
oversimplified, allowed a young reader to navigate language that might otherwise be daunting. *Classics Illustrated's* version of *Hamlet*, for example, includes the full text of important soliloquies in side panels, with difficult words glossed at the bottom of the page.

In the video age, Richardson argues, "all means are justified that make any remotely respectable texts appear exciting and accessible." The new *Classics Illustrated* have upgraded the art, employing Gahan Wilson, for example, to illustrate Edgar Allan Poe, but to make the comics truly irresistible, Richardson suggests, First Publishing should arrange to have them "condemned from the pulpit, or sold in back alleys."

The Two Worlds Of Satyajit Ray

"Satyajit Ray: The Plight of the Third-World Artist" by Chandak Sengoopta, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 1993), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

When filmmaker Satyajit Ray (1921–92) died last year, not long after being awarded a special Oscar, it was said that his films were more appreciated in the United States than in his native India. That is empty self-congratulation, says Sengoopta, a Calcutta psychiatrist and journalist studying at Johns Hopkins. Ray's limited appeal in the West dramatizes the plight of the Third World artist who wishes to celebrate and explore his own culture without being imprisoned by it.

During the late 1950s and '60s, thanks to the crusading efforts of American distributor Edward Harrison, Ray's *Apu* trilogy and later *Two Daughters* (1961) were seen by sophisticated American audiences. The trilogy—*Pather Panchali* (1955), *The Unvanquished* (1956), and *The World of Apu* (1959)—chronicled the daily lives of a middle-class Bengali family across three generations, and showed the interplay of tradition and modernity, of the village and the city. *Film Quarterly* called *The World of Apu* "probably the most important single film made since the introduction of sound."

After Harrison's death in 1967, however,

commercial distribution of Ray's films in the United States petered out. Only *Distant Thunder* (1973), set during the worst famine in recent Bengali history, and *The Home and the World* (1984), about an amoral nationalist agitator, were screened in this country. Most of Ray's American admirers have actually seen only a handful of his 40-odd films.

Almost all of his films were in Bengali and explored Bengali culture—and through it such grand themes as the conflicts between tradition and modernity, the nature of religious superstition, and the position of women. As Sengoopta notes, Ray believed "that a truthful portrait of any human group . . . would bear some meaning for all human beings, across national and cultural boundaries." Although it is a cherished notion in the West that Ray and others like him are rescued by Western patronage, "this kind of audience cannot, by itself, sustain a filmmaker economically," Sengoopta observes.

That the technique of Ray's films was Western did not change the fact that they were about Bengal. "All that such a film can hope for in the West (or in other parts of India) is critical appreciation and the support and interest of a small, somewhat elite audience," Sengoopta says.

"Even within India, a regional language film is, practically speaking, a foreign film in regions other than its own," he points out. India's 20 different major languages seldom share even the same alphabet. Films in Bengali, such as Ray's, "have only one big audience: the natives of West Bengal," a small section of the vast subcontinent. It was his Bengali audience that sustained Ray financially. "This audience grew with him and to this audience the annual Ray film became the cultural event of the year." Most of his films ran for months in Calcutta.

Ray looked to the West, however, for informed criticism, Sengoopta says. But while Western reviewers appreciated his technique and style, much of the content of his films was inaccessible to them. The synthesis of East and West that Ray attempted could be fully grasped, as he himself realized, "only by someone who has his feet in both cultures." Adds Sengoopta: "In a fragmented, provincial world, the price of psychological and cultural universality"—especially for the Third World artist—"is incomplete appreciation."