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The Treatment of Historical Element in *The Pianist* and *The Chess Players*

Muhammad Kamal Khan, Ph.D. Scholar (Newcastle, UK)



Courtesy: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The Pianist \(2002 film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pianist_(2002_film))

Abstract

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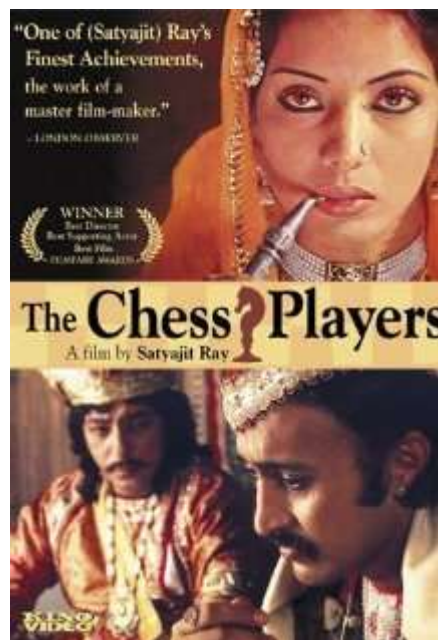
The Treatment of Historical Element in *The Pianist* and *The Chess Players*

The present article analyzes the treatment of historical element in two movies, **The Pianist** and **The Chess Players**. It looks at the various ways through which historical authenticity has been assigned to these films. The study evaluates these films as historical evidences, analyzing them with the help of setting, costumes, objects, the use of colors etc., and examining how these fictionalized historical films have the ideological function; and also checking how they seem to be serving up on the screen the respective national histories of the collective past. A subsequent discussion addresses the philosophical point of view regarding the depiction of history. Finally, it explores how such films appear to achieve authenticity, and what are the films' strengths and weaknesses as historical records.

Introduction

The objective of this article is to analyze the treatment of historical element in the movie The Pianist (hereafter Pianist) dir. Roman Polanski (France 2002) and The Chess Players (hereafter Chess) dir. Satyajit Ray (India 1977). The main focus of the study is on the Oscar-winning movie- Pianist while the second movie, Chess has been used for the comparison with the former. We shall be looking mainly at the following questions;

1. How these movies are made to carry authenticity regarding the historical events presented through them?
2. How fiction and history have been mixed up in order to represent the record of everyday life and great events side by side.



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Pianist and Chess both are strongly related to the histories of their respective regions and, therefore, both are of great importance. Pianist, apart from other awards and nominations, has won three Oscars¹ and is regarded among the best historical films of World War- II. Similarly Chess is also an award-winning movie² based on an important event from the Nineteenth century³ directed by a well known Indian film director Satyajit Ray. Moreover there is a sort of similarity regarding the treatment of historical element in both the movies, Pianist and Chess, as both deal with great events on the one hand and socio-cultural aspects of everyday life on the other. World War II is the great event which is represented in the Pianist the documentary, while the fall of Avadh, a state in Northern India, to East India Company is the center of interest in Chess.

The treatment of historical element in Pianist and Chess

There is a juxtaposition of documentary and fiction in both of the films. Pianist is dealing with World War II as the great event, which is an important historical event of the past. All the important events of World War II regarding the story of pianist Szpilman have been represented through it. Based on the autobiographical book by Wladyslaw Szpilman, Pianist tells the story of Szpilman's struggle to survive the Nazi occupation of Poland during World War II. Szpilman, a talented Jewish pianist and composer, witnessed first-hand horrors of the Warsaw Ghetto. The Nazis used this notorious, walled slum to imprison Polish Jews until their "resettlement" to concentration camps. While most of his Jewish relatives and friends perished in the holocaust, Szpilman managed to survive through sheer force of will and a number of lucky strokes. The film tells his heartbreaking survival story with unflinching honesty. The outbreak of the war, Great Britain's declaration of war on German-Nazi occupation of Poland, Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the holocaust, Russian attacks and the ultimate capture of German-controlled area and then the captivation of the German forces, every detail of history is represented through it. Pianist deals with the events of World War II as history on the one hand and with the story of Szpilman as fiction on the other. The historical part of Pianist is related to an image of the way daily life unfolded for the masses, how they were peacefully working at the time of the outbreak of the war, what they were doing for fun, how families fell apart, or the fabric of daily life was trampled upon. These social and cultural aspects of daily life have been shown through the story of Szpilman.

While comparing this treatment of history to the one in Chess, it is very obvious that the great event in it is the fall of Avadh to East India Company. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's indifferent ruling of Avadh, General Outram's visits, the march of British troops into Lucknow and the ultimate passing of Lucknow into the hands of the company are the events of history shown in it. This fall of Avadh is itself a great event for the people of

¹ The film won three Oscars; for Best Director, Best Actor and Best Adapted Screen Play (Cannes Film Festival: 2002).

² Best Feature Film in Hindi (New Delhi: 1977)and Best Color Photography (New Delhi: 1977).

³ The fall of Avadh to East India Company.

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India. This has been shown on the one hand as history, while the social cultural aspects are shown on the other as the part of story as fiction. For example, the preoccupation of Mir and Mirza with the game of chess, emotional feelings of Khursheed against the chess game of her husband, Nafisa's affair with her cousin, Mir and Mirza's escape from the fight with British forces all show the social and cultural history of the Nineteenth century India in the shape of this fictional story.

Documentary Style of Filming

To achieve a considerable amount of authenticity *Pianist* opens with a documentary style showing dates; and these dates are claimed to be accurate according to the history of World War II. It is shown in the very first scene on the screen “Warsaw 1939” and these beginning scenes of the film were shot in the style of a documentary at the old army barracks. Then as the story progresses, step by step dates are shown in the sequence before the scenes of historically important events, like the declaration of the orders of the Governor of Warsaw regarding the ban on the Jews living outside the Ghetto, having insignia of the star of David for identification for Jews on their shoulders and the limit of maximum amount of money for the Jews are shown with their corresponding dates. Similarly the dates of other important events like the outbreak of World War II, German invasion of Poland, Britain’s declaration of war on Germany, Warsaw Ghetto uprising etc., are shown in this manner at the start of the scenes of these events. Similarly these dates move in a sequence in the style of a documentary film and specifically important dates like Oct 31, 1940, March 15, 1942, August 16, 1942, April 19, 1943, May 16, 1943, and August 1, 1944 are shown one by one. Based on the autobiography of Wladyslaw Szpilman these dates are said to be the original dates of these historical events.

In the case of *Chess*, it starts up with the same documentary style of filming. Some papers are shown which are claimed to be an authentic historical document and proofs of related history. This is a known characteristic of historical movies through which authenticity is achieved through such production practices. According to Hayward, authenticity is the key term where historical films are concerned, at least in terms of the production practices. From setting, costumes, objects, the use of colors etc., every detail must appear authentic. Historical film focuses on a real event in the past which is often highly fictionalized (Susan Hayward: 2004: 185). These criteria have been met very carefully and beautifully in both of our subject movies. Let us discuss` these points in both movies taken for our discussion one by one.

The Setting for *Pianist*

The setting for the *Pianist* is the war-burnt Warsaw, the ruined military barracks and camps of Russian army which have been beautifully used by Polanski in order to show the real battlefield. The city of Warsaw is set like the scenario of World War II in reality. From the military march of German army into Warsaw to the camps of Jew refugees at the railway stations and the depiction of the Ghetto, and the holocaust, everything

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represents World War II. Setting of Pianist is exactly according to the Warsaw society of the 1940s. People are wearing long coats and having same fashionable and typical hats on their heads. The prisoners-of-war camp which is shown at the end is claimed to be set in the real location of the camp. The Warsaw Ghetto and the surrounding city were recreated on the set of Pianist in the way they would have looked during the war. For this purpose old Soviet army barracks were used to create the ruined city. The director successfully built the complete battlefield on these original buildings, re-creating World War II-era Poland with signs and posters from the period. Additional filming also took place around Warsaw. The Umschlagplatz scene where Szpilman, his family and hundreds of other Jews wait to be taken to the concentration camps was filmed at a local military academy. All of it was done for the historical authenticity of the film.

The Setting for *Chess*

In the case of Chess, the setting of the court of King Wajid Ali Shah had been set by Ray in order to achieve maximum authenticity. This is the setting of Nineteenth century Avadh. Their dress, their style, their attitudes towards pigeon-games, mujra scenes at khotas, chess, cock and sheep-fights and other socio-political aspects are depicted in order to make it closer to the real one.

Setting Comparison

Coming back to the point made by Susan Hayward, regarding the production practices of treatment of historical themes in films, Pianist is the outcome of the masterful filming qualities of Polanski. The setting of the Warsaw Ghetto and the surrounding city were recreated as close as possible to what these would have been during World War II. The scenes of the ruined city of Warsaw surprisingly represent the images of real locations. The house where Szpilman meets Captain Hosenfeld was recreated carefully to represent the war-hit buildings of World War II. The scenes that featured the Germans destroying the hospital with flame throwers were filmed in an old army hospital. The rundown district of Praga was chosen for filming because of its abundance of original buildings. These original buildings played an important role in re-creating World War II-era Poland with signs and posters from the period, thus making the film revisit history through these images and colors.

Chess is also made very authentic by shooting it in settings very similar to the original places. The court of Wajid Ali Shah, the drawing room of the old lawyer, and the dancing place of the singer girls, all these play their roles in re-creating the Nineteenth century India.

Costumes – Role of Authenticity

Costumes of both Szpilman in Pianist and Wajid Ali Shah in Chess are exactly suited to the portrayal of their said characters. The military uniform of German Gestapo and Polish

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army are beautifully designed to imitate the original ones. While in Chess the kingly appearance and robes of Wajid Ali Shah are shown to be the real ones. His crown, his court and everything matches the original history. Even chess-playing of Mirza and Mir and their language style belong to the India of that time.

‘Authenticity’ serves a different purpose in historical films, having an ideological function; it is serving up the country’s national history before the eyes of the indigenous people teaching from history, giving accordance to the ‘great moments’ of the collective past⁴. Therefore historically accurate movies that are also captivating have an immense burden to meet. But thanks to *the cinema of possibility*⁵ (Peter Haining: 1999), it is possible to visit, go back to the historical moments of the past through these historical films.

Fitting the Ideological Function

If we examine Pianist and Chess on these criteria of historical movies, these will show that both fit this criterion. Both movies seem to serve the ideological function. Pianist is serving the role of national history to Jews in particular while it is also serving as role-model - passion against the cruelties of war and terrorizing other nations in general. The history of the holocaust is, of course is of great importance in the eyes of Jews and it is teaching them the moments of their collective past. While it is also teaching the other nations that war is harmful to all; and that all Germans were not evil and there were men like Captain Wilm Hosenfeld who saved Szpilman and had a soft heart like any good man even among the shadows of canons and bombardments.

History is revisited through Pianist revealing to all of us the destructive force of war and terror. Same is true in the case of Chess, as India’s national history is revisited through it, teaching from the collective past of the Muslim rulers of India. It shows us like a mirror how unable were the leaders of the Nineteenth century India, who were incapable of being in charge of government. And therefore East India Company conquered them without even a slight retaliation. Thus it also teaches us about our collective past, and satirizes that part of history in the shape of a story.

To Make Movies Effective: Historical Accuracy and Sense of Hope – A Comparison

According to Joe, in order to make historical movies more effective, the director has to look for two very crucial elements in the movie. These elements are historical accuracy in the personal story, and a sense of hope. He adds that historical accuracy does not mean trying to encompass everything that happened in a particular time period. Rather, it requires a story that highlights key elements of the period involved while containing nothing that could ever have happened in the time (Joe: 2008).

⁴ Ibid page-2

⁵ Peter Haining used the term for Science Fiction but it fits History-cum-Fiction films also.

Historical accuracy is not the only requirement for a fantastic historical work. The key to illustrating history through a personal story is to have it contain a strong sense of hope, even in the most devastating circumstances. The reason for this is that, for a story to be the most powerful it can be, it must be understood with the mind as well as the heart. It must have an intellectual question as well as an emotional feeling.

Pianist is a personal story which fulfills this condition very beautifully just as it could have happened in the time of war. For example, war-time cruelties, a Jewish family life, forced labor enforced by the Nazi army, Nazi-Jew relations, war-prisoners' lives, hunger, and in all these dilapidated circumstances, a human heart engaged in love for music, all are the possibilities of the time. Pianist fully satisfies this criterion; not only was it on a big budget but it also had an experienced brilliant director Polanski who truly involved his masterful talents in depicting all this, for creating a sense of hope in the personal story of Szpilman. This is a personal story about a tragic situation from history which gives the viewer a hope; and it makes the story more about a bigger picture than the immediate tragedy of Szpilman only. The story is true and it has been embellished for the screen by the director. This movie is the perfect example of a historically significant personal story that has the key element of hope to make it a truly fantastic film. Our most critically acclaimed film about World War II i.e. Pianist undoubtedly has these two elements interwoven throughout.

While a personal story with historical accuracy and hope is not the decisive formula for a wonderful film about history, it is a characteristic that the most powerful and compelling films concerning war and terror have in common. And history can be the most captivating story of all, because it is about us. Based upon the memoirs of Wladyslaw Szpilman, this is a harrowing story of one man's time of suffering in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Nazi occupation.

Pianist is a powerful and true story of suffering, strength and survival in this regard.

Chess desperately wants to be important in Indian culture. Even though that success was not attained, it is still a very powerful historical epic. Again, the story is true, but embellished for the screen; this is not a problem, because in its embellishment it has not really distorted the hard realities of Indian society of the time. And Chess, even more than Pianist, has a very clear level of academic entertainment. The fought battle in Chess is fought on a purely ideological level. We are given a white man's court to decide the fate of the Indians - it's a clear picture of the interaction between Indians and Britishers. Should this be the proper way to rule the people who do not understand or respect the system? How strange is it that a contract between rulers and traders could be honored in this manner without having the king protest the very essence of the white man's burden to rule? And was East India Company truly an enlightened body and a well wisher of the

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people of India, or merely a deluded idea on the part of the king?

For it to be one of the most potent of films, Pianist is based on a truly emotional story. The scenes at the time of the putting down of the Ghetto uprising during the German occupation are some of the most brutal ever made about war-cruelties, and hurt audiences emotionally. So while Polanski's main focus in the film is World War II, it also gives a harrowing vision of Szpilman's survival and his personal struggle in oppression. It stimulates the brain and the heart, and presents an effective historical picture. This movie is the perfect example of a historically significant personal story that has the key element of hope to make it a truly fantastic film.

Historical Accuracy in *Chess*

World War II is a great historical moment which is of course common history for all nations of the world. Similar historical accuracy and sense of hope are also found in Chess. The year 1856 – Lucknow – seated on the throne of Avadh is Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, an indifferent ruler but a fine poet and musician. Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Roshan Ali are occupied in playing “Chess”. Mirza's neglected wife Khurshid makes an effort to wean her husband from his obsession but in vain. Mir's wife Nafisa, on the other hand encourages her husband to play so that she can carry on her affair with her cousin. East India Company plays a bigger game of ‘chess’ which is to dispose the Nawab on the pretext of his misrule and bring Avadh under British rule. Mir and Mirza flee from Lucknow on the news of the approaching company's troop. They fear that they have to fight for the Nawab, and therefore, run to a secluded village and play chess there. Wajid having no other way out, surrenders and wins a moral victory. The story of Mirza and Mir could be historically plausible. Mir and Mirza end up fighting bitterly with each other over the game. The troops march into Lucknow; Avadh passes into the hands of the company. Dusk falls - the true friends are reconciled and resume their game of bloodless combat. Fearing blood shedding of his people in a hopelessly unequal battle, the king opts to hand over the kingdom to the British without a fight.

Movies as Records of the Past

The film genre has great potential as a record of past. In 1898, Polish cameraman Boleslas Matuszewski declared motion pictures “a new source for history” that provided “authenticity, exactitude, and precision.” Almost twenty years later, D. W. Griffith, perhaps the most famous American film director of the silent era, argued that motion pictures would revolutionize the way history was taught, even superseding written records. Both of them were very right about these points at that time.

Today by virtue of the capabilities of historical films, some sixty years in the case of World War II and one hundred fifty years in the case of the fall of Avadh to East India Company, we can actually see and experience what happened in the past. You are present

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there at the making of history. World War II is being fought and Wajid Ali Shah handing over his kingdom to General Outram. All the work of writing, revising, collating and reproducing have been carefully attended to by the teams of experts under their directors Polanski and Ray.

Image and Light

Camera and light also play an important role in both of these films in the treatment of the historical element, because the photographic image has a direct causal relation to the subject it represents. The light reflected from the objects or people photographed, causes the image to be captured on light sensitive film. A photographic image not only resembles its subject but also indicates its existence. Of course, all historical evidence should be subject to skepticism. Historical documents, eyewitness accounts, and archeological objects all claim a direct connection to the events or situations that are represented by Polanski and Ray in these films. *Pianist* has been portrayed by Adrien Brody while Wajid Ali Shah by Sanjay Kumar and both are clearly made up to resemble the original characters.

Portraying the Daily Life

Both Polanski and Ray, like other historical movie makers, have moved a bit further away from the histories of World War II and the fall of Avadh to the level that tries to provide an image of the way daily life unfolded for the masses of those lands, how they worked, what they did for fun, how families were formed or fell apart, or how the fabric of daily life was formed or transformed. Both these films show all these aspects of everyday life alongside their respective great events. They have used their films also to display the lives of “ordinary” people. These movies are perhaps more like the records of daily life of the time alongside the documents that record great events.

Pianist provides the best evidence of what it was like to walk down the streets of Warsaw for a Jew during the war, how was the life of a common man, what a German army-man would behave with a Jew in Warsaw at that time. Similarly *Chess* provides the same social and cultural history of that time: showing Lucknow, how the people in town did their work or spent the day when British troops entered the city.

All of these subjects are staged and dramatized, of course, and these films are changed in many ways. But as a record of time and motion, these films effectively preserve gestures, gaits, rhythms, attitudes, and human interactions in a variety of situations.

Providing Indelible Images

This is not to deny that these films, especially *Pianist*, provide indelible images of the great events. Our horrified consciousness of the Holocaust relies partly on the filmed images from the liberation of the camps, and our knowledge of the devastation of the

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Warsaw city from Pianist. Moreover, those disasters or traumas of World War II that went unrecorded by motion pictures are now very clear in our minds because of the vivid images of the film Pianist. Similarly when we focus on social and cultural history, especially the always available leisure in the lives of the rich class like Mirza and Mir,

Chess not only provides evidence and records but takes on a key role. And all of a sudden we come to know the reasons for the failure of a big Muslim empire of India. The past is a foreign place, and a film's portrayal of the past depends upon thousands of choices about the physical, behavioral, and cultural details of the period and places being presented. Being authentic or truthful about the past involves much more than getting the costumes and the architectural details right.

Relationship between Fiction and Historical Evidence

In addition to the historical story and documentary blend of films discussed above, we must now answer an important question. Can the fictional parts of such films be used as historical evidence? As evidence of what? Fictional stories within such films serve as historical evidence in the same way that other representational art forms do, by making events vivid, portraying social attitudes, and even revealing the unconscious assumptions of past societies. Like here in these films every detail of history has been represented as evidence.

Chess does, painfully, and even unintentionally, indicate the sorts of hysterical anxieties and aggressive fantasies of Wajid Ali Shah. Attitudes about war, hunger, helplessness, and ethnicity, as well as heroism, work, play, and “the good life” are all portrayed in these history-(plus fiction)-cum-documentary films. As a form of mass visual entertainment, these films reflect social attitudes in a specific and vivid manner. Like in the game of Chess, the story of the chess-players is shown in the form of a satire - the fictional story of Mir and Mirzah, which is the dominant form of popular fictional entertainment. These movies, therefore, aimed at the wider target audiences than that of most novels and plays. Does this mean that movies reflect social attitudes more accurately than any other medium, since they reach the greatest number of people? (Maybe and maybe not the best medium to understand true history and society and its attitudes of those times, which is done best by historical books have no fictional material in them). These are the characteristics of these films regarding the treatment of history.

The above is all apropos to Polanski's feat in Pianist wherein he creates an account of Polish Jewish experience in World War II that manages to be illuminating, historically faithful, and definitive. There is documentary footage of the Warsaw Ghetto and part of Polanski's achievement is to not attempt to recreate for us the astonishing and horrific images of death and decay that were caught by documentaries. Instead, we are offered an initially intimate portrait of Szpilman and through his eyes we begin to slowly understand the magnitude of the violence occurring around him. Pianist works by maintaining a coolly detached view of the events in the Ghetto. We are placed in the position of

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observers of horror, and because so much of the Nazi terror depended on maintaining a climate of fear, we come to understand completely what allowed the horrors of the holocaust to occur. The majority of Pianist is filmed within closed rooms, claustrophobic spaces in which Szpilman and his family need to hide. Even when outdoors in the Ghetto, we are aware of the walls and the regulations which dictate movement for the Warsaw Jews. The film begins just before the invasion of Poland by Germany and ends with the liberation of the country by the Soviet army. At first Szpilman's experiences are more humiliating than they are coercive or violent: the introduction of Nazi Race Laws, the requirement to show the Star of David on his clothing etc. Then the Ghetto walls are built and, then, the trains arrive to take the Jews to the death camps in the east. All this is done to treat history in the form of realistic entertainment.

Juxtaposing History with Fiction

One important reason for juxtaposing history with fiction in Pianist and Chess could be because films are complex industrial and social products and how they are made, distributed, exhibited, and received by audiences and critics must be investigated to fully evaluate their roles as historical evidence.

Another great benefit of the blend of history with fiction is that the attitudes portrayed in a specific film may represent a series of compromises carefully designed to be non-offensive. One strategy for creating and pleasing a mass audience includes designing such films in way that audiences could interpret them in different ways. This is very clear in the carefully regulated portrayal of sexual behavior in such movies. An adult audience member may decide that Nafisa and her cousin Aqil have illicit relations when Mir and Mirza leave for their chess game in a deserted place. But a child or a socially conservative viewer might assume nothing happened. Such ambiguous scenes provide rich material for studying social history, but they require complex interpretation and investigation.

An Important Question

We cannot neglect an important question when we study a film as historical evidence. This is to ask who made the film and for what purpose. The director is certainly responsible for the production involved. Polanski made Pianist and as he was himself one of the victims of the war, the possibility could be revisiting history in addition to the primary purpose of appealing and entertaining the audience. Similar possibilities could also be there in the case of Chess as it also addresses the national history of India.

Limitations

Moreover, the camera has been placed by a human agent and the true depiction of history in an art form is always questionable. Many limitations are involved in this level of depiction. The limitation of film as a language and then the limitation of film as a

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representational art form are the main short-comings. To tackle these problems, a director portrays and recreates the great characters of history through the actors. If we take the problem at the philosophical level, it is not possible to show everything as it is, and so it is represented through a story showing facts of the moment in it with the help of actors; we see Szpilman in Pianist and Wajid Ali Shah in Chess represented through actors. So the representation of them is according to the view point of the directors involved. And since the depiction of the real characters and real locations is not possible, the directors try to portray the image of characters and objects with the help of costumes, objects, props, colors etc. Szpilman and Wajid Ali Shah are shown with proper period costumes and within appropriate mise-en-scene.

Another technical limitation is that director has to put the camera at one place, so only one point of view is shown. It catches one degree at one time and the rest of the 359 degrees are missing. This is of course, a big limitation and since there is no complete solution to it, different angles and shots have been caught by the camera. Film directors are conscious of these limitations. What the directors of Pianist and Chess have done to handle this limitation is that they have dealt with their movies subjectively.

Philosophical Reality

One more noticeable point is the philosophical treatment of the depiction of reality through movies. So the three-dimensional reality comes down to two-dimensions when camera is put there and we are watching it on screen. In this process, the depiction of reality is achieved through the use of colors and lights. In the case of Pianist and Chess colors and lights have been used very carefully to the required degree in the films.

Conclusion

Of course, all historical evidences are subject to skepticism. No picture of past events could be indisputable. This might be because films could not be objective in the sense of providing evidence. After all a movie is the creation of its producer. Thus it is not possible for the director to remain totally objective in treating the historical evidence in a movie. Therefore, Polanski and Ray both have treated their respective films subjectively. Historical documents, eyewitness accounts, and archeological objects all claim a direct connection to events or situations that historians evaluate and interpret. These films, however, offer a unique ability to reflect and resemble historical figures and events.

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Appendix Synopsis of the Subject Movies

The Pianist (2002)

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Directed by	Roman Polanski	
Produced by	Roman Polanski Robert Benmussa Alain Sarde	
Written by	Ronald Harwood (Screenplay) Władysław Szpilman (Book)	
Starring	Adrien Brody Thomas Kretschmann	
Music by	Wojciech Kilar Frederic Chopin	
Cinematography	Pawel Edelman	
Editing by	Hervé de Luze	

Wladyslaw Szpilman, a famous Polish Jewish pianist working for Warsaw radio, sees his whole world collapse with the outbreak of World War II and the invasion of Poland in September 1939. After the radio station is rocked by explosions, Szpilman goes home and learns that Great Britain and France have declared war on Germany. He and his family rejoice, believing the war will end quickly. When Nazis occupy Warsaw after the regular army passes on, living conditions for the Jewish population gradually deteriorate as their rights are slowly eroded: first they are allowed only a limited amount of money per family, then they must wear armbands imprinted with the Star of David to identify themselves, and eventually, late in 1940, they are all forced into the squalid Warsaw Ghetto. There, they face hunger, persecution and humiliation from the Nazis-occupants and the ever present fear of death or torture. The Nazis became increasingly sadistic and the family experiences many horrors inflicted on their neighbours. While living in hiding, he witnesses many horrors committed by the Nazis, such as widespread killing, beating, and burning. Szpilman also witnesses the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and its aftermath as the Nazi party forcibly enters the ghetto and kills nearly all the remaining insurgents.

A year goes by and life in Warsaw further deteriorates. On more than one occasion, Szpilman nearly dies due to jaundice and malnutrition. While trying to open a can of cucumbers, he realizes to his horror that he is being watched from behind, it was a Captain of the regular German army, Wilm Hosenfeld. Hosenfeld asks the initially perplexed Szpilman to play something for him on the grand piano. Hosenfeld is touched by his performance, and lets him continue hiding in the attic of the building. He even brings the almost starved Szpilman food regularly, thus saving his life eventually. He gives Szpilman his coat and leaves.

When a nearby concentration camp is liberated, Captain Hosenfeld and other Germans are captured. Hosenfeld begs a passing Jewish prisoner, a musician, to contact Szpilman to free him. Szpilman, who has gone back to playing live on Warsaw radio, arrives at the

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site too late; all the prisoners have been removed along with any trace of the stockade. In the movie's final scene, Szpilman triumphantly performs on piano to a large audience in Warsaw. Title cards shown just before the end credits reveal that Szpilman continued to live in Warsaw and died in 2000, but that Hosenfeld died in 1952 in a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp.

The Chess Players (1977)

Directed by Styajit Ray

Produced by Devki Chitra Productions (Suresh Jindal)

Written by Satyajit Ray, Based on the short story: 'Shatranj Ke Khilari' by Munshi Premchand

Cast Sanjeev Kumar, Shabana Azmi, Saeed Jaffrey, Farida Jalal, Amjad Khan, Victor Bannerjee, Sir Richard Attenborough, Tom Alter, Veena, David Abraham, Farook Shaikh, Leela Mishra, Barry John, Samarth Narain, Budho Advani

Music by Satyajit Ray

Cinematography Soumendu Roy

Editing by Dulal Dutta

The year 1856 – Lucknow – seated on the throne of Avadh is Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, an indifferent ruler but a fine poet and musician. Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Roshan Ali treated playing “Chess” as their predominant occupation. Mirza’s neglected wife Khurshid makes many efforts to wean her husband from his obsession but in vain. Mir’s wife Nafisa, on the other hand encourages her husband to play so that she can carry on her affair with her cousin. East India Company plays a bigger game of ‘chess’ which is to dispose the Nawab on the pretext of his misrule and bring Avadh under British rule. Mir and Mirza flee from Lucknow on the news of the approaching company’s troop. They fear that they have to fight for the Nawab and therefore run to a secluded village, and play chess there. Wajid having no other way surrenders and wins a moral victory.

Mir and Mirza end up fighting bitterly with each other over the game. The troops march into Lucknow - Avadh passes into the hands of the company. Dusk falls- the true friends are reconciled and resume their game of bloodless combat. Fearing blood shedding of his people in a hopelessly unequal battle, the king opts to hand over the kingdom to the British without a fight.

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Filmography

- The Pianist, dir. Roman Polanski (France: 2002)
- The Chess Players, dir. Satyajit Ray (India: 1977)

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