

What Others Said About "The Gold Rush" (1925)

Neil Sinyard (*Silent Movies*, Brompton Books Corp., 1990)

" . . . one of the greatest and most popular Chaplin comedies."

"The film's themes of starvation and cannibalism, not to mention greed and madness, could hardly have been more savage and desperate, yet they seem to have inspired Chaplin to new heights of comic invention."

Maurice Bessy (*Charlie Chaplin*, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983)

"'The Gold Rush,' made in 1924-25, is Chaplin at the height of his powers; in it we experience that laughter mingled with tears that is the essence of his genius, all the pathos of the little fellow with the big heart, sublime in defeat. Genius like that is unanswerable. Supremely confident, it sweeps all before it."

Charlie Chaplin (*My Autobiography*, Simon and Schuster, 1964)

"In the creation of comedy, it is paradoxical that tragedy stimulates the spirit of ridicule, because ridicule, I suppose, is an attitude of defiance: we must laugh in the face of helplessness against the forces of nature - or go insane. I read a book about the Donner Party, who, on the way to California, missed the route and were snowbound in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Out of 160 pioneers, only 18 survived, most of them dying of hunger and cold. Some resorted to cannibalism, eating their dead, others roasted their moccasins to relieve their hunger. Out of this harrowing tragedy, I conceived one of our funniest scenes. In dire hunger, I boil my shoe and eat it . . ."

David Robinson (*Hollywood in the Twenties*, A.S. Barnes & Company, 1968)

"'The Gold Rush' is an elaborate episodic comedy which derives its peculiar strength from the underlying blackness of the situation. Behind the gags and laughter, the theme is the privation and the jealous greed of the nineteenth-century gold prospectors. . . Practically the whole repertory of gags in this film have become legendary; it is one of those rare pictures whose lore has been passed down from generation to generation."

Edward Wagenknecht (*Stars of the Silents*, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1987)

"There has never, I think, been any serious question that it is one of his finest achievements, though photographically, it is less rewarding to watch than some of the others, as the predominance of snowscapes becomes monotonous. Personally, too, I find Chaplin's introduction as a 'lone prospector' teetering on the edge of a precipice, with a bear coming out of a cave behind him and then lumbering off unseen into another, infelicitous and glaringly movie-like in the bad sense, especially coming after it does after the stark reality of the great opening shots. . . At the beginning, however, the note of reality, daringly but triumphantly blended with the best Chaplin high jinks, is soon regained in the cabin of the killer Wolf Larsen . . ."

Roger Manvell (*Chaplin*, Little, Brown and Company, 1974)

"Charlie gave one of his very finest dramatic performances in this film, which many still consider to be his best. . . Although the film is laced throughout with a wonderful sense of humor, one is left with the overall feeling that it is a sad, not humorous, film with a somewhat contrived happy ending. It is as if Charlie could not bear to leave 'The Gold Rush' without relieving its melancholy. . . But, if this film can be accepted as a fable, and not as a story which (for all its moments of seeming realism) should conform to actuality, the happy end can be seen more as a comment than a contrivance - human beings can achieve happiness if they set out to do so. . . 'The Gold Rush' could be called at once Charlie's saddest and most humorous film, and this is probably the reason why he feels it to be his best, or at least the film for which he prefers to be 'remembered.'"

Lewis Jacobs (*The Rise of the American Film*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939)

"The story was also an autobiographical picture of Chaplin himself. It showed that wealth is illusion; that the happy moments of life are those of anticipation. (Extremely wealthy now, was Chaplin giving us an insight into his own feelings?) At the moment of striking it rich, the little prospector finds himself suddenly and completely alone. (Was there some resemblance here to Chaplin's own life?) When the prospector thinks the most beautiful girl in the world is beckoning to him, his face lights up with ecstasy, and when he realizes that she is summoning someone else,

another illusion is shattered. . . The cabin teetering on the edge of the abyss was another incomparable moment of satirical fantasy springing from deep experience of the real world."

Robert F. Moss (*Charlie Chaplin*, Pyramid Publications, 1975)

"As always in Chaplin's work, most of the humor is generated by the Tramp's struggle against adversity, which often takes amusing forms, and his imaginative strategies for overcoming it. Here the scope of his conflict, usually limited to society, is widened to include nature. . . 'The Gold Rush' is probably Chaplin's most successful union of comedy and sadness."

John Grierson ("The Product of Hollywood" *Motion Picture News*, Vol. 34, No. 19, November 6, 1926)

"Here is Chaplin with his "Gold Rush," a step ahead of the old Chaplin. The picture has moments of weakness and a bad ending, and it is not without stray elements of slapstick, but Chaplin's pyrotechnics on the borderline between tragedy and comedy are profounder than before."

Uno Asplund (*Chaplin's Films*, A.S. Barnes and Company, 1971)

"In it we find everything that is best in Chaplin's repertoire: his pantomime, his biting satire, the human drama, the tenderness. The film is a cavalcade of mankind's hopes and disappointments, a documentary of his deprivations. Goodness symbolised by Charlie, triumphs in the end. And all the while the sentimental elements are interrupted by logically introduced farce."

Richard Koszarski (*An Evening's Entertainment - The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*, University of California Press, 1990)

"'The Gold Rush' was revered for its humanity, for its studied mixture of pathos, drama and slapstick, and for its very existence as the latest example of Chaplin's art. . . Chaplin's films remain as imaginative and affecting as always, but the passage of years since their creation has allowed their flaws to show through, as well. The crudities of Chaplin's technical methods were simply not an issue in 1925. His cutting, his camera placement, even his scenic design, seem to later audiences a crude holdover from a simpler age of cinema . . . The cardboard sets of 'The Gold Rush' offer very little help to the star and director of this picture, who seems to care not a whit for the actual ambiance of the Far North and, in the old music-hall tradition, is satisfied to throw up a flat."

Joe Franklin (*Classics of the Silent Screen*, The Citadel Press, 1959)

"'The Gold Rush,' at any rate, despite some admittedly slow sequences, some inexcusably cheap sets (the more obvious since they are supposed to represent the 'great outdoors'), and a tendency to too much repetition in gags, is quite wonderful entertainment. Some of the episodes rank among the best that Chaplin has ever created, most notably, of course, the famous 'Dance of the Rolls' sequence."

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