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A WOMAN OF PARIS

Having built his career as both an actor and director of silent cinema with comedic short films starring his wildly popular Little Tramp character, Charles Chaplin confounded audiences when he followed up his first feature, *The Kid*, with a serious melodrama—sans the Tramp! A major departure from his previous output, *A Woman of Paris* centers around the title character (frequent Chaplin Studios actor Edna Purviance), who is betrayed by her lover and then cast aside by her would-be fiancé (Adolphe Menjou). Applauded by the press but rejected by the public, then pulled from distribution by Chaplin himself, *A Woman of Paris*, with its influential, understated acting and deft storytelling, now stands as one of Chaplin's greatest directorial achievements.

The 4K restoration of A Woman of Paris used a second-generation full-frame dupe negative, deposited by Roy Export SAS with Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna and selected as the best available element. The film was restored in 2019 by Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna at L'Immagine Ritrovata in association with Roy Export SAS as part of the Chaplin Project.

United States | 1923 | 78 minutes | Black & White | 1.33:1 aspect ratio

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

In 1922, Charles Chaplin was cinema’s brightest star as well as one of the world’s most revered citizens. Since his 1914 debut as the Little Tramp in *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, he had conquered the medium as both actor and director, and recent efforts like 1921’s *The Kid* had expanded his unique brand of slapstick comedy to include dramatic scenarios that stirred deep pathos. Yet Chaplin sensed he had dug himself into an artistic rut and even felt increasingly alienated from his Tramp persona. Seeking a project that would fulfill his belief that, in the words of biographer Kenneth S. Lynn, “he was a man of destiny who ought to be searching for grander means of communicating with the world,” Chaplin embarked on *A Woman of Paris* in late 1922 at Chaplin Studios in Los Angeles. The resulting film would prove a virtual anomaly within his legendary career: of the movies Chaplin directed, it was the only straight drama and one of only two, alongside *A Countess from Hong Kong* (1967), in which he did not star.

A Woman of Paris was also Chaplin’s first production for United Artists, the distribution company he had founded in 1919 with actors Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks and filmmaker D. W. Griffith. The four partners hoped to use UA to operate independently of Hollywood’s major studios, and in this sense, *Paris* would serve as a statement of intent from Chaplin: not only would he make pictures at his own deliberate pace and in his own exacting way, but their content wouldn’t be beholden to public demand for further Little Tramp adventures. The film’s narrative derived from the infamous love life of Peggy Hopkins Joyce, a former Ziegfeld Follies dancer and aspiring actor whom Chaplin had courted in the summer of 1922. A Virginia native, Joyce had become notorious for her myriad dalliances with wealthy men, including several marriages to millionaires. (In 1953, Joyce would wed for the sixth and final time.) Chaplin based the central love triangle and tragic climax of *Paris* on a particularly fraught

experience for Joyce, who has been called the “quintessential gold digger.” Earlier in 1922, Joyce had an affair with Chilean diplomat—and married man—Guillermo “William” Errázuriz. He then shot himself in Joyce’s Paris hotel room; according to Joyce, Errázuriz committed suicide when she turned down his marriage proposal.

But much of Chaplin’s own experiences also found representation in *Paris*. For the role of Marie St. Clair, the film’s Joyce-like protagonist, Chaplin cast Edna Purviance, who had costarred in almost all of his previous films. Chaplin had discovered Purviance while shooting *A Night Out* in the San Francisco area in 1915, and the two entered into a relationship that lasted until 1917. By that time, Purviance had fallen in love with actor Thomas Meighan, but in 1918 she was nonetheless stunned to learn via newspaper that Chaplin had married sixteen-year-old Mildred Harris. In *Paris*, St. Clair finds out that beau Pierre Revel (Adolphe Menjou) has become engaged to another woman when her friends happen upon the marriage announcement in the paper. Revel, then, is Chaplin’s partial self-portrait: the rich playboy stands for Chaplin the debonair man-about-town, Chaplin the womanizer, Chaplin the self-obsessed egoist. A more positive side of Chaplin is represented by Jean Millet (Carl Miller), an impoverished, sensitive artist who loses Marie in the film’s prologue but later tries to win her back from Revel when the onetime lovers accidentally reconnect in the City of Light.

Such a tale may seem relatively tame in 2023, but a century ago, these narrative elements would have been considered potentially explosive. At that time, the movie industry was starting to face public and governmental scrutiny for its allegedly scandalous output as well as for the real-life immoral and criminal behavior of several high-profile actors. Although official regulation of film content wouldn’t begin until 1930, the ascendance of the upright



CAST

Marie St. Clair Edna Purviance
Pierre Revel Adolphe Menjou
Jean Millet Carl Miller
Marie’s stepfather Clarence Geldert
Jean’s mother Lydia Knott
Jean’s father Charles K. French
Fifi Betty Morrissey
Paulette Malvina Polo

CREDITS

Written, produced, and
directed by Charles Chaplin
Cinematography Roland Totheroh, Jack Wilson
Music by Timothy Brock, Charles Chaplin
(1977 version)
Editors Monta Bell, Charles Chaplin
Art director Arthur Stibolt
Assistant director A. Edward Sutherland

William H. Hays as president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America in 1922 signaled a new, repressive age of cinematic expression. Since *Paris* revolved around a woman “living in sin,” and wondering whether to keep seeing a man who would soon be married, Chaplin set the film in France so that his characters’ actions could be blamed on the loose ethics of a foreign land. This clever ruse wasn’t enough to placate some, however: Pennsylvania granted *Paris* clearance for exhibition only after Chaplin reedited it according to the demands of the state censorship board, while the city of Worcester, Massachusetts, banned the film outright.

What may have most enraged censors and other guardians of decency was Chaplin’s determination to depict the film’s love triangle as realistically as possible. This approach makes the tone of *Paris* less moralizing and far more humanist, with Chaplin rendering complex, fallible characters with whom the average viewer could sympathize. In order to instill *Paris* with such rich naturalism, Chaplin coached his actors to perform with exceeding nuance and subtlety. No one took to Chaplin’s direction more than Menjou, who had broad supporting roles in prominent films like *The Sheik* (1921) and *The Eternal Flame* (1922). As Lynn points out, in *Paris* Menjou reinvented himself with “psychologically suggestive acting that catapulted him to stardom.” In his 1948 autobiography *It Took Nine Tailors*, Menjou effusively praises Chaplin for encouraging him to plumb new psychic depths. “Not until we started shooting,” wrote the actor, “did I begin to realize that we were making a novel and exciting picture. It was Chaplin’s genius that transformed the very ordinary story. Aside from his own great talent as an actor, he had the ability to inspire other actors to perform their best. Within a few days, I realized that I was going to learn more about acting from Chaplin than I had ever learned from any director.”

But it was Purviance whom Chaplin most wished to showcase in *Paris*, which was meant to demonstrate her dramatic chops and that she could succeed in roles other than Chaplin’s dependable comic foils. Yet while Purviance performed excellently as St. Clair, American moviegoers weren’t willing to accept a Chaplin picture with neither comedy nor Chaplin. The director made sure to let

the public know in advance what it was in for by distributing flyers outside theaters that alerted prospective moviegoers to *Paris*’s dramatic, Tramp-less content; he even chose to open the film with a title card explaining the same. This strategy all but scared away any box-office numbers the film might have garnered on the strength of Chaplin’s celebrity and ensured it a short original theatrical run, which began in the United States in October 1923. Even after its international release in 1924, the film failed to recoup its production costs and thus proved Chaplin’s first major financial failure. The goal of launching Purviance from Tramp supporting player to top-tier actor never materialized—Purviance starred in just two more films after *Paris* before effectively retiring from the screen in 1927.

But like many an artistic gem that goes largely unappreciated in its own time, *Paris* impressed the “discriminating audiences,” as Chaplin put it, who took a chance on the film. In the January 1924 issue of *Photoplay*, Pickford named *Paris* one of her all-time favorite titles, noting that it “allows us to think for ourselves and does not constantly underestimate our intelligence. It is a gripping human story throughout, and the director allows the situations to play themselves. The actors simply react the emotions of the audience.” When Michael Powell saw *Paris* upon its original release, he was inspired to quit his job and seek work in the movie industry. In 1980, the legendary English filmmaker would tell *Sight and Sound* of his revelatory encounter: “I reckoned that if . . . film was capable of this sort of subtlety, it was the medium for me.” Chaplin himself was proud of what he had accomplished. In his 1964 autobiography, he insisted on the film’s pathbreaking creative legacy: “It was the first of the silent pictures to articulate irony and psychology.” Such aggrandizement can be forgiven in a genius who understandably hoped the public would take a second look at one of his lesser-known efforts. The picture clearly held a special place in his heart. In 1976, just a year before his death, Chaplin reedited *Paris* for rerelease, removing nearly three minutes across the film; around that time, he also worked with Timothy Brock to replace the music that Louis F. Gottschalk and Fritz Stahlberg had composed for the original cut. The new soundtrack was the final creative act that Chaplin completed in his iconic life.

CHARLES CHAPLIN BIOGRAPHY

Put simply, Charles Spencer Chaplin is a towering figure of cinema, his iconic Little Tramp character virtually synonymous with the magic of the medium itself. Born in London on April 16, 1889, Chaplin was the son of Hannah Hill and Charles Chaplin Sr., both music-hall entertainers. The couple separated around two years later, forcing Hannah to parent Charles Jr. and his older half-brother, Sydney, on her own.

Chaplin’s early years were Dickensian, punctuated by stints at workhouses and schools for the poor as his mother descended into mental illness and his father succumbed to alcoholism. Amid these rough circumstances, Chaplin first appeared onstage at the age of five but didn’t take up performing in earnest until four years later, when he started clog dancing as part of the



Eight Lancashire Lads. By thirteen, he had dropped out of school and was working minor jobs while pursuing a full-time career as an actor. At fourteen, Chaplin earned his first theatrical role and soon played Billy the page boy in a touring production of *Sherlock Holmes*. Positive notices secured him the same role in the play's London production, which would run for more than two years.

Between 1906 and 1912, Chaplin toured with Sydney, also an actor, and found work in comedy, burlesque, and a brief solo act. Sydney encouraged Fred Karno, the leader of a comedy troupe, to also take on his younger brother, who ascended to increasingly more prominent roles over the course of three years. As a rising star, Chaplin joined Karno's touring North American vaudeville group, which also featured Stan Laurel. In 1913, Chaplin once again performed across the United States and there signed with the New York Motion Picture Company, which sent the actor to its Keystone Studios branch in Los Angeles. The first short to star Chaplin, a one-reeler entitled *Making a Living*, was released in February 1914. In *Kid Auto Races at Venice* (also 1914), Chaplin debuted his Little Tramp persona, a cane-twirling hobo sporting oversize pants, a too-tight coat, and a toothbrush mustache.

Starting with *Caught in the Rain* in May 1914, Chaplin began directing most of his own films. When, at the end of the year, Keystone refused to meet Chaplin's demand for a raise, the actor-director signed with the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company. There, Chaplin began to master the art of filmmaking, molding the Tramp into a more sympathetic "lovable loser" and crafting each movie with increasing deliberation. It was also during this time that Chaplin rounded up a stock company of supporting players, including Edna Purviance, who would appear in almost three dozen of his productions and who entered into a romantic relationship with the star that lasted until 1917.

In the mid-1910s, Chaplin became not just a household name but a veritable international hero as well as cinema's first megastar. Now able to command one of the highest salaries worldwide, he left Essanay for the Mutual Film Corporation in 1916. As both actor and director, Chaplin delivered to Mutual some of his finest work (including 1917's *The Immigrant*) while devoting ever more planning and energy to each project. Still, Chaplin sought greater creative control and production quality than Mutual could provide, and so, in 1917, he moved on to work for First National Exhibitors' Circuit, which gave him enough money—one million dollars—to build his own studio.

In 1919, Chaplin formed United Artists with actors Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks and filmmaker D. W. Griffith. An independent distribution company, UA allowed Chaplin to eventually finance and oversee his own productions. After fulfilling his contract with First National (for which he made his feature debut, 1921's *The Kid*), Chaplin directed *A Woman of Paris* (1923), his first straight drama and the first film of his in which he did not appear (aside from

CHARLES CHAPLIN FILMOGRAPHY

- 1914 *Making a Living* (short; as actor only)
Kid Auto Races at Venice (short; as actor only)
Mabel's Strange Predicament (short; as actor only)
A Thief Catcher (short; as actor only)
Between Showers (short; as actor only)
A Film Johnnie (short; as actor only)
Tango Tangles (short; as actor only)
His Favorite Pastime (short; as actor only)
Cruel, Cruel Love (short; as actor only)
The Star Boarder (short; as actor only)
Mabel at the Wheel (short; as actor only)
Twenty Minutes of Love (short; codirected with Joseph Madderly)
Caught in a Cabaret (short; as actor only)
Caught in the Rain (short)
A Busy Day (short)
The Fatal Mallet (short; as actor only)
Her Friend the Bandit (short)
The Knockout (short; as actor only)
Mabel's Busy Day (short; as actor only)
Mabel's Married Life (short)
Laughing Gas (short)
The Property Man (short)
The Face on the Barroom Floor (short)
Recreation (short)
The Masquerader (short)
His New Profession (short)
The Rounders (short)
The New Janitor (short)
Those Love Pangs (short)
Dough and Dynamite (short)
Gentlemen of Nerve (short)
His Musical Career (short)
His Trysting Place (short)
Getting Acquainted (short)



a brief cameo). Slapstick comedy and the Tramp returned in *The Gold Rush* (1925), one of the silent era's highest-grossing films. *The Circus* followed in 1928; *City Lights*, one of Chaplin's greatest achievements, then debuted in 1931. By this time, synchronized sound had revolutionized the film industry, but aside from adding sound effects and brief vocal noises (as opposed to conventional dialogue) to his films, Chaplin held out for a considerable period against the production of talkies. Arriving on-screen almost a decade after the introduction of sound, *Modern Times* (1936) was Chaplin's final masterpiece in the near-silent format.

Chaplin used his enormous popularity and artistic freedom to confront the major issues of his day. In *Modern Times*, he satirized industrialization, and in *The Great Dictator* (1940) he lampooned fascism, anti-Semitism, and the megalomania of Adolf Hitler. The latter film, followed by the dark, murderous comedy *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), also initiated the most controversial period of Chaplin's career, when his tumultuous romantic life and leftist political leanings came under attack from the government and the press. While in London for the British premiere of the quasi-autobiographical elegy *Limelight* (1952), Chaplin learned that he had been denied reentry into the U.S. He wouldn't return until 1972, when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences presented him with an Honorary Award for his incalculable contributions to the medium.

Chaplin's final two films were *A King in New York* (1957) and *A Countess from Hong Kong* (1967). On December 25, 1977, he died in Corsier-sur-Vevey, Switzerland, where he had resided for twenty-four years. Filmmaker René Clair summarized the international appreciation for Chaplin: "He was a monument of the cinema, of all countries and all times . . . the most beautiful gift the cinema made to us."

EDNA PURVIANCE BIOGRAPHY

Olga Edna Purviance was born in Paradise Valley, Nevada, on October 21, 1895. In 1913, Edna left Nevada to join her sister and brother-in-law in San Francisco in order to attend business school.



In 1915, Purviance met Charles Chaplin when the famous actor-director was shooting *A Night Out*, his second film for the Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, in the Bay Area. A member of Chaplin's production team spotted Purviance in Tate's Café; Chaplin interviewed the young woman but hesitated to cast her in his latest comedy, fearing that her expression was too somber. Nonetheless, Chaplin placed her in *A Night Out*, and both she and the picture proved a success.

Purviance would go on to appear in more than thirty Chaplin films, including *The Kid* (1921), his first feature. Her career foundered after she starred in *A Woman of Paris* (1923), Chaplin's bold venture into straight drama and the last of her major collaborations with the cinematic master. Afterward, she garnered roles in only two more films, Josef von Sternberg's *A Woman of the Sea* (1926; unreleased and destroyed) and Henri Diamant-Berger's *Education of a Prince* (1927), before retiring from screen acting—with the exception of uncredited cameos in Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) and *Limelight* (1952). On January 13, 1958, Purviance died in Los Angeles.

	<i>His Prehistoric Past</i> (short)
	<i>Tillie's Punctured Romance</i> (short; as actor only)
1915	<i>His New Job</i> (short)
	<i>A Night Out</i> (short)
	<i>The Champion</i> (short)
	<i>In the Park</i> (short)
	<i>A Jitney Elopement</i> (short)
	<i>The Tramp</i> (short)
	<i>By the Sea</i> (short)
	<i>Work</i> (short)
	<i>A Woman</i> (short)
	<i>The Bank</i> (short)
	<i>Shanghaied</i> (short)
	<i>A Night in the Show</i> (short)
	<i>A Burlesque on Carmen</i> (short)
1916	<i>Police</i> (short)
	<i>The Floorwalker</i> (short)
	<i>The Fireman</i> (short)
	<i>The Vagabond</i> (short)
	<i>One A.M.</i> (short)
	<i>The Count</i> (short)
	<i>The Pawnshop</i> (short)
	<i>Behind the Screen</i> (short)
	<i>The Rink</i> (short)
1917	<i>Easy Street</i> (short)
	<i>The Cure</i> (short)
	<i>The Immigrant</i> (short)
	<i>The Adventurer</i> (short)
1918	<i>How to Make Movies</i> (short; unreleased in full until a 1982 reconstruction)
	<i>A Dog's Life</i> (short)
	<i>The Bond</i> (short)
	<i>Shoulder Arms</i> (short)
1919	<i>Sunnyside</i> (short)
	<i>A Day's Pleasure</i> (short)
1921	<i>The Kid</i>
	<i>The Idle Class</i> (short)
1922	<i>Pay Day</i> (short)
1923	<i>The Pilgrim</i> (short)
	<i>A Woman of Paris</i>
1925	<i>The Gold Rush</i>
1928	<i>The Circus</i>
1931	<i>City Lights</i>
1936	<i>Modern Times</i>
1940	<i>The Great Dictator</i>
1947	<i>Monsieur Verdoux</i>
1952	<i>Limelight</i>
1957	<i>A King in New York</i>
1967	<i>A Countess from Hong Kong</i>