

Modern Times marked the last screen appearance of the Little Tramp - the character which had brought Charles Chaplin world fame, and who still remains the most universally recognized fictional image of a human being in the history of art.

The world from which the Tramp took his farewell was very different from that into which he had been born, two decades earlier, before the First World War. Then he had shared and symbolized the hardships of all the underprivileged of a world only just emerging from the 19th century. Modern Times found him facing very different predicaments during America<sup>1</sup>'s Great Depression, when mass unemployment coincided with the massive rise of industrial automation.

Chaplin was acutely preoccupied with the social and economic problems of this new age. In 1931 he told a newspaper interviewer, "Unemployment is the vital question ... Machinery should benefit mankind. It should not spell tragedy and throw it out of work." In *Modern Times* he set out to transform his observations and anxieties into comedy. The little Tramp - described in the film credits as "a Factory Worker" - is now one of the millions coping with the problems of the 1930s, which are not so very different from anxieties of the 21st century - poverty, unemployment, strikes and strike breakers, political intolerance, economic inequalities, the tyranny of the machine, narcotics. The film's portentous opening title - "The story of industry, of individual enterprise - humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness" - is followed by a symbolic juxtaposition of shots of sheep being herded and of workers streaming out of a factory. Chaplin's character is first seen as a worker being driven crazy by his monotonous, inhuman work on a conveyor belt and being used as a guinea pig to test a machine to feed workers as they work.

By the time *Modern Times* was released, talking pictures had been established for almost a decade. Till now, Chaplin had resisted dialogue, knowing that his comedy and its universal understanding depended on silent pantomime. This time though he weakened to the extent of preparing dialogue, and even doing some trial recordings. Finally he thought better of it, and as in *City Lights* uses only music and sound effects. Human voices are only heard filtered through technological devices - the boss who addresses his workers from a television screen, the salesman who is only a voice on the phonograph.

Just at one moment, though, Chaplin's own voice is heard directly. Hired as a waiter, the Little Worker is required to stand in for the romantic café tenor. He writes the words on his shirt cuffs, but these fly off with a too-dramatic flourish; and he is obliged to improvise the song in a wonderful, mock-Italian gibberish. Chaplin's voice had already been heard on radio and in at least one newsreel, but this was the first and only time that the world heard speech from the Little Tramp.

**Essay:** The author of this article states that the opening title of the movie, "The story of industry, of individual enterprise - humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness" is portentous (significant, crucial) to understanding the movie. Do you agree or disagree with his opinion. Write a well-developed essay with an introduction, a body paragraph and a conclusion that uses text based reasons to support your view.