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Izaokas (Isaac)

William L. Blizek

University of Nebraska at Omaha, wblizek@unomaha.edu

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Izaokas (Isaac)

Abstract

This is a film review of *Izaokas (Isaac)*, directed by Jurgis Matulevicius.

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Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the *Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (2009)



**Izaokas (Isaac), dir. Jurgis Matulevicius
Based on the novel by Antanas Skema**

The story begins with the infamous Lietukis Garage Massacre on June 27, 1941. Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators tortured and murdered about 40 Jews from the village of Kunas, Lithuania. The brutality and cruelty of this massacre are difficult to watch. During the massacre, Andrius Gluosnis, a Lithuanian activist, is told to kill a Jew by one of the Lithuanian collaborators. The Jew is Isaac Kaplan, one of Andrius' neighbors. Since the collaborators have run off to kill others, it is only Isaac and Andrius and Andrius does not have to kill Isaac. Nevertheless, Andrius does kill Isaac. From this point on Andrius is wracked with guilt, a guilt that affects Andrius throughout the film.

The story then skips forward to 1964 where we see the return from America of Gediminas Gutauskas (Gedas), a now famous filmmaker. Gedas has come home to make a movie from a stolen script. The movie is to be about the Lietukis Garage Massacre. Gedas is an old friend of

Andrius and his wife, Helena. The film brings out the guilt in Andrius, changing the relationships between the three old friends.

The story gets more complicated when a KGB agent decides to investigate the original massacre. The agent suspects that Gedas was at the actual massacre and that he may be guilty of committing war crimes. The script of the film is such an accurate retelling of the story that it had to be written by someone who was actually there. This raises all of the issues of the three friends, the issues that have never been dealt with before.

This is a story of relationships, secrets, politics, and betrayal. If you look at the larger picture, however, it is also a story about Anti-Semitism. The film reminds us of a singularly horrible event in human history—the extermination of Jews from Europe, the extermination of people who believe in one God by people who believe in another God. It is often that pitting one God against another is the source of such horrible evil.

The film also reminds us of the fact that it was not only the Nazis who tried to exterminate the Jews. There were many non-Nazis (in this case Lithuanian collaborators) who also participated in this atrocity. Defeating the Nazis does not destroy Anti-Semitism. Finally, the movie shows us how easy it is for ordinary people to get caught up in a mob mentality, to become cruel toward others, and to become evil under the right circumstances. I was reminded of this as I recently watched the U.S. Capitol building under violent assault by mobs of white supremacists and white nationalists as well as ordinary people. It is clear how vigilant we must be to never let the “right circumstances” arise.