



Call for Papers

Alterity

Dialogues on Difference and Identity in Romance Studies

30th Carolina Conference for Romance Studies

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

April 17-18, 2026

Submission Deadline: January 31st 2026

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Madeleine Dobie

The concept of *alterity*, or “otherness,” denotes the condition of being different from, and defined in opposition to, the self. Far from a static distinction, this opposition of self and other has evolved across time and cultures, reflecting shifting social, political, and symbolic orders. The meaning of alterity itself is plural and contingent, taking on multiple forms essential to understanding human relationships. This complexity further deepens when considered through the Lacanian domains of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic, which structure how subjects relate to the other in language, desire, and social order. Such frameworks are especially valuable for literary analysis, where symbolism and representation continuously negotiate and redefine these boundaries.

The modern idea of *otherness* draws on insights from psychology, philosophy, politics, sociology, and literature. Starting from Alfred Schutz’s perspective, writing in exile during the Nazi era, where the “stranger” is forced to assimilate to survive, and moving to the German sociologist Georg Simmel, who saw the stranger as both near and distant, we find the foundations for modern accounts of otherness. Building on them, Bauman’s notion of liquid modernity, Said’s critique of the construction of the “colonial Other”, and Fanon’s analysis of colonial control reveal how modern systems rely on exclusion and violence against those who resist established norms. These genealogies of alterity become especially urgent in the context of colonialism, where the construction of “the other” was central to imperial domination and the shaping of national imaginaries. Given the colonial entanglements of Romance cultures, the critical examination of alterity is indispensable, and literature offers a privileged space in which otherness can be represented, resisted, or reimagined.

In contrast to a view of alterity defined purely by opposition or domination, there is also the notion of the “other” as a new reality to explore and learn from. Across history and literature, the “other” is not always an entity to subjugate or resist, but one that inspires curiosity and genuine interest. Encounters with the “other” have offered opportunities to gain fresh perspectives on the world, revealing both the nature and limitations of the “self.” Within the Enlightenment and Western engagement with the so-called “Orient,” Aravamudan (2011) argues that it would be reductive to view these interactions solely as relationships of domination; efforts toward cross-cultural understanding were frequently made, and Enlightenment thinkers often subjected “the self” to as much critique as “the other.” Such engagements with alterity have historically fostered relativism, tolerance, and the comparative study of law, religion, and custom, ultimately prompting self-reflection and critique. This dynamic shifting with the observer’s gaze, finds vivid expression in different literary works.

Before the 17th and 18th centuries, the representation of the “Other” was largely the domain of missionaries and early ethnographers, whose accounts often served imperial interests and relied on forms that maintained a clear sense of distance and superiority. With the emergence of travel narratives in the early modern period, however, the figure of the “Other” began to be depicted in more complex ways. “Exotic” epistolary novels, such as Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* (1721), Madame de Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne* (1747), and their literary legacy, often portray “Oriental” characters in a favorable light, while Europeans appear flawed. Behind the guise of foreign travelers stands the European author, whose seemingly naïve characters become a vehicle for critiquing European society and religion, suggesting that the “Other” was never truly separate, and the boundary between West and East less clear than it seemed.

In contemporary literature, science fiction is a genre that is uniquely equipped to probe the boundaries of identity and difference. Presenting “the other” in manifold forms—whether as a non-human animal, a robot, an alien, a monster—science fiction interrogates alterity not as an external threat but as a reflective mirror for self-understanding, identity critique, and cross-cultural empathy. Fredric Brown’s short story *Sentry* (1954), for example, overturns the protagonist’s, and the reader’s, perception of terrifying alien enemies when they are ultimately revealed to be human.

The 30th annual *Carolina Conference for Romance Studies* invites graduate and undergraduate students, professors, scholars, and authors from any discipline to submit scholarly essays that address or investigate the theme of *alterity* as it pertains to the far-reaching Romance world. Potential fields, theoretical approaches, and topics of interest may include but are not limited to the following:

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| - Animal Studies | - Environmental Humanities | - Modern & Early Modern Literature Studies |
| - Antihumanism | - Feminist Studies | - Performance Studies |
| - Art History | - Film and Media Studies | - Posthumanism |
| - Biopolitics | - Gender and Women's Studies | - Queer Studies |
| - Diaspora Studies/Migration | - History | - Religious Studies |
| - Classical Antiquity | - Indigenous Studies | - Renaissance Studies |
| - Colonial and Postcolonial Studies | - Language and Identity | - Science-fiction |
| - Comparative Literature | - Linguistics | - Transatlantic Studies |
| - Critical Race Studies | - Medical Humanities | - Transhumanism |
| - Cultural Studies | - Memory Studies | - Violence and Trauma Studies |
| - Disability Studies | - Modernism and Avant-Gardes | |
| - Ecocriticism | | |

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Please submit abstracts of up to 250 words using the submission form via the CCRS website (ccrs.unc.edu). The deadline for submission is **January 31st, 2026**. We welcome papers submitted in French, English, Italian, Portuguese, or Spanish. Panel proposals and roundtables that are language and/or topic-specific are also welcomed, and each participant should individually complete a submission form. Please direct any questions to ccrs@unc.edu.

Submissions must include the following information:

- Name:
- Email Address:
- Affiliation:
- Classification: (Professor, Ph.D. Student, M.A. Student, Undergraduate Student, Post-doc, independent researcher, etc.)
- Presentation Title:
- Abstract (250 words, single-spaced):
- Relevant Time Period(s) and Country(-ies):
- Keywords (up to six):