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PERHAPS the best comment on Satyajit Ray's rich and extraordinary Bengali trilogy (*Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito* and this concluding part) was a conversation overheard at the Academy: "Did you enjoy it?" "No, my heart broke so many times. . . ."

Here, Apu, having left university, exists in the Calcutta slums, struggling to write. Innumerable themes criss-cross—industrialization, class-relationships, the contrast between rigid old traditions and the new humanist sensitivity for feelings—but are always broken down into the simplest terms so that intellectualization never shows through the drama. Apu applies for a job in a Calcutta factory: after one glance at the "labelling room," a dark hole where bottles clink like chains, and an old workman turning on him a stare full of dreadful resignation, he flees in horror. A friend's wealthy, old-fashioned family have arranged a wedding for their daughter without even seeing the groom; at the last moment they discover he is insane. Superstition demands that the daughter be married within the hour; her mother, who liked the look of Apu, asks him to be the groom. Obscure feelings impel him, almost involuntarily, to agree. The marriage is a perfect one: Ray, savagely criticizing the impersonality of the arranged match, evades the wilful individualism implicit in over-personalized Western ideologies.

After his wife's death in childbirth Apu, unshaven, distraught, wanders through a forest. A ray of sunlight strikes his brow. He stoops, peers at a fern deep in shadow. We think: is the healing power of nature bidding him return from his private pit of sorrow? He stands on a high hill and gazes at the sun setting beyond distant mountains. His dark, anguished countenance, and the magnificent sun, confront each other; it is his colloquy with God; and we cannot help expecting that, Joblike, he will be forced after all to worship, for all its injustice, the flaming axle of life and fate. But with a gesture of suicidal—yet magnificent—revolt he lets the leaves of his manuscript float out over the valley. . . .

After years of aimless wandering he returns to his son, who for want of parental affection has become a cold, little savage and rejects his father as brusquely as he kills birds. In despair Apu leaves. The boy follows him, a little dot on the horizon. Apu waits, then asks: "Would you like to come with me?" "Will you take me to my father?" Apu, almost in tears: "— Yes. . . ." "Who are you?" "— A friend!" The boy runs into his father's arms. And off they go.

There are many echoes from the earlier films: the theme of railways; and more irrational ones—as Apu's bride gazes in horror at the slum which is her new home, she hears a child happily gurgle as it plays with its mother in the sordid courtyard below. She peers down through the torn curtain; in close-up we see only her eye, in which a sombre contentment mitigates her shock; and we recall how in *Pather Panchali* Apu's elder sister Durga awoke him by pulling his eyelids apart to reveal his stupefied eyeball staring blankly out upon the world. And more hauntingly still we recall the shot where just after Durga's death, a blank circle of clear water on the scum-covered pool opens like her last scared gaze at the living. . . .

Ray's favourite films—Renoir's *The River* and di Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*—are clearly visible "in" this trilogy. But his elegiac calm, both austere and mellow, dispassionate and (in the best sense) sentimental, is a new creation out of them. Behind Ray's advocacy of change—and whoever rejects it rejects life—lies a tradition which unlike ours retains its awareness of life's cyclical sprawl (indeed a *bad* Indian film never crams into one year a story whose timespan could possibly be stretched to twenty!). Apu's final acceptance of fatherhood, and himself has dignity because the optimism it implies lies on the *other* side of tragedy, and is not facile. **RAYMOND DURGNAT**