiful. There was a magical light filtering through the golden leaves on the trees surrounding the spacious lawn. Charlie was in a good mood and ready to perform for the camera to the extent that he could. Oona had clearly done a good job persuading him to play along. Walter also did his part to make Charlie feel at ease, and I suspect that even the presence of Candace Bergen taking stills of the event helped as well. Certainly Nestor's eye and his sensitivity to every possible dimension of the situation made all the difference in the world.

The net result was not only that we got the shot along with some others that Nestor was able to grab in the aftermath, but Charlie was sufficiently encouraged by the experience to agree to having us shoot some footage with him in the living room after lunch. I had made it clear that all we wanted to do was to get some shots of Charlie and Oona chatting with the Matthauss. Nestor took a quick look and said that the light coming in through the French doors and just the ordinary lamps in the room would be sufficient to shoot by. Bert and Candace and the Matthauss joined the Chaplins for lunch while the rest of us drove back in to Vevey to eat. As I recall there was some complication with finding a place to eat lunch so that it took us a bit longer than we expected. When we returned the afternoon light in the living room was beginning to fade, and Nestor realized it would be necessary to supplement it with some soft lights set up at one end of the room. By the time we were ready to shoot and everyone returned to the living room from the dining room, I think the long meal and the wine were beginning to take their toll and Charlie had lost a little of his enthusiasm for the venture.

Walter and Carol and Oona did their best to keep him amused and interested while we just let the camera roll in the far corner of the room. Eventually it began to become obvious to all that Charlie was ready for us to leave. We finished the roll in the camera, shut off the lights and called it a day. As we were packing up, I asked Nestor how he felt about what he had seen through the viewfinder. He said he had felt constrained by not being able to move the camera to adjust the framing, but there was one moment when he caught a look between Charlie and Oona that he felt conveyed how he felt about her. That was all I needed to hear. I had seen enough of the various bits of conversation to know that with any luck I could cut something together that would seem relaxed and natural. What I heard Nestor telling me was that we had gotten the perfect bit of icing on the cake.

On Sunday we were scheduled to go back to shoot more, but we were told that Charlie was not interested in cooperating. Somehow we cooked up a scheme where Nestor and the assistant cameraman would set up two cameras in the bushes along the side of the back yard, and Oona would persuade Charlie to come out on the veranda while some of the kids and grandchildren played in the back yard. Bert, Candace, Walter and Charlie Matthau joined in, and the gambit worked. Charlie came out on the veranda with Oona, at the very least pretending to be completely unaware of any cameras.

I remember having three reactions when I finally viewed the dailies back in the editing room in London. First of all I was surprised to see that Nestor had zoomed in to reframe during the walk with Oona on the lawn. My initial reaction was that it undermined the connection with the static framing in the end shot for *Modern Times* and was a odds somehow with the abstract concept I had of the shot. Later as I cut the ending of the film with music I realized that the decision to zoom was inspired.

My main interest as I viewed the film was, of course, to find the moment of interaction between Charlie and Oona that Nestor had mentioned. As the footage played I began to recall



how we had overstayed our welcome. Then I saw a moment when Charlie looked over at Oona; and it was clear to me that the look in his eyes said, "When are you going to get these people out of my living room?" I winced and kept going and suddenly realized this was the moment Nestor had seen. I looked at it again and saw that what his eyes said on another level was, "I need you." I looked at it again and began to see the potential in it. Once it was underlined with the passage from his autobiography about love, the look conveys something much more significant than the circumstances of that one afternoon and the impatience Charlie was beginning to feel. This has always remained one of the most telling moments in my experience as a film editor. Context is everything.

The third thing I remember about the dailies from Vevey was the two-camera coverage of Charlie and Oona on the veranda. Nestor and his assistant had agreed that one of them would stay wider and the other would shoot a tighter shot so that there could be some possibilities for cutting between the two. When Oona approached Charlie, and he reached out to her; what he actually did was to pat her on the bottom before taking her hand. As I viewed the footage, I found myself faced with a quintessential documentary filmmaker's dilemma. I could see immediately that the two angles and the nature of his gesture made it possible to cut the shots together in a way that eliminated the pat on the bottom. I knew full well that patting her on the bottom was completely in character; but I also knew that it was not something he would do in one of his movies, and I knew that it could complicate things for some viewers. I probably agonized about the cut less at the time than I have since. I still think, all things considered, it was the right choice; but part of me wishes it was not.

It is easy for me to imagine a critical viewer saying that this cut is symptomatic of a tendency in the film to sanitize and sentimentalize Chaplin the man. I can also hear a less critical viewer just saying, "Oh, you should have left that in. It would have been so great to see him do that!" To some extent I agree with the premise of the more stringent criticism that the

decision cuts to the heart of the nature of the film rather than the viewer who just sees a little missed opportunity.

What is the missed opportunity? It is the chance to see the “real” man beyond the public image which has occupied the screen up to that point. It is also the chance for the viewer to be a Peeping Tom spying on Chaplin from the bushes. The latter characterization is especially apt if Charlie really did not know that we were filming and was behaving in a way he would only do in the privacy of his own back yard. The moment would seem “real” because it would be sexual, but what viewer has any doubt that this man who has had eight children by his fourth wife after a series of scandalous affairs is a sexual being.

In case you fell asleep watching the movie, sex is a major theme in *The Gentleman Tramp* just as sex was a major theme in Charlie’s life. In my estimation to think that the movie sanitizes and sentimentalizes Charlie’s sex life (or his political or emotional life) is to misunderstand the dialect the film is speaking. The film is composed essentially of public images, and the intent is to enable these public images to point beyond themselves to something inside both Charlie and the viewer. Even the home movies are performances for a camera to a large extent. The staged visit with the Matthaus is comparable to the staged scene with the visitors at his studio. The “true” moment on the porch would seem wrong precisely because it would not feel like a public image and because the impulse to include it would be an impulse to puncture the sentimental surface.

To my mind Charlie tells us more about the reality of his sex life when he clowns for the home movie camera by sprouting horns behind his attractive female guest or by the way he self-consciously says “my wife” while responding to reporters when he has landed in England in 1953. Many of us share sexual conflicts like the ones that defined much of Charlie’s psyche; few of us act them out on the scale that Charlie did both in his life and in his work. The sentimentality which infuses the film is part of the performance with which Charlie

strutted and fretted his hour upon the stage. It is not something imposed on his life in an attempt to please an audience viewing the documentary. If this seems far-fetched or sounds like over-compensating rationalization, so be it. It is how my mind works now, and I have every reason to believe it was how my mind worked while I edited the picture.

Two other things resulted from the trip to Vevey: Oona agreed to make available to us the 16mm Kodachrome home movies she had shot over the years, and we were given permission to return to photograph some of the stills and souvenirs which Charlie had and would not allow to leave the house. A second shoot was planned to do insert photography with Bruce Logan, who had done visual effects photography for 2001: A Space Odyssey and was still working in England. In addition to returning to Vevey, Bruce and I went to Paris to film a variety of things in the collection of Simon Dargols. We did not see Charlie or Oona when we went to Vevey, but Charlie's business manager, Rachel Ford, made arrangements for us to have access to the material and to set up a camera in one room of the house.

The home movies were an amazing treasure. We had them blown-up to 35mm at the Rank lab in London, and I was astounded by the quality of the images. My own mother had taken 8mm home movies of her children, and I immediately discovered that I had a very strong emotional connection with the Chaplin home movies. At one point after the film had been finished my parents visited me in Los Angeles, and I arranged a screening for them. I was still working at an office at BBS and for whatever reason I decided to let them view the film without me in the screening room. When I knew enough time had passed, I went to the projection booth so that I could know exactly when the film had ended. I happened to arrive in time for the section devoted to the home movies; and, as I watched my parents watching the home movies, I was overwhelmed by the realization of how personal certain aspects of the documentary were for me. To my mind the home movies were a reflection of my own memories and fantasies of childhood as

well as an archtypal image of an American Dream.

One of my most vivid memories of editing the documentary is of the day when I cut the home movies taken in Beverly Hills together with the scene from *Limelight* with its incredible emotional climax. I have no idea how many other people respond as strongly as I do to that cut or to the home movies in general, but I can still be moved to tears by the combination of the pathos of *Limelight* with the image of domestic bliss enjoyed briefly before the strong arm of the American political system hammered Charlie.

In December of 1973 I returned to Los Angeles for a couple of weeks to shoot the on-camera narration with Matthau and record the voice-overs. With Paul Lohmann as the cameraman we shot in three different locations: the Chaplin studios which was then the A & M Records studio, Chaplin's former home in Beverly Hills, and a courtroom in downtown Los Angeles. Walter's son Charlie accompanied him and was included in one of the bits which was used in the television version.

All of the voice-overs were probably recorded in one or two days. For an English voice I used William Beckley, an actor who had been in the short film I had made at the American Film Institute. For the others I was able to hire some of the most talented voice-over people in Los Angeles. Most of them did two or three different voices, and the recording sessions with them were great fun. They would play with the interpretation offering me a variety of renditions in order to settle on a persona for the particular character. I remember loving the way they were able to recall things like the period pronunciation of Los Angeles.

Many of the voice-overs were based on contemporary news clippings. Even though my father had worked for the Office of Price Administration, I doubt that on my own I could have come up with the line about the OPA wanting to know where Charlie got the gas to drive up to Carpentaria for his wedding. The persona of the gossip columnist was the most imaginative creation, but it was obviously inspired by the reams of gossip column chatter available on Charlie.

In January we screened the film for Charlie and Oona in Paris. I was sitting in the rear of the small theater, and Bert was sitting closer to Charlie and Oona towards the front. At one point where we were anxious about Charlie's reactions - perhaps the treatment of the Joan Barry incident - Charlie got up and walked out of the theater. My heart sank. In a short while, however, he came back in; and we carried on. Later I was greatly relieved to learn that the reasons for his departure had nothing to do with the content of the film and everything to do with his bladder.

I did receive a letter from Oona after the screening in which she voiced objections to some things in the film, and Bert made it clear that we had no choice but to comply. The main concern was a desire to protect the integrity of the film clips. Specifically they objected to having voice-overs about events in his life playing over the clips themselves. Most of the instances of this were easy to remedy, even if I felt they made for less graceful transitions. There were, however, two places in which I made significant changes to accommodate their concerns.

One was a sequence in which voice-overs dramatizing Chaplin's divorce from Lita Grey played over the scene from *The Circus* in which Charlie is trapped in a cage with a lion. I had felt this was just too apt to resist, but I substituted other visuals to accompany the voice-overs about the divorce and just dropped the clip with the lion. Using the fun house chase immediately afterwards seemed equally appropriate to me.

The other change involved the use of the scene from *The Great Dictator* in which Charlie makes his speech at the end. When the film dissolves to the shot of Paulette Goddard listening to the speech, I added yet another dissolve to a photo of Charlie's mother, whose name, like that of Goddard's character in the movie, was Hannah. It was a simple matter to remove the photo and hope that the audience could still make the connection just on the basis of the name and themes established earlier.

I felt, and I believe Bert felt as well, that the changes I

made satisfied all of the concerns in Oona's letter without compromising the film at all.

Probably the last thing we did in London before moving the production back to Los Angeles in February or March of 1974 was to record passages from Chaplin's autobiography read by Laurence Olivier. I had known all along that I would want to use passages from the autobiography as voice-over, and Bert and I agreed that it would better serve the film to have someone other than Charlie read them. Bert and/or Oona persuaded Charlie to contact Olivier and ask him to do it. Olivier could hardly refuse.

Sir Laurence was very gracious and polite when he informed me at the recording session that he would read each selection once. Needless to say I was delighted to have Olivier involved in the film, but I did not hesitate to chop up his reading mercilessly removing pauses so that it would have a pace that I thought worked for the film.

When the production returned to Los Angeles, Joyce Sunila was hired as a production assistant and Kurt Hirschler was hired briefly as an editor so that I could focus more on other aspects of the production. By that point the film was basically edited. and there was not much for Kurt to do.

The main thing I had to do to finish the film was to record a little more music as well as the final version of the narration. Since Charlie had scored all the silent films he still controlled, the only clips that did not have music were the ones from the early Keystone and Mutual films. I had used some of Joshua Rifkin's recordings of Scott Joplin as a temporary score, but I wanted to see if any of the songs that Charlie himself had written could be made to work. Somewhere along the way we had found sheet music to several songs Charlie had published very early in his career.

To record a solo piano version of the songs Joyce found Julian Levy. Julian had been trained as a classical pianist but had long since given up performing. He was unsure whether he wanted to go into a recording studio, but he agreed to try a pass at a temp track on a tape recorder at home. I loved the

way he played the pieces and found selections that I thought worked perfectly with the clips. When the time came to record them for real, we ran into several difficulties. First of all the studio we used was accustomed to recording pop music rather than classical solo piano, and it took me a while to realize that the reason I did not like the sound I was hearing was because the engineer had the mike stuffed down the throat of the piano. I was able to convince him to back the mike away from the piano, but we were off to a rough start; and Julian began having problems, some of which may have been rooted in the anxieties or issues that had caused him to abandon his musical career in the first place. The net result was that neither of us was really satisfied with what we were able to record, and Julian suggested I try using someone else to play the pieces.

Bert made the obvious suggestion: use the pianist who recorded all the music for *Five Easy Pieces*. We booked time in a different studio that knew how to record solo classical piano, and fortunately Julian agreed to come along with me as an observer. Pearl Kaufman was, of course, the consummate professional - the kind of studio musician who can walk into a recording studio completely cold, take one look at a piece of music and play it effortlessly. The only problem was that her interpretation of the songs was completely different from Julian's, and I was at a loss for words to explain to her what I wanted. My attempts to explain that I wanted a more "lyrical" interpretation only resulted in something I felt was "heavier" and further off the mark. Finally Julian offered a more technical explanation of what I was looking for based on his knowledge of how much I had liked the way he had originally played it. Her response was something like, "Oh, you mean tongue-in-cheek. When you said 'lyrical,' I thought you meant operatic." She proceeded to play all the pieces with an interpretation that was much more to my liking. After we had everything, and she left; Julian said he'd like to give it another shot if we could keep the studio a little longer. I suspect that because the pressure was off, he was able to play all of the selections in a way that I loved and was able to use in the final

mix for the track.

We had several screenings at BBS for a variety of people, and we felt the film was essentially finished when we took a print to Paris again to screen for Rachel Ford, Victoria Chaplin, Simon Dargols and some of the people who had worked on it. Charlie was not able to make the trip to Paris for the screening, and a cutting continuity for the film was delivered to Oona via Rachel Ford.

Oona immediately wrote the following letter to Bert:

June 2, 1974

Dear Bert,

*Rachel sent me the continuity sheet of the documentary and I was disturbed to see that apparently you still juxtapose certain clips from the films with events in Charlie's private life as if there were a significance between them. For example, the death of his first baby and the baby scene from The Kid. For example, the Lita Grey divorce and the fun house scene from The Circus. For example, the Barry trial and the trial scene from Monsieur Verdoux. It disturbs me first of all because I find it cheap - a sort of Modern Screen mentality. But more than anything else it disturbs me because it is false. To cut from the Barry trial to the trial scene from Monsieur Verdoux is shocking to anyone who cares for Monsieur Verdoux; it jars them and leaves a bad taste in the mouth, and I'm convinced we all would be justly criticized for a documentary treating Charlie's films this way.*

*I hate to write you like this, not repeating all the nice things I've heard and feel myself about the documentary, but it's important to me to try and put down exactly what I think and get it off my chest. I did make this point in my letter to Richard Patterson after the first Paris showing, but he never answered most of my comments on the film.*

Love,  
Oona

Bert let me respond to the letter, and I obviously stepped up to the plate swinging for all I was worth:



June 11, 1974

Ms. Oona Chaplin  
Manoir de Ban  
Corsier sur Vevey  
Switzerland  
Dear Oona,

Bert has conveyed to me your comments about the juxtaposition of certain clips from the films with sequences presenting events in Charlie's life. I am a bit concerned because as I understand your comments you are objecting to something fundamental to the conception of the documentary, and I want very much to explain or clarify this aspect of the film. Let me also hasten to say that I would have responded more fully to your letter of January 25 had I thought you objected in this way to the basic approach of the film.

With the exception of the clips used in the opening montage all of the clips used in the documentary have been chosen because of the way they can be related to Charlie's life. The relationship implied by the juxtaposition of the clips with information about his life is not a literal or superficial one (e.g. Charlie shot a scene about taking care of a baby because he had lost a baby in real life.). It is the relationship that exists between the life and work of any great artist. Someone who responds to Long Day's Journey Into Night or even A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by reducing the work to literal autobiography is obviously missing the point, but anyone who wants to understand the life or psyche of your father or James Joyce would do well to contemplate the events of his life in the light of the way he expressed himself in his work.

A work of art stands on its own and does not need biographical underpinnings. Charlie's films obviously need no explication or elaboration with biographical information. Nevertheless they are autobiographical in the way that most modern art is inherently autobiographical, and seeing clips from the films in the context of events in his life sheds light on the way his artistic consciousness responded to and assimilated these circumstances. As an artist Charlie used his own life as the material from which he wrought his creations. This material included everything from lawsuits to the most profound inner conflicts, and it underwent varying degrees of transformation in the creative process.

In the original treatment for the documentary I tried to make it

clear that my interest was in telling the story of Charlie's life and that the film clips would be used in a way analogous to dream sequences or lyrical interludes in a dramatic film. That is to say the clips were meant to evoke a state of mind or to provide an emotional context for the events being presented. The cut from the sequence dealing with Mildred Harris to the scene from *THE KID* does not imply a literal connection between the death of their baby and the story for *THE KID*. What it does is to amplify the information with an emotion which gives the viewer a deeper understanding of what the event meant to Charlie. If I want someone to understand the way in which Charlie probably responded to the death of the baby, the best thing I can do is to say, "Look, he is a man who can create this scene." What this gives the viewer is not a verbal analysis of Charlie's personality but a direct expression of a part of it which is relevant to the matter at hand. It gives them a part of Charlie's heart with its complex mixture of humor and pathos as a means of imagining how he would have responded to the death of his first child.

This is only one level on which the structure of the documentary is functioning. There are several others as well and in fact the most important one of all is very easily forgotten in this kind of analysis of a particular juxtaposition. The single most important factor influencing all the choices in making the film was the desire to communicate a feeling, to move the audience in such a way that they share a sympathy and deep affection for Charlie. The point is to enable the audience to understand with their hearts who Charlie is. People cry when they see the film because they are involved with Charlie, because they have shared some meagre portion of the agony and joy which have shaped and filled his soul; and this is possible only because of the way in which the film clips are used. Anytime a scene is excerpted from a film, one does violence to the film itself. It is an act of pillage which can be justified only by the ultimate use to which the loot is put. If in making the documentary we are taking liberties with the films, it is in order to communicate our love for Charlie. Only if we accept the clips as given elements to be combined with other material in a process that uses the magic of film as an art form can we construct a work which communicates this love. I personally am satisfied that the documentary works in this way--more than satisfied. Far from being criticized for the way clips are used, the film is consistently praised for the way in which it weaves together clips and

*biographical information to create an emotional and dramatic experience. People as diverse as Henry Miller and Peter Bogdanovich have been moved by the documentary and have not felt that Charlie's films were being mistreated. Simon Dargols, a man whose love of Charlie's films borders on a fanatical obsession, liked the way in which the clips were related to events in Charlie's life. Likewise Kevin Brownlow has been extremely complimentary about the way the clips are used not to mention about a hundred other people who have seen the film and commented on it.*

*The way in which the documentary juxtaposes the Barry trial and the trial scene from MONSIEUR VERDOUX is not false and it is not cheap. If you conclude this from examining the continuity for the documentary, it can only be because the continuity abstracts the juxtaposition from its aesthetic and emotional context. While I understand and appreciate the concerns which are expressed in your comments, I feel confident that if you are able to view the film objectively you will see that this juxtaposition like the others is one in which a film clip enriches the telling of Charlie's life story while at the same time taking on additional resonances itself.*

*I am sorry we were not able to discuss this earlier and that we can not discuss it in person. I hope that what I have said makes sense to you, and needless to say I look forward to hearing your reactions when you see the film in its present form.*

*Sincerely,  
Richard Paterson*

The letter and a subsequent screening of the film for the Chaplins in Switzerland allayed their concerns. The film had its official premiere at Filmex (The Los Angeles Film Exposition) in March 1975. It was shown at several festivals and had enough of a theatrical release to garner a Golden Globe nomination for best documentary of 1976. It had a long life in the non-theatrical market, but only one brief outing in the home video market. Needless to say I am delighted that it is once again available for people to see.

## The Gentleman Tramp DVD

### 1) Theatrical Version

*The only version of the film previously distributed.*

### 2) Television Version

*A version with two sections of on-camera narration and a different main title sequence.*

### 3) Trailer

*A trailer made for the theatrical and non-theatrical release.*

## Chapters

1) Prologue

2) Childhood

3) Vaudeville

4) Shorts

5) Edna Purviance

6) World War I

7) Mildred Harris

8) Trip Abroad

9) Lita Grey

10) Talkies

11) Politics

12) Paulette

13) Joan Barry

14) Un-American

15) Exile

16) Apotheosis

*There are numerous additional markers in the DVD for skipping ahead or back, and there are menus to let you view only the clips from a specific Chaplin film.*

High Definition Master ..... Sunset Digital  
 Additional Transfers by MK2 & Film Preservation Associates  
 Audio Transfers ..... Chace Productions  
 DVD Authoring and Color Correction done on a Macintosh  
 using After Effects, Final Cut Pro and DVD Studio Pro.

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 encouragement and support made this DVD possible

Josephine Chaplin

Erik Anderson

Bert Schneider

Stan Taffel

Kate Guyonvarch

David Shepard

Jeffrey Vance

Judith Patterson

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