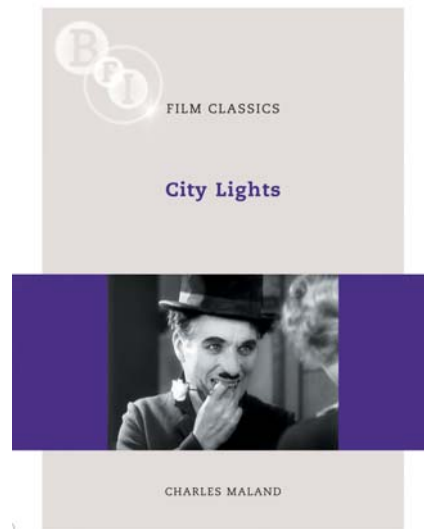


## Books press release

### BFI FILM CLASSICS



## City Lights

### Charles Maland

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This July the BFI launches the redesign of its popular and acclaimed Film Classics series with three titles – *City Lights*, *The Big Lebowski* and *Lawrence of Arabia*.

In 1967 Charlie Chaplin told an interviewer, 'I think I like *City Lights* the best of all my films'.

Speaking of the film's famous ending, James Agee wrote that 'it is enough to shrivel the heart to see'. Although *City Lights* had a long and extremely difficult production history, the final film, in Alistair Cooke's apt words, flows 'like water over pebbles, smooth and simple for all to see with no hint of the groaning pressure that had gone into it'.

It could easily have been otherwise. Chaplin began the film in 1927, even before the release of *The Circus*, just months after a highly publicised divorce from his second wife and in the midst of a tax dispute with the US government, both of which cost him dearly. In addition, Chaplin's mother, with whom he had a close and complex relationship, died in August 1928. Besides the burden of these financial and emotional strains, Chaplin also had to contend with the transition of the American film industry to the talkies and the downward spiral of the depression following the Stock Market Crash in October 1929.

He chose a novice actress, Virginia Cherrill, as the female lead for the film, and during production he fired the man originally cast as the millionaire and fired, then re-hired, Cherrill. Yet he pressed forward, releasing the film to much acclaim and box-office success in the first two months of 1931.

Aesthetically, technologically, and culturally, *City Lights* is a key transitional film in Chaplin's body of work, as the director/writer/actor responded for the first time to sound films and stepped in the direction of the social commentary that would become more overt in *Modern Times* (1936) and *The Great Dictator* (1940). Based on extensive archival research of Chaplin's production records, Charles Maland's *City Lights* offers a careful history of the film's production and reception, as well as a close examination of the film itself, with special attention to the sources of the final scene's emotional power.

#### About the author

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**About BFI FILM CLASSICS**

The BFI Film Classics is a series of books that introduces, interprets and celebrates landmarks of world cinema. Each volume offers an argument for the film's 'classic' status, together with discussion of its production and reception history, its place within a genre or national cinema, an account of its technical and aesthetic importance, and in many cases, the author's personal response to the film.