

Melville and Grabbe: A Letter*

Dear Editors,

As regards Grabbe's *Don Juan und Faust* as a possible source for Melville, I'm afraid there is no evidence whatsoever that Melville read German and Professor Cook makes no mention of an English translation of Grabbe's play that would have been available to Melville. (I assume that the English translation she offers in brackets is her own.)

Professor Cook's suggestion that Grabbe is the source of Melville's words about the Godhead is striking indeed, but it leaves other possibilities that need further exploration. (1) Behind Grabbe is an ultimate source, available both to him (in German?) and to Melville (in English). (2) Grabbe's lines were translated into English by another author whose work Melville knew. (3) Some friend of Melville who read German, such as George J. Adler, knew Grabbe's writings and called Melville's attention to the lines in question. (4) The similarities are purely coincidental. I think that the second of these possibilities is the most likely, and I hope that another contributor can settle the matter by coming forth with some hard evidence.

Sincerely yours,

Merton M. Sealts, Jr.

*Reference: Eleanor Cook, "Herman Melville and Christian Grabbe: A Source for The Godhead is Broken," *Connotations* 4.3 (1994/95): 225-27.