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I DOUBT THAT the international audience will be able to respond to *The Music Room* as readily as it did to the famous *Apu* trilogy by the same director, Satyajit Ray. As against the poor Bengali family and the conflict between fatalism and modern progress, we have here an impoverished aristocrat who has used up the family wealth on grand musical evenings in his ancestral mansion. After personal tragedy has made a recluse of him, the news that a money-lender's son in the village is planning a night of music, as lavish as his own used to be, comes as a challenge to his pride. The bats must be chased from the music room, the last of the money must be spent, to outdo the challenger and maintain the old tradition.

The study of aristocracy in pathetic decline is interesting in itself, and Chhabi Biswas identifies most ably with the character he plays, but for anyone who found, as I did, that the *Apu* films needed to be met half-way, this one will have to be met at least three-quarters of the way. Of course, it is right for a film to preserve the indigenous quality of its country of origin,

but Ray is unique among Indian film-makers in that he has combined this with a cinematic idiom that is acceptable outside India. His films are very slow, but the influence of neo-realism and a flair for poetic imagery has brought them nearer to us than other Indian films have ever been. Even so, the slowness of Ray is less consistently cinematic\* than the slowness of, say, Antonioni. At times he is content to let the subject matter too much alone, and observe his characters, or in this case his almost solitary central character, in pictures that are often pretty dull.

Yet, at other times, there are indications of his ability to present evocative images. There are potent impressions of the desolate house, the aristocrat alone in its darkened rooms, the chandelier resplendent with lights for the festivities or glinting in the gloom of empty years, the spider creeping over the noble portrait. But there is never enough of this to outweigh the rest, the plodding part, the part that might mean much more to an Indian audience, perhaps, than it does to me.

GORDON GOW