

Delprov ELF 2002-04-06

The Off-screen Chaplin

From a review of Joyce Milton's biography Tramp

In inventing himself on screen, Charlie Chaplin had an unlimited imagination. Off screen, according to Joyce Milton's unsentimental appraisal, he was less resourceful and certainly less amusing. *Tramp* is particularly tough in presenting new details on Chaplin's naive and inconsistent political views, and it also covers a depressing list of his personal betrayals of employees, old friends, collaborators and former wives and lovers. But Ms. Milton's book is nonjudgmental, and she clearly makes an effort to be fair.

Chaplin is no stranger as a subject for biography; there have been many books about him over the years. He wrote his own version of events in *My Autobiography*, where he described a Dickensian childhood, glossed over some of the more controversial events and omitted many of his best friends. This caused his lifelong partner Mary Pickford to comment, "He's still a son of a bitch."

Ms. Milton makes a significant contribution of her own, because she has taken Chaplin's political life as her primary focus. Most people who know anything about that life know that Chaplin left the United States. Some say it was because he was a Communist; others believe it was because he was "immoral". Although each charge has some basis in reality, neither is a fact. Ms. Milton examines both, commenting occasionally on the sheer naiveté of Chaplin's speaking publicly on subjects he knew little about.

Ms. Milton's intention, of course, is not to make a fool out of Chaplin. Although she does not write in detail about all his films, she has clearly seen and appreciated them and brings a sense of context to them. She understands Chaplin as a man who wanted to "make his kind of movies according to his own schedule," and she understands the changes in the Hollywood film-making process in the late 1920's and early 30's

and how they affected his goal. Her main intention, however, has been to document facts that have previously been neglected.

Chaplin's flirtations with Communism are traced from his enthusiasm in the 1920's to his disaffection by the end of the decade and back to a new enthusiasm as he began to believe that it was "the only true anti-Nazi force in Europe, and the only hope of defeating Hitler." A reason for his early attraction to Communists is that he saw them as representatives of the oppressed classes, with whom he identified.

Chaplin's political inconsistency is illustrated by his support of Upton Sinclair, a 1934 candidate for Governor of California who wanted to impose a 50 percent state income tax on the wealthy. Chaplin, not only wealthy but reputed to be stingy, never paid a dollar in taxes throughout his life if he could avoid it. The irony of his leftist sympathies is completed by Ms. Milton's picture of his final years, lived out in an 18-room mansion on 37 prime acres in Switzerland, with two full-time nannies and an American tax problem.

In the end, one has a description of a petty individual who could not let go of minor feuds and who was so driven by a deep inner anger that he started lawsuits against dear friends. For such a man, provocative political speeches became an emotional outlet, and in self-defense he cried: "I'm an artist! I have never been interested in politics." He may not have been interested, but he was involved, and *Tramp* adds that piece to the puzzle of Charles Chaplin—who died at the age of 88, one year after knighthood had been bestowed on him for the most significant part of his life: his talent for making hilarious films.

*Jeanine Basinger, The New York Times Book Review,
July 28, 1996*

1 How is Ms. Milton's biography characterised in the first paragraph?

- A It gives an unfavourable picture of Chaplin as an actor
- B It is not objective enough to be really good
- C Though critical, it tries to do justice to Chaplin
- D It is clearly written with the intention of harming Chaplin

2 What is the reason for Mary Pickford's critical opinion of Chaplin?

- A His lack of honesty and loyalty
- B His miserable English childhood
- C His unfair attacks on her
- D His exploitation of Dickens

3 Why does the reviewer say that Ms. Milton "makes a significant contribution" to our knowledge of Chaplin?

- A She is the first to describe his achievement
- B She presents information that other biographers have disregarded
- C She gives convincing proof of his Communist sympathies
- D She is the first to point out the defects in his character

4 What are we told about Chaplin's political ideas?

- A Even as a boy he was a convinced leftist
- B He discovered the danger of Nazism earlier than others
- C He tried to conceal his real position
- D His views fluctuated in the course of time

5 What is meant by Chaplin's "inconsistency"?

- A He failed to live up to his political ideals
- B He often got into conflicts with others
- C He stuck to a policy of economic equality
- D He considered money more important than art

Please turn over

To Err is Human

From a review of a book by Robert Youngson on scientific blunders

The former British Astronomer Royal Richard Woolley assured us “All this talk of space travel is utter bilge”, five years before Yuri Gagarin first orbited the Earth. Blunders like this are made often enough in science and great fun is to be had laughing at them with the confidence that comes with hindsight.

In *Scientific Blunders*, Robert Youngson makes hay of scientific howlers in this impressively wide-ranging collection of some of the most egregious errors that scientists, technologists and even philosophers have made over the past 2500 years. So that we thoroughly understand each story, he throws in quite a bit of history.

The lessons of the past teach us that, in their search for truth, scientists have made a virtue of error. Whenever they publish what they claim is an important new idea or experimental result, they know their colleagues will take it to pieces looking for logical or experimental errors. This ruthlessness towards mistakes has been one of the engines of scientific enterprise.

Not that the engine always runs smoothly. Far from it. There is often plenty of room for disagreement over what is a scientific fact. And there are ample opportunities for bullies and ignoramuses to win arguments through rhetoric rather than reason. The entire history of science is full of tales of rows, wild-goose chases and ill-fated predictions by people who can't conceive of knowledge beyond what they already know.

From the book's title, Youngson appears—wisely—to have narrowed down his subject from the vast area of common-or-garden scientific error to the comparatively small domain of blunders, that is, stupid or careless mistakes. But it turns out that he inter-

prets “blunder” so broadly that it includes now-defunct theories.

Aristotle, arguably the first scientist, is one of the most eminent victims of this condescension. Youngson implicitly invites us to scoff at his naiveté for suggesting, for example, that the human embryo arises only from sperm, and that fossils are failed attempts at spontaneous generation from mud. I'd class these as the misconceptions of a pioneering genius, not as blunders.

Nor is George Bernard Shaw shown any mercy. The great Irish wag used his jesting to tease and annoy just about everyone, including scientists and especially medical doctors. So when Shaw says that he mistrusts results scientists get in laboratories because, if it is unexpected or unaccountable, it is liable to be “re-manufactured until it proves what the laboratory controller wants it to prove”, does he not have a point?

Youngson has done a good job of collecting tales of error and misjudgment, but he has lost sight of his purpose by serving them with too much pop history. It is a pity, too, that he doesn't give proper references for some of his most telling quotations, making them unusable as references and, in some cases, undermining our confidence in their veracity.

The concept of the scientific blunder is a great theme for a popular book. Youngson has responded with some splendid howlers. But by failing to illuminate how scientists continually exploit their errors in their quest for truth, he has squandered his original idea. Bit of a blunder, really.

Graham Farmelo, New Scientist, November 1998

- 6 What is the main purpose of the quotation in the first paragraph?**
- A To suggest how far scientific research has advanced in recent years
 - B To demonstrate the difficulty of making predictions in astronomy
 - C To indicate how easy it is to be wrong in scientific matters
 - D To show that researchers' claims should never be trusted
- 7 What are we told about scientists' general views on mistakes in research?**
- A They tend to be too intolerant of them in fellow researchers' work
 - B They are likely to overemphasize their scientific relevance
 - C They sometimes underestimate the problem of providing solid proof
 - D They usually do their utmost to detect them in other scientists' research
- 8 What general criticism of Youngson's book is expressed by the reviewer?**
- A The book's title does not correspond to the field actually covered
 - B Youngson has defined the aims of his study too restrictively
 - C Youngson has partly misunderstood Aristotle's ideas
 - D The book pays too little attention to the failure of earlier explanations
- 9 What is said about George Bernard Shaw?**
- A His views on scientific matters cannot be taken seriously
 - B He is criticized by Youngson for his views on scientific progress
 - C His attitude towards laboratory research may be partly justified
 - D He was always prepared to see both sides of a scientific argument
- 10 What does the reviewer say about Youngson's book in his closing remarks?**
- A Despite a promising subject it is something of a lost opportunity
 - B It should have been more clearly aimed at the scientific community
 - C More should have been said about the unethical side of much research
 - D It is too much focused on the researchers' own insider perspective

Please turn over

And here are some shorter texts

Hotels in Business

One of the burning issues facing hotel managers is whether business travelers want only a direct phone line or whether they sleep better surrounded by enough office equipment to launch a small business. Marriott has dropped its slogan, “The room that works,” indicating disenchantment with the bunker approach, but like other hotels it promises to drum up a fax machine if requested in advance. Some hotels will even provide a security blanket in the form of a PC and Microsoft Windows.

11 What is the main point of the text?

- A Most business travelers prefer hotel rooms that can also be used as an office
- B Hotel managers tend to disregard business people’s requests for professional equipment
- C Hotel people are wondering how rooms for business travelers should best be outfitted
- D Business people appreciate being able to receive professional phone calls and fax messages

Of Mice and Drugs

American scientists have found that defects in a brain protein that appears to dampen the exhilarating sensations caused by cocaine could make people more susceptible to drug addiction. Experiments with mutant mice lacking a protein called fosB show that they become unusually hyperactive on cocaine and excited when they are in places associated with the drug.

12 What is the main point of the text?

- A Recent experiments will lead to new treatments for addiction
- B Too little fosB may cause cocaine dependence
- C Mice and humans react differently to cocaine
- D fosB may increase the effects of cocaine

Verbosity

David Black has a novel approach to interviews. He seems to think that if he talks fast enough, he can get away without the *inter* bit and give us just a *view*. So if at first he comes across as verbose, it is because he is almost painfully reticent about anything that concerns him personally.

13 What is said about David Black?

- A He is talkative and open-hearted
- B Interviews tend to make him nervous
- C He has an unusual speech defect
- D At heart, he is rather reserved

Pompeii

In the mid-1980's, volcanologist Haraldur Sigurdsson of the University of Rhode Island in the US concluded that the area around Vesuvius had been troubled by intermittent earthquakes for 17 years before the fatal eruption in AD 79. Recent archaeological research confirms that the city had experienced ongoing deterioration in the years that preceded the disaster. From an analysis of the contents of houses in Pompeii, there is evidence that the villas had been taken over by squatters. Agricultural implements were hung over fabulous frescoes and statue bases from public monuments had been dragged into villas and overturned for tables.

14 What is suggested about Pompeii?

- A The victims had struggled desperately to stay in the city
- B The final eruption had caused much less damage than is generally believed
- C The original owners had abandoned their villas long before the disaster
- D The house owners had not understood that the eruptions could cause a catastrophe

Nature and Nurture

Perhaps the 20th century's most profound shift in thought has been a reassessment of the roles of nature and nurture. In the first half of the century the human brain was seen as a tabula rasa on which culture could print whatever instructions it chose. But in the second half, nature—the genetic heritage of both species and individuals—began to be perceived as a guiding if not controlling force, first in animal behavior and then increasingly in different kinds of human conduct.

15 What is the main idea of the text?

- A The brain is supposed to govern all aspects of human behavior
- B Cultural factors are now seen as largely irrelevant to human behavior
- C Human behavior and animal behavior seem to be strikingly similar
- D The role of genes in human behavior is now very much in focus

Travel Writers

Fiction writers accept the notion that they follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. For travel writers, however, the metaphor suggests a serious problem. The whole point of travel writing is—or was—to describe unworked mines whose fat, tempting seams promised treasures to any brave soul with a strong back and a pick. Until quite recently, the earth offered many such places, but airplane travel and the cheap package tour put an end to all that. Now Tashkent, Nairobi and Kuala Lumpur all lie within a day's reach of New York.

16 What problem is mentioned in connection with today's travel writers?

- A They try to imitate fiction writers
- B They write travel books which encourage mass tourism
- C They have few unexplored places to write about
- D They write books which resemble those of their predecessors

Please turn over

In the following text there are gaps which indicate that something has been left out. Study the four alternatives that correspond to each gap and decide which one best fits the gap. Then mark your choice on your answer sheet.

Making Rice Disease-resistant

Rice is arguably the world's most important food. Almost two billion people depend primarily on rice for basic nourishment. Rice fields cover more than 360 million acres of land around the globe and yield 560 million tons of grain every year. But farmers 17 much more rice than they harvest, because insects, bacteria, viruses and fungi often claim a substantial portion of each crop. One of the most devastating of these pestilences is blight, caused by bacteria common through Asia and Africa.

These bacteria, known as *Xoo*, spread rapidly from rice plant to rice plant and from field to field in water droplets. Infected 18 develop lesions, yellow and wilt in a matter of days. In severely infected fields, bacterial blight can wipe out half of a farmer's rice crop.

And yet rice plants possess an amazing assortment of genes that offer protection from a host of diseases, including bacterial blight. The farmers' problem is that no single variety has every gene and that all plants are vulnerable to some diseases more than to others. Breeders have exploited disease-resistance genes in rice for nearly a century, redistributing its genetic 19 from hardy species to agriculturally useful varieties. But conventional breeding is painstaking and time-consuming; often a decade or more is needed to produce desired traits.

With the advent of genetic engineering, we are now able to introduce isolated disease-resistance genes directly into rice plants, trimming years from the time required to develop a useful variety. My colleagues and I recently cloned the first such disease-resistance gene from rice—a gene that protects against common forms of bacterial blight. We have used this gene to generate the world's first transgenic disease-resistant rice plants. These new varieties of rice have tremendous potential to aid 20 around the world.

- 17 A produce
B sell
C plant
D receive

- 18 A genes
B leaves
C insects
D liquids

- 19 A wealth
B shortage
C complication
D flow

- 20 A consumers
B geneticists
C botanists
D farmers

Pamela C. Ronald, Scientific American, November 1997

That is the end of the English test. If you have time left, go back and check your answers.