SCREENING THE HOLOCAUST PERPETRATOR IN LITHUANIA: *PURPLE SMOKE* (2019) AND *IZAOKAS* (2019)

Violeta Davoliūtė, Lithuanian Institute of History

If the televised testimony of several dozen Holocaust survivors at the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem and the publication of several notable memoirs led Annette Wieviorka to declare the 1960s as inaugurating the "era of the witness," the 1990s were marked by a surge of interest in the subjective perspective of perpetrators. Richard Crownshaw identifies a "turn to the figure of the perpetrator" in several works of historical fiction published in Germany, France, and the UK, while Fernando Canet points to the emergence of a "significant number of documentary films examining crimes against humanity from the perpetrators' perspective" (160).[1] The distinguishing feature of these works lies in their empathetic rendering of the perpetrator or, in the more precise language of reader response theory, a rendering that enables "an empathetic or at least an affective relation to the perpetrator" on the part of the reader (Crownshaw 75).

The three-decade delay between the revolution of the witness and the turn to the perpetrator may be explained by the ethical pitfalls that confront any effort to articulate the perpetrator's perspective in art, literature, or film. As noted by Katherine Stafford, we tend to reserve our empathy for the victim, limiting our consideration of the perpetrator as a figure to be judged and condemned. In scholarship, literature, and the law, Stafford says, there is a taboo against efforts to understand the perpetrator, insofar as empathy may lead to forgiveness at the expense of justice. Nevertheless, interest in the perspective of the perpetrator is sustained by an awareness of how an exclusive focus on the perspective of the victim may impair historical understanding and undermine the possibility of post-conflict reconciliation. In South Africa, for example, a television series entitled *The Truth Commission Special Report* aired

1. The establishment of the Perpetrator Studies Network and journal testify to the rise of interest in the perpetrator from an academic perspective. See the organization website at https://perpetratorstudies.sites.uu.nl.

from 1996–1998 to an audience of over one million viewers each week. It focused on the life-narratives of Apartheid-era perpetrators to move beyond the static representation of perpetrators as monsters and to generate a degree of "empathetic unsettlement" that could provoke self-reflection and transformation in South African society (Anderson).

In the wake of the Jewish genocide, themes of reconciliation and empathy with the perspective of the perpetrator would gain ground only with the passing of generations, in the writings of the descendants of Holocaust survivors like Daniel Mendelsohn, who explores the complex relations among Jews, Ukrainians, and Poles by returning to the village where several members of his family were killed during the Holocaust (Rigney). A broader interest in the perspective of the perpetrator may also have been stimulated by the various national processes of public historical reckoning with the Holocaust, starting with Germany's atonement for its primary historical responsibility, extending to the subsequent atonement of France for Vichy, and including those of other occupied European nations for their roles as collaborators with the Nazi regime (Judt).

The ethics of representing the subjective position of the perpetrator are complex and raise the dilemma of developing an understanding with a degree of empathy but stopping short of identification with the act of perpetration itself. In works of fiction, the path between empathy and identification is laid on the field of aesthetics; specifically, through narrative techniques of voice and focalization that shape how third-person narratives frame the past through the consciousness of individual characters. In a landmark 2016 article, Erin McGlothlin provides a taxonomy of five "modalities of identification" that can be used to characterize the degree to which narrative enables an identificatory response, provokes alienation, or negotiates some defamiliarized position in between these poles (*"*Empathetic Identification"; see also McGlothlin, *The Mind of the Holocaust Perpetrator*). While the first modality, *existential identification*, is grounded in the focalization of the perpetrator's perspective and the viewer's basic recognition of the perpetrator as a historical agent, *perspectival identification* measures the viewer's readiness to see events through the eyes of the *perpetrator* and to exclude alternate points of view. The third modality concerns the *reliability* accorded by the viewer to the perpetrator's perspective, to the capacity and sincerity of the perpetrator as a witness to his own crimes. The fourth, *affective identification*, deals with viewer engagement with the perpetrator's emotional life outside his identity as a victimizer, typically as he attempts to escape punishment for his crimes. Finally, *ideological identification* concerns the viewer's alignment with the perpetrator's ethical worldview and justifications for his behavior (*The Mind of the Holocaust Perpetrator*). McGlothlin and other scholars of perpetrator memory present these modalities of identification as a sliding scale, a slippery

slope from the high ground of understanding to the abyss of ideological identification with the perpetrator.

In the context of World War II in Central and Eastern Europe, perpetrator memory and, in particular, its identificatory processes have not received enough attention. Jelena Subotić has argued that several recent representations of the Holocaust in Central and Eastern European memorial museums have gone so far as to "obfuscate" the narratives of Holocaust victims ("The Appropriation of Holocaust Memory"). Compelled to commemorate the Holocaust as a matter of political correctness, and yet driven by a deeper need to assert their national identity, post-communist societies have tended to appropriate the memory, symbols, and imagery of the Holocaust to represent crimes of communism, to refocus attention on their own national suffering, and to glorify individuals who fought for the national cause, no matter what crimes they may have committed along the way (Subotić, "Political Memory").

Against this background, this article seeks to contextualize and interpret the significance of two feature films dealing with the collaboration of Lithuanians in the Holocaust, released in Lithuania in 2019. If most films produced in Lithuania on World War II since the restoration of independence in 1991 advance a monolithic narrative of national victimhood or heroic resistance vis-à-vis the Soviet occupation, these films stand out insofar as they feature portraits of Lithuanians as perpetrators, as local participants in the Nazi genocide of Lithuanian Jews (Norkūnaitė). *Purple Smoke* (*Purpurinis rūkas*, 2019, dir. Raimundas Banionis) portrays an anti-Soviet Lithuanian partisan, thought to have killed a Jewish family, through the eyes of one of its members: the surviving son, who was evacuated from Lithuania to the Soviet interior just as the Germans invaded, returns to his home village in the troubled circumstances of postwar, Soviet-occupied Lithuania. *Isaac* (*Izaokas*, 2019, dir. Jurgis Matulevičius) portrays the evolving subjectivity of a Lithuanian who killed a Jew (Izaokas) during the infamous Lietūkis Garage massacre in June 1941 in Kaunas. The nearly simultaneous emergence of these films based on texts written by emigres in the 1960s and 70s about Holocaust perpetrators is striking. Reflecting current commemorative trends in Lithuania, each film builds upon a distinct and complex transnational heritage of experience, memory, and intertextuality, and takes a distinct approach to the ethical challenge of representing the subject position of the perpetrator.

After contextualizing the turn to the perpetrator in the cultural discourse of contemporary Lithuania, this article will examine the aesthetics of perpetrator representation in each film in light of McGlothlin's five modalities of identification. In view of their direct and forceful confrontation with the legacy of local participation in the Holocaust, *Purple Smoke* and *Izaokas* signal a new readiness to probe the received narrative of national victimhood

and heroism. However, they also reflect the challenges and, particularly in the case of *Izaokas*, the potential moral hazards of dramatizing history from the perpetrator's perspective.

Reckoning with the Legacy of Collaboration

The process of historical reckoning with collaboration with the Nazi regime and with the participation of Lithuanians in the Holocaust is complex, owing to the entanglement of the German occupation from 1941–1944 with the Soviet occupations that preceded (1940–1941) and followed (1944–1991) and the efforts of people whom Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik would call "memory warriors" to place the legacy of anti-Soviet resistance at the heart of national identity in the post-Soviet era. Reflecting on this problem two decades ago, before the process of European integration had had much of an impact on approaches to the past in post-Soviet Lithuania, historian Saulius Sužiedėlis described how "the painful record of 1941 continues to confront, embarrass and annoy Lithuanian society," and how the emphasis on national martyrology, seen by then in purely ethnic terms, had constructed a "rigid pattern of collective memories impervious to any revision based on new research" ("The Burden of 1941," 47). That said, over the next decades, research and education have contributed to a certain evolution in attitudes. A growing body of meticulous historical studies, stronger transnational social links, and the proliferation of popular and artistic works have slowly laid the groundwork for a more nuanced understanding of this difficult past. However, many memories were lost, marginalized, or silenced and have not been integrated into the official interpretation of history to this day.

The most difficult aspect of this legacy concerns the collaboration of Lithuanians with German forces and the violence committed by Lithuanians against their Jewish neighbors, not only as auxiliaries to German forces in the mass killing that began in August 1941, but also in different forms of participation, including the more spontaneous incidents of collective violence that erupted in several towns and villages during the first weeks of the invasion. The group of Lithuanians who took part in the Jewish genocide and who then went on to fight as partisans against the Soviet occupation is an especially sensitive issue. In general, the implication of Lithuanians as observers of and participants in the violence at the time and the "diachronic" (Rothberg) implication of the Lithuanian community of memory vis-à-vis these events today has emerged as a major focus of recent political, historical, and cultural discourse (Davoliūtė,"The Gaze of the Implicated Subject"). Writer Rūta Vanagaitė's *Mūsiškiai* (*Our People*) stands out as the work that provoked an especially lively public debate over the implication of ordinary Lithuanians in the events of the Holocaust. First published in 2016 in Lithuanian, selling out several editions, and then in English in 2021, the book catalyzed an earthquake of polemics over the role that Lithuanians, i.e., "our people," played in

the Holocaust and on the issues of collective and individual guilt and responsibility (Davoliūtė, "Genealogical Writing").[2]

Meanwhile, Lithuanian cinema, except for a few documentaries that were not widely screened,[3] has until very recently promoted a mainstream narrative of the nation's "fighting and suffering" (Budrytė) in works like *Lunar Lithuania* (*Mėnulio Lietuva*, 1998), *All Alone* (*Vienui vieni*, 2004), *Forest of the Gods* (*Dievų miškas*, 2005), *Emilija. Breaking Free* (*Emilija iš Laisvės alėjos*, 2017), *Ashes in the Snow* (*Tarp pilkų debesų*, 2018), and others. But, in 2019, one can see a certain digression from this pattern, as *Izaokas* and *Purple Smoke*, which each portray a Lithuanian Holocaust perpetrator, were released. Interviews with individuals involved in the production of both films suggest a deliberate engagement with the broader national discourse of memory and reckoning with the legacy of World War II and its aftermath in Soviet-occupied Lithuania.

The director of *Purple Smoke*, Raimundas Banionis, notes that the film was produced in an environment of universal glorification of the anti-Soviet partisan as a one-sided heroic historical actor, when any discussion of this complex historical period was condemned as a revisionism or a revival of Soviet propaganda:

> I remember times when we were told that the Forest Brothers were bandits. Today we are told that they were all saints. But we are talking about the same people, who were evaluated in one way earlier, and differently today. And what will be in the future? It is not known […] Who is the real patriot? Is it the one who will show the truth about us, although it is not very beautiful, or someone who will lie that we are saints. (Banionis).

The creators of *Izaokas* demonstrate a similar engagement with the painful history in question, conducting research to understand the psychology of perpetration and the available archival materials on the pogroms against Jews in Kaunas, Vilijampolė, and other sites. The script for *Izaokas*, being a collaborative work of the director Jurgis Matulevičius and scriptwriters Saulė Bliuvaitė and Nerijus Milerius, was read and commented on by the Lithuanian Holocaust survivor Irena Veisaitė (1928–2020), whose uncle Jurgis Štromas was killed during the pogrom at the Lietūkis garage.

Notably, each film is based on texts written decades earlier, by members of the Jewish and Lithuanian émigré communities in North America, pointing to a more complex and multilayered process of memory. The film *Purple Smoke* (*Purpurinis rūkas*) is based on a short story written by the Russian Jewish emigre writer Felix Roziner (1936–1987) and first published in 1987 in Russian as *Lilovy dym*. Roziner, a Soviet music critic, scholar, and writer, born and raised

2. In 2018, social media activists seized upon an injudicious remark made by Vanagaitė about a leader of the postwar anti-Soviet resistance to whip up a storm of hatred on social media. Vanagaitė's publisher bowed to pressure and pulled all of her books, including *Mūsiškiai*, from sale.

3. See for example, *Sudie*, *Lietuvos Jeruzale!* (Farewell, Yerushalayim de Lita! 1994, dir. Saulius Beržinis) and *Elegija medui ir degutui* (An Elegy to Honey and Tar, 2013, dir. Alicija Žukauskaitė).

in Moscow, emigrated to Israel in 1978 and then to the US in 1985.[4] Roziner appears to have been inspired to write "Purple Smoke" through his friendship with Levas Feigelovičius (Lev Feigelovich), a Lithuanian Jew born in Kaunas in 1926 who was deported with part of his family from Lithuania in 1941 as a teenager, survived, and returned to Lithuania after the war. The story is dedicated to him.[5] Feigelovich described his experience of deportation and return to his native Lithuania in a memoir, *Quick as Waves* (*Bystry kak volny*), published in Russian in Israel in 1988.[6]

The film *Izaokas* is named after a short story by the Lithuanian émigré writer Antanas Škėma (1911–1961). This would be his last, unfinished work, started in 1960 before his sudden death in a car accident in 1961. Škėma, a member of an anti-Soviet uprising in 1941 who fled the Soviet advance and who eventually settled in the United States, was haunted by the dramatic historical events of World War II and made them the topic of several of his literary works, like *Balta drobulė* (1958) and *Izaokas* (1985). Allegedly, right before the tragic author's death in a car crash in 1961, the manuscript of *Izaokas* was given to the liberal Lithuanian émigré sociologist Vytautas Kavolis (1930–1996), reportedly with the words, "please take care of my little book because if not you, nobody will ever publish it" (Jačėnaitė).[7]

Produced recently in Lithuania by Lithuanian directors, these films reflect

4. Although Roziner never lived in Lithuania, he spent a significant amount of time there, researching the life and works of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911). Roziner wrote two monographs on the Lithuanian painter and composer; during this time, he befriended Vytautas Landsbergis, the musicologist who would later become a prominent political figure and leader of *Sąjūdis*. Roziner spent several summers in Lithuania with his family and developed many close friendships (V. Landsbergis; I. Roziner).

5. According to Adasa Skliutauskaitė (1931–2023), married at that time to Feigelovich, they met with the Roziners at a riverside beach near Vilnius (Valakampiai) and became close family friends. Skliutauskaitė is a graphic artist who provided the illustrations for one of the first works of Holocaust-themed literature in the USSR, authored by Icchokas Meras (1934–2014) and published in Vilnius in 1957, which depicted the Holocaust in the Lithuanian provinces (Skliutauskaitė).

6. In 2009, the adjusted translation of this text appeared in Lithuanian with an amended title, *A Long Cold Spring* (*Ilgas šaltas pavasaris*), published by the Center of Jewish Culture and Information, Lithuania. This well-written and historically valuable account of the experience of deportation, however, never reached the wider Lithuanian public, as has been the case with many other stories of the Jewish experience of Soviet deportations. This connection between the memoir of a Jewish deportee and the narrative plot of *Purple Smoke* has not been noticed in the Lithuanian context or raised in discussions about the film. This is quite typical, insofar as the very fact that Jewish Lithuanians were among those Lithuanians deported by the Soviets in June 1941 is poorly known to the Lithuanian public, which tends to associate the memory of Soviet deportation with an ethnic Lithuanian (not also Jewish) trauma (Davoliūtė, "The Entanglement of Historical Experiences").

7. The text was published in Chicago more than twenty years after Škėma's death, in 1985, not as a separate book, but within the third volume of the complete collection of Škėma's literary works. The story was first published in Lithuania in 1994 as part of the collection of Škėma's works. *Izaokas* was finally published as a separate book in 2018.

current societal concerns in relation to the legacy of collaboration, but they build upon older narratives by writers with vastly different relationships with and perspectives on the Holocaust in Lithuania. In the case of *Izaokas*, an author is wrestling with his own implication in the perpetration of the Holocaust; in *Purple Smoke*, a Jewish author from Moscow writes from a deep and abiding fascination with Lithuanian culture and history. Accordingly, the films must be interpreted as the outcome of a longer-term, multi-layered evolution of intertextual memory, involving several steps of translation and transfer across different periods, cultural contexts, and geographies.

Purple Smoke

The short story "Purple Smoke" engages the legacy of perpetration by depicting the encounter of a young Jewish man—Joseph—with Vladas, a leader of a local partisan group fighting against the Soviet occupation after the end of World War II, who had allegedly taken part in the extermination of Joseph's family, in collaboration with the German occupational authorities. The encounter takes place upon Joseph's return to his hometown in the Lithuanian provinces in the immediate postwar period. The events are narrated in 1984 from Jerusalem, where Joseph recounts how he has been receiving letters for a year from police and judicial authorities from the United States and Israel, asking him to provide testimony against Vladas, whom, he presumes, has been arrested in the United States. These official letters trigger Joseph's personal memory, which carry him from the present of 1984 back to his post-war experience in Lithuania.

The setting for the action is a village near the town of Šiauliai with the imaginary, Lithuanian-sounding name of Ūkščiai. The fictional and even fanciful name of the village generates a symbolic surplus that reinforces the significance of the locale where Joseph's family was murdered during the war and where the post-war action of the story occurs. By focalizing the story through the eyes of a Jew returning to the site of genocide, Roziner's narrative compels the Lithuanian reader to confront the uncanny reality that the postwar village, the site of the heroic and ultimately tragic resistance of Lithuanians against Soviet rule, was also the site of the traumatic violence of Lithuanians against their Jewish neighbors. The personal familiarity between these two men, who grew up in the same village, points to the intimate nature of the violence that occurred across the Lithuanian countryside during the Holocaust, where victims and perpetrators knew each other by name. Stories of the return of Jewish deportees or Holocaust survivors to their former homes comprise a highly sensitive and underrepresented motif in historical research and artistic representation. The sensitivity (and possibly the neglect) of this topic lies in the way it raises the issue of local attitudes towards the Jewish tragedy as well as the looting of Jewish property and how it was disposed of in the wake of the genocide (Bartov).

The script of the film, produced by Raimundas Banionis and Lithuanian writer Renata Šerelytė, follows the structure of the short story very closely.[8] The action of the story begins in late 1944, when Joseph returns to Lithuania, seeking to re-establish what remains of his former life. Joseph survived the Holocaust because he had been evacuated to the Soviet interior.[9] On his journey back to Lithuania, he befriends a fellow Lithuanian Jew on the train to Vilnius, applies to Vilnius University, and makes a fateful trip to his home village to find out what happened to his mother, father, and the rest of his family. Nearing his village, Joseph is apprehended by a group of anti-Soviet partisans, suspicious of this "outsider" entering their territory. Fearing for his life, Joseph is relieved to see that the leader of the partisan group is none other than his slightly older Lithuanian neighbor from the same village, Vladas, with whom he grew up. As a young boy, Joseph earned Vladas's favor by risking his own safety to protect Vladas's dog from abuse. Joseph is not killed by the partisans but taken back to the house where his family rented rooms from the owner, called Daugėla, and where, now, Vladas is illegally residing, hiding from the Soviet authorities.

Daugėla tells Joseph that Vladas took part in the murder of the Jewish residents of the village, including Joseph's parents. "They will kill you too," Daugėla whispers. As the plot develops, Joseph is caught between two dangerous and opposing powers: the Soviet regime's representatives, who force him to spy on the partisans, and the anti-Soviet partisans, led by Vladas, who force Joseph to help maintain their cover. Joseph is forced constantly to choose between the temptations to escape, to seek revenge, or to express a selfless humanity, and he always chooses the last. In the end, he manages to survive this ordeal and, meanwhile, to save Vladas from discovery, Vladas's wife from deportation, and Vladas's son from an "accidental" poisoning by his mother (she meant for Joseph, not her son, to drink the poison). The film concludes with the decision of Joseph, fast forwarding to the "present" of Israel in 1984, not to testify against Vladas.

In this manner, the film stages a veritable collision between an empathetic portrait of a Holocaust perpetrator—who is also a Lithuanian anti-Soviet free-

8. Banionis was introduced to Roziner's story by Vytautas V. Landsbergis (the son of the previously mentioned musicologist and politician Vytautas Landsbergis) nearly two decades ago, and he commissioned Marius Ivaškevičius to write a film script. This was published in 2003, but Banionis was not able to secure funding for production until several years later, at which point he commissioned a new script, written by Renata Šerelytė.

9. The narrative of how children from summer camps in the coastal town of Palanga were evacuated to the interior of the USSR was an iconic Soviet Lithuanian narrative, including the famous poem by Salomėja Nėris, "Mama, where are you?", which was part of the Soviet Lithuanian school curriculum. This narrative disappeared from the cultural memory of independent Lithuania and is now seen as an element of Soviet war propaganda. A Lithuanian reviewer of the film, Ramūnas Aušrotas, accuses Roziner of taking this Soviet narrative and weaving this into the texture of Lithuanian history.

dom fighter—with the extraordinary story of the return of a Jewish survivor to his place of birth, to the scene of the crime of the extermination of his family. On one hand, it is the subject position of the Jewish survivor and victim that is focalized: Joseph's distress at the discovery of his family's unmarked graves, not even fenced off from grazing cows; his shock at the realization that his family's dishes and furniture have been appropriated by the Daugėla family; his fear of being killed by the partisans; the attempted poisoning and his ultimate realization that he can never really return to his former home. The scene of return to one's native home after the war and genocide recalls the accounts of several Lithuanian Jewish survivors, and echoes Feigelovich's description of his visit to a neighbor upon his return from deportation and seeing his family's items in the house in *Šaltas ilgas pavasaris* (Feigelovičius 108). On the other hand, the narrative is very much about Vladas and the sentence that Joseph makes, or rather refuses to make, about his role in the Holocaust. Vladas is thus affirmed as a historical agent whose role remains ambiguous and cannot be reduced to the victimization of Joseph's family and of Joseph himself. Indeed, the struggle of Vladas's partisan group against Soviet power is portrayed in the text and film with empathy and even a degree of romanticization. Focalized through the character of Vladas, the Soviet occupation is represented as the initial moment of rupture of the social fabric of Lithuanian society—the ultimate, if not the original, source of discord and animosity among different ethnic groups rooted in the same locale and between Jews and Lithuanians in particular.

This political and ideological platform is articulated by Vladas in the following monologue addressed to Joseph, using the intimate, familiar version of Joseph's name, Yossele:

> We lived quietly, you remember, Yossele. I was the only one who may have been a little noisy. To keep things from being boring. You'll say they didn't like you, and I'll say that nobody likes anybody. The Lithuanian doesn't like the Jew, neither of them likes the Pole, the eastern Lithuanian doesn't like the western one, and each still goes around saying that the other is not a real one. Just as one brother doesn't like another when it comes to dividing the father's farm. Nobody liked anybody, but we lived peacefully around here, and we didn't live badly, you remember, Joseph, until the Soviets brought in their ways. Then the good Jew went to denounce the bad Lithuanian as well as his own bad landsman, the good Lithuanian hired hand went to denounce the Pole he worked for, and everybody who didn't join the Communists got loaded into trucks headed for Siberia—you remember, in May of '41? You were still a snotnose, and your family didn't get sent off only because your uncle had been a Communist years before, but the Germans killed him, too. When they buried your people there in the pasture, there were some who cried—but not many; our people were no longer crying then, many were even laughing. Now everybody is crying, and those that are in the ground can laugh. Their souls are in heaven, Holy Mary defend them—even if you don't believe in her, what's the difference. (F. Roziner 89)

Through his actions, if not in words, Joseph rejects Vladas's perspective by repeatedly choosing to do the humane thing. He repeatedly rejects opportuni-

ties to take revenge or to denounce Vladas, seeking only to escape from his own predicament. Moreover, he forms a loving bond with Vladas's young son, a boy who now is effectively being raised without his father and considers Joseph to be his father. Through Joseph's selfless, psychologically unconvincing and almost saintly actions, the history of hate (Vladas's wife's accidental poisoning of her own son instead of the intended poisoning of Joseph, with whom she commits adultery) is rewritten by the history of empathy and humanity, with an almost Christian narrative of redemption.

While the role of Vladas and the Lithuanian partisans is represented with empathy, the focalization of the narrative through the perspective of the Jewish survivor generates friction with the partisan's perspective. Indeed, the final ethical argument of the film is concretized in the refusal of Joseph to respond to the request of the American prosecutor to testify against Vladas at trial in Chicago and, thus, to "return" to the scene of the crime: "But now, reading the letters that come to me and listening here in holy Jerusalem to a policeman's fine words about justice, I find myself thinking: let others convict Vladas… So let the trial in Chicago take place without me. Let the purple column of smoke billow up again, but without me" (F. Roziner 61). Joseph's reluctance to pursue justice in the US court may be interpreted by the viewer in several ways: as forgiveness, as an expression of pacifism, or as a refusal to reopen old wounds. Instead of closing the film with an explicit judgement of Vladas's legacy, the viewer is left to interpret the drama of the narrator's original return to the Lithuanian village, the site of intimate violence, and the postwar encounter of the perpetrator and victim who knew each other as children. While the narrator's empathy for Vladas may seem excessive, any possible identification of the viewer with the perpetrator is decentered by the defamiliarization of the village setting, by the way in which the film foregrounds the provincial locale as the common site of intimate violence of Lithuanians against Jews as well as Lithuanian resistance against the Soviets.

Izaokas

In the novel *Izaokas*, Škėma wove fragments of the memory of World War II in Lithuania with the context of the North American environment where he ended up as a war refugee. Surreal scenes from the imagination of the first-person narrator, a Lithuanian émigré in the United States named Andrius Gluosnis, take place in Chicago and New York and blend with memories of historical scenes from Lithuania. Themes of traumatic memory, guilt, and revenge are built upon the narrator's stream of consciousness concerning a Lithuanian Jewish man called Izaokas, whom he supposedly murdered out of revenge during the pogrom right at the beginning of the war, and the narrator's lost lover, a fellow writer and war refugee from Lithuania called Živilė.

The novel starts with the memory of the pogrom in Kaunas, Lithuania, a

surreal representation of one of the first and most violent pogroms in Lithuania, during which a group of Jewish men were tortured and murdered in Lietūkis garage. Gluosnis is initially watching the humiliation and violence with the crowd of "random passers-by—women, men, children," thus taking the position of the observer before turning into the perpetrator (Škėma 9). Perhaps for the first time in Lithuanian literature, the writer depicts bystanders as voyeuristic accomplices: "They all had the same look in their eyes, as if to say, 'I want to see more,' the expression one has when watching a fire or a flood from a position of safety" (12). In the novel, the voyeuristic curiosity of onlookers at the scene of incredible violence is personified in the image of an old Lithuanian grandmother with a head-kerchief and "miniscule" face, "who was pushing herself higher up on her toes to see, small and thirsty" (13). The image of this character, as the embodiment of the local bystander, is emphasized by signs of her local rootedness: not only by the kerchief—a traditional image of the elderly Lithuanian woman—but also by her folksy colloquial dialect, when she asks Gluosnis: "Will they perhaps kill them right here?" (13). Paradoxically, this old "granny" (*bobulė*) surprises Gluosnis by articulating his wish for bloodthirsty revenge ("It was his wish which was turned into words on the lips of this scrawny grandma"). Thus, in the text, there is a clear bond between the "thirsty" bystander and the perpetrator, a thin line that Gluosnis crosses when he murders a Jewish man called Izaokas, who allegedly tortured the imprisoned Gluosnis in an NKVD cell. After the murder, the scene is ended by the same intimate questioning of the "thirsty" granny: "So did you get your revenge, child?" The image of the old woman asking this question is evoked repeatedly, right to the very last chapter, reinforcing the bond between the perpetrator and the onlookers and rooting them in the locale. The following chapters take place interchangeably in emigration (Chicago, Michigan, New York, and other locations), with memory flashbacks to Lithuania, the two locations becoming part of one surreal world where Gluosnis's wounded psyche is meandering.

The film conforms to the novel by opening with the scene of the Lietūkis pogrom, providing an extended spectacle depicting the massacre in graphic detail, including the murder of Izaokas by Gluosnis. This opening scene also shows the group of onlookers watching the act of killing and gives a glimpse of the bodies of the dead Jews being looted: the audience sees a woman rushing onto the murder scene and taking the boots of a victim. However, this is only a fleeting moment, intelligible only to those in the audience with deep historical knowledge of the local violence, and easily lost among the other details of the murder scene. In stark contrast with the book, the local rootedness of bystanders and perpetrators is lost in the film when a crowd of onlookers bursts in, shouting "Juden raus" ("Jews out" in German). Coming after the opening titles, which explain how some Lithuanians were influenced by German propaganda, the improbable depiction of the crowd shouting in German

disassociates the violence from local subjectivity. In stark contrast to the intimate portrayal of the complicit bystander in the novel, the film presents the bystanders at a distance, with foreign, as distinct from local, markers of identity. Similarly, the image of some men tortured by water hosing, repeatedly reported as an element of the pogrom at the Lietūkis garage, is also left in the background and comes back into focus later, in the torture scene in the prison cell of Soviet Lithuania.

If the book explores the subjectivity of the émigré perpetrator-protagonist wrestling with guilt, shame, and madness against the urban backdrops of New York and Chicago, the film is more focused on the psychological and moral deterioration of Gluosnis, living in fear and anxiety of being discovered as a former German collaborator in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. This wider historical lens raises the challenge of exploring the entanglement of historical experiences—the Nazi and Soviet occupations—that are most often narrated as separate events. The pervasive violence of the Soviet regime is conveyed through the regular appearance of corpses that Gluosnis encounters in his work as a forensic photographer for the KGB. This gruesome parade is ostensibly tangential to the plot, but it gathers prominence over the course of the film conveying the fear and repression of the Soviet regime, relegating the protagonist's reckoning with his own act of perpetration to the background.

The storyline of the film proceeds as follows: a Lithuanian émigré film maker called Gediminas returns to Lithuania as part of Nikita Khrushchev's attempt to establish closer ties between the émigré communities abroad and the USSR. He is met with great respect and aplomb and is promised support to make a film, using his original script, about the events of June 1941. In Lithuania, he meets his friend Gluosnis, whom he has not seen for twenty years, and Gluosnis's wife, who is also part of the pre-war milieu he left behind. Twenty years ago, both Gluosnis and Gediminas were vying for her favor. Meanwhile, the relationship of Gluosnis and his wife has become strained by Gluosnis's personal and moral deterioration and abuse of alcohol. Thus, it is an encounter of three Lithuanians, scattered by war and marked by the melodramatic intrigue of a love triangle.

Gediminas is subject to constant KGB surveillance, and his film script attracts the attention of a young and highly enthusiastic Lithuanian KGB officer named Kazys. Kazys notes how the script includes fine details about the massacre recorded only in police files and, as a result, suspects that Gediminas must have taken part in the pogrom. He is so convinced of this that he presses on with his investigation despite the direct orders of his superiors to desist. In the end, Kazys has the émigré Gediminas tortured to death by beating and water hosing in one of the KGB cellars. Before this, however, Gediminas confesses to Gluosnis to not having participated in the Kaunas pogrom and, in fact, not being the author of the film script, which he had received from his fellow émigré friend, Antanas Škėma, who gave it to him before he

died. In the end, it remains completely unclear as to whether the author of the script did take part in the pogrom and the killing or whether he, in his own turn, represented some other person's experience.

Meanwhile, Gluosnis, who conceals his participation in the massacre and who is employed by the KGB as a technician, is given the task of developing negatives of the photos taken of the Lietūkis garage massacre, which the KGB officer received from German archives. While doing this work, he discovers and attempts to hide a photo that places him at the scene of the crime. He eventually confesses to an interrogator that he, indeed, was there and killed his neighbor, Izaokas Kaplanas, whom he suspected of bearing false witness and betraying him to the NKVD before the war. The interrogator informs Gluosnis that Izaokas was not guilty of anything: he was arrested at the same time as Gluosnis because he refused to provide information about the whereabouts of anti-Soviet partisans. The story ends with the attempts of Gluosnis's wife to visit him in the psychiatric hospital, one of the archetypical locations of Soviet repressions. After thirty failed attempts to see him, she is given one more refusal. In the final scene, Gluosnis enters a surreal space, where he sees Izaokas lying in a puddle of blood. Gluosnis lies down next to Izaokas and embraces him.

Thus, although the murder of Izaokas is shown in graphic detail during the opening scene of the pogrom, he does not appear in the film as a protagonist with any recognizable identity or subjectivity. The viewer sees him only three times: first, as a figure on his knees, his head down and his face invisible, just before he is killed. Second, when Gluosnis notices a man walking along the road, asks the driver to stop, gets out of the car, and chases the man across the fields. Again, the face of this man, whom a viewer familiar with the book may presume to be Izaokas, is not shown. The last time the viewer sees Izaokas is in the final, surreal scene in the psychiatric hospital. This approach stands in sharp contrast to that of Škėma's book, where Izaokas exercises agency—albeit in a surreal way—and has a distinct identity. Perhaps most importantly, the displacement of the action from America to the USSR and the foregrounding of this setting, emphasizing the pervasive violence of the USSR, is significant to the framing of the question of perpetration, as it embeds the atrocity of the Kaunas pogrom, perhaps even familiarizing it for the Lithuanian viewer, within the broader historical context of Lithuania's occupation by the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

The production of these two films and their simultaneous release in 2019 reflect the growing engagement of Lithuanian artists, intellectuals, and society with the legacy of collaboration with the Nazis and local participation in the Holocaust, as well as the challenges this effort entails. Building upon narratives written decades earlier in North America, the films are also manifes-

tations of the layered, complex evolution of memory and of its translation and transference over time and space.

Based on the short story of a Jewish-Russian writer with close ties to the Soviet Lithuanian intelligentsia, who sought to understand and represent the non-Jewish Lithuanian perspective on World War II, *Purple Smoke* is the first Lithuanian film made in a popular genre to portray a direct, personal, and visceral encounter between a Lithuanian perpetrator and a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, set in the intimate milieu of the village community in which they were both rooted, a setting that has long been reserved as a space for ethnic Lithuanian protagonists in exclusively "national" narratives. By developing a relatively, perhaps excessively, empathetic portrayal of a Lithuanian Holocaust perpetrator through the eyes of the Jewish victim, the film constructs a unique platform that enables a limited (existential and perspectival) identification of the viewer with the perpetrator, which stops short of affective and ideological identification. Indeed, the film provokes a certain alienation of the "fighting and suffering" narrative of the post-war period by foregrounding the "Lithuanian" village as the site not only of heroic resistance but also of brutal, intimate violence. Specifically, by representing the return of a Jewish survivor to the site of trauma, the film challenges standard Lithuanian representations of the post-war period. That said, *Purple Smoke* could hardly be described as a hard-hitting account of the role of Lithuanians as perpetrators. Indeed, the empathy shown by Joseph towards Vladas would come across as apologetic if it were not focalized through the eyes of a Jewish descendant of Holocaust victims. Nevertheless, *Purple Smoke* remains the first popular film to broach the implication of certain Lithuanian freedom fighters in the commission of historical atrocities, addressing a sensitive and uncomfortable issue directly on screen.

Izaokas, by way of contrast, enables all five of McGlothlin's modalities of viewer identification with the Holocaust perpetrator. Although the film opens with a stark and uncompromising representation of the massacre of Jews at the Lietūkis garage, the narrative is strongly focalized by the perpetrator's perspective. The initial scene of Izaokas's murder and the ethical issues it raises are gradually overwhelmed by the complexities of the love triangle, impassioned debates about Lithuanian history, and the foregrounded "background" of Soviet brutality. While the narrative emphasizes the innocence of Izaokas, insofar as it is revealed by the KGB agent that he did not betray Gluosnis as Gluosnis had suspected, the film also bridges the gap between Gluosnis as the murderer and Izaokas as the victim by portraying them both as victims, a bridge cemented in the final scene of Gluosnis embracing Izaokas's body. In this regard, the focalization of the narrative is quite myopically restricted, not only to the perspective of the individual perpetrator, Gluosnis, but to the collective Lithuanian memory of Soviet repression. Notably, a visual, not to mention ethical and ideological parallel, is made between the

water hosing of Jews at the Lietūkis garage massacre and the water hosing of Gediminas during his torture by the KGB. Thus, while the "return" of diasporic memory of the Holocaust to Lithuania through the screening of Škėma's novel provoked a confrontation with the memory of perpetration, the ethics and aesthetics of *Izaokas* make the Holocaust into a foil for Lithuanian suffering under the Soviets.

While the response of actual viewers can only be surmised, *Purple Smoke* stages a vibrant confrontation between the perspectives of victim and perpetrator. The same cannot be said of *Izaokas*, insofar as the Jewish victim remains "faceless" and without agency, and the Holocaust narrative is arguably buried in the story of Soviet occupation. Nonetheless, both films break new ground by addressing a highly sensitive topic—the role of Lithuanians in the killing of their Jewish neighbors—through the representation of the intimacy of genocidal violence in the Lithuanian village and the notorious pogrom at the Lietūkis garage in Kaunas. As such, they represent a small step forward along the long and difficult road of national reckoning with the legacy of perpetration during World War II.

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes two feature films dealing with the collaboration of Lithuanians in the Holocaust. *Purple Smoke Izaokas* (2019) represent a step forward along the road of national reckoning with the legacy of perpetration, challenging received narratives of national victimhood and heroism. The ethics of representing the subjective position of the perpetrator are demanding, requiring a degree of empathy to develop understanding, but stopping short of identification. While *Purple Smoke* enables considerable empathy for the perpetrator, it focalizes history from the perspective of the victim. *Izaokas*, on the other hand, creates a moral hazard by dramatizing history from the perspective of the perpetrator, and make the Holocaust into a foil for Lithuanian suffering under the Soviets.