

Invitation to lecture:

**“Between Suspense and Noir: Hitchcock’s
I Confess and the Borderlands of Genre and
Gender”**



David Greven

Professor of English (University of South Carolina)

Organizer: Stefan L. Brandt (University of Graz)

Moderator: Liliia Makala (University Of Graz)

Friday, June 30, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

SR 34.D2, Attemsgasse 25 / DG, 8010 Graz



David Greven is Professor of English at the University of South Carolina. Greven specializes in both nineteenth-century American literature and Hollywood film. His books include *Intimate Violence: Hitchcock, Sex, and Queer Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2017), *Gender Protest and Same-Sex Desire in Antebellum American Literature* (Ashgate, 2014), *Psycho-Sexual: Male Desire in Hitchcock, De Palma, Scorsese, and Friedkin* (The University of Texas Press, 2013), *The Fragility of Manhood: Hawthorne, Freud, and the Politics of Gender* (The Ohio State University Press, 2012), *Manhood in Hollywood from Bush to Bush* (The University of Texas Press, 2009), and *Men Beyond Desire: Manhood, Sex, and Violation in American Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

ABSTRACT: As James Naremore observes, Hitchcock's suspense films are always "at the margins of noir." This lecture considers *I Confess* (1953) as a film where form matches content. Just as Father Michael Logan (Montgomery Clift) forever runs the risk of exposing the guilt of Otto Keller (O. E. Hasse), the murderer who confesses to and then hounds Logan, „I Confess“ forever threatens to expose the noir underpinnings of the Hitchcock thriller. *I Confess* offers a pastiche of noir by choosing as its setting not the trademark noir city Los Angeles but instead the French-Canadian Quebec City. Similarly, the hero, Logan, is not a typically morally compromised and suspect noir male protagonist but a Catholic priest doing his duty and remaining bound the strictures of the Catholic sacrament of confession, which prevents Logan from revealing Keller's crime. The film shifts perspective repeatedly, undermining our sense of reality when the socialite that loves the priest (Anne Baxter) recounts what may or may not have occurred between her and Logan through mazy, misleading flashback. The film's quasi-explicitness as noir matches the quasi-explicitness of homosexual themes in the film. The film makes Clift's Logan an enigmatic, inscrutable figure in order to heighten the illicit nature of his sexuality. The film liminally oscillates between the genres of suspense thriller and noir, and this shifting movement is paralleled by the fluid reconfiguration of gendered identities and ethical positions among the characters.

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