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**Othering the Black in the Three Orders: *Heart of Darkness*
and *Benito Cereno***

In the mid – to – late nineteenth century, both *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the masterwork by British novelist Joseph Conrad, and *Benito Cereno* (1855), the political novella by American writer Herman Melville have vigilantly but ambiguously touched racial issues. Both novellas tell the story of the white protagonists – Kurtz and Cereno – who die of horror after seeing the “heart of darkness”. And the two novelists’ contradictory stance, both attacking and defensive, on colonialism and slavery has made the two texts comparable in the similarities and differences of British and American writers’ attitude toward racial matters in the nineteenth century. Previous studies have mainly focused on the two novelists’ racial stance and the theme of horror and evil from the perspective of post – colonialism, reader – response theory and philosophy. Drawing upon Jacques Lacan’s Three Orders, particularly the notion of the “other/Other”, this paper seeks to set the complex relationships between blacks and whites in the Three Orders, suggesting that blacks have been passively othered by whites as the Lacanian other and they are also the Lacanian Other who have progressively othered whites. In the Imaginary order, Conrad more radically denounces colonialism; in the Real order, Melville challenges the racial stereotype of blacks more directly. Finally, in the Symbolic order, both novelists have inspiringly explored the possibility of blacks being the dominant Other, but both end with the conclusion that a black government will be dark, enigmatic and hopeless. Although Conrad and Melville still take an ambivalent stance on racial issues, they have made brave and profound attempts for the racial equality.