

## German Literature in Bessarabia 07—Berta Häußer

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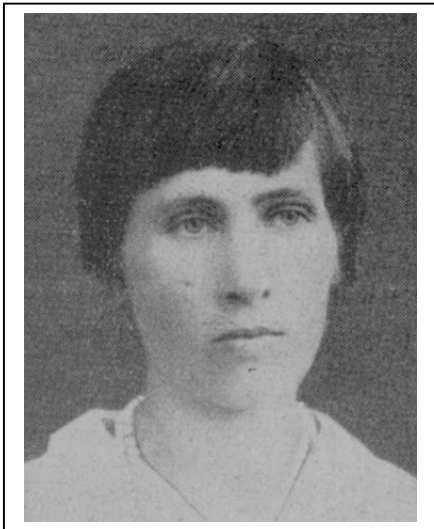
To have a better understanding of the following translation, it would serve you well if you were able to view German Literature in Bessarabia 01—Introduction.

[Note: The poem below is also given in the original German to show the rhyming which is difficult to reproduce in English. Comments in square brackets in the document are those of the translator.]

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[Translation Begins]

**Berta Häußer. (— r)**



On a dull, foggy November day, in 1893, I saw the light of day. This first day of my life left its mark on me. Fog and clouds have remained my faithful companions. Again and again I chased the sun's rays to hold fast to them, again and again they slipped away from me, and I stood with empty hands.

When I was 11 years old, my beloved father died. What this means can only be understood by those who themselves had to do without the protective, supportive hand of the father.

First, I attended the village school in Brienne, and then 2 years a Private Girls' School in Arzis. Then came the seriousness of life: I became a stepchild, and in a certain sense I have remained so until today.

(Berta Häußer and her sister, teacher Antonie Häußer, can be addressed as the German-Bessarabian masters of lyrical poetry).

[A Poem and a Story by Berta Häußer]

**a) *Herbst***

*Wie hab ich früher dich geliebt,  
O Herbst, mit deinem tollen Spiel,  
Den bunten Blättern rot und gelb,  
Dem weiten, kahlen Stoppelfeld!  
Wenn Wolken flogen um die Wett'  
Mit Wandervögel langer Kett'.  
Wenn Sturmwind türmte Wolken zu Hauf,  
Mich boshaft hemmend im schnellen Lauf.  
Und heut? — Die Brust ist mir so leer,  
Fühlt nur ein brennend Abschiedsweh'.  
Wenn ich jetzt Blätter fallen seh',  
Die sich im Todestanze dreh'n,  
Dann denk ich nur allein an dich  
Und an ein bleiches Angesicht.  
Wie hab' ich früher dich geliebt,  
O Herbst, mit deinem tollen Spiel.*

**a) *Autumn***

How I used to love you,  
O autumn, with your great performance,  
The colorful leaves red and yellow,  
The wide, bare stubble field!  
When clouds flew around the competition  
With migrating birds long chains.  
When storm winds piled up clouds in abundance,  
Me mischievously inhibiting in the fast running.  
And today? — My chest is so empty,  
Just feels like a burning farewell pain.  
When I see leaves falling now,  
Who turn in the dance of death,  
Then I only think of you  
And of a pale face.  
How I have loved you before,  
O autumn, with your great performance.

**b) *The Brothers***

The two yard farmers (*Hofbauer*) were brothers and neighbors at the same time. Originally, Yard Farmer Franz lived on the lower row. But when the yard next to Yard Farmer Hans was sold, he also quickly sold his yard on the lower row and bought the yard next to his brother. Yard Farmer Hans muttered angrily: “He could have stayed on the lower row.” A few days later, Yard Farmer Franz visited his brother and informed him that he would move to his new yard the next day.

Yard Farmer Hans did not say yes—nor no to his brother’s announcement; as if he had not understood it at all. The next morning, he was the first on his brother’s yard: with horses, wagon, hired man and maid to help with the change of dwelling.

The villagers said: “In the whole world there is no other such difference among brothers as between Yard Farmer Franz and Yard Farmer Hans.” “That is surely true,” said one farmer, “but they stick together as if hardly like two. One goes through thick and thin for the other.”

I once came to this when Yard Farmer Hans was scolding a lot about his brother Franz. I agreed with him in everything and said: ‘Yes, your brother Franz is a real bore.’ — “Whaaat?” shouted Yard Farmer Hans at me — “my brother is a real bore? And if he is one, then he is worth a hundred times more than you!” I left it alone the second time and did not interfere again when the Yard Farmer brothers scolded one over the other.

In fact, one could not imagine greater contrasts than the two brothers were, both internally and externally. Tall, blond, broad-shouldered the one, small, dark, delicate the other. Only in the rapid flair up, which immediately subsided again, were both the same.

Yard Farmer Hans had something rigid, military about him, one could notice him as of soldiers, as he had served in a border regiment as a non-commissioned officer; while the big blonde brother was allowed to stay at home with his father and mother. Subsequently, he also had a certain carelessness, which Yard Farmer Hans always reprimanded with the words: "One notices that Franz did not serve as a soldier." Yard Farmer Hans was a passionate smoker, so that his wife often said angrily: "Man, light one cigarette from the other, then at least you will save on matches!" To which the farmer replied each time: "Woman, let me smoke, if I do not smoke anymore, then I will be seriously sick." If Yard Farmer Franz smoked a cigarette in a social gathering, he behaved so clumsily that he – because he kept taking the cigarette out of his mouth and placing it on the table cloth – burned large holes in the host's table cloth. But Yard Farmer Franz was noble—he regularly paid for the table cloth or bought a new one. And even for himself, after partaking of the cigarette, it was so bad that he had to drink a large glass of schnapps, with a good pinch of pepper in it, so that he would get better again.

If there was anything to be determined at a community meeting, it was the rule that the yard farmer brothers were in opposition to each other ; a person was not used to it being any other way. And immediately each of the brothers had like-minded people behind them, and each party tried to achieve victory. The one who was then defeated was the first to leave the meetinghouse, and his followers followed him on the foot.

On another occasion, there was a community meeting and the request was made to purchase some expensive thing: Yard Farmer Franz was fired up (*Feuer und Flamme*) for it and requested that the thing be ordered immediately and the money collected. His brother Hans, on the other hand, advised: to postpone the matter, to think about it, because the matter was too expensive to settle it "immediately" (*Knall und Fall*). The proposal of Yard Farmer Hans was accepted. Furious, his brother Franz called out to him: "I would not have believed that I had such a jackass as my brother." Yard Farmer Hans acknowledged the insult with scornful silence. The wife of Yard Farmer Hans learned of the insult done to her husband and said indignantly: "I am not going to go to the yard of Franz anymore, and the cuckoo always calls cuckoo. Just look at his machine shed, where the most modern machines lie broken and bent on a pile, there you can see who is a jackass. How he did boast last summer when he drove into the harvest with his new "Hercules", it was unbearable. And then, what happened? He did not mow half an acre (*Deßjatine*) with his new "Hercules" and then it lay broken-winged in the middle of the grain field. And afterwards, he came and borrowed our old mowing machine so that he could mow his crops." Yard Farmer Hans laughed at his wife's excitement. "But woman," he said, "Franz did not mean the jackass thing seriously, he was just angry with me because the majority of the voices were on my side." A few days later, Yard Farmer Franz showed up at his brother's house and asked: "Why doesn't your wife come to us anymore? We are used to her coming to us every day." "She is angry with you because of the jackass you attached to me in the meetinghouse." "But brother, what was in the meetinghouse, we leave in the meetinghouse and do not carry it home. You know that was not meant seriously. Do we still understand each other, brother?" Laughing, they looked into each other's eyes. "So: no offense, brother." "No offense, Franz."

“And your wife will visiting us again?” “Yes, she has to come over to you today.” And peace was restored. So the brothers often spoke their minds to each other thoroughly, but defiance and anger were not allowed to permanently build a nest.

Yard Farmer Hans had a tight, soldierly order. And the farmhands had a certain respect, even fear, for the farmer. He did not proceed mildly when a thing was ruined through negligence or recklessness.

With Yard Farmer Franz it was the opposite: there was a good-natured unconcern. If it did not work out at all, then it was stormy for a while, and then everything stayed as before. Yard Farmer Franz ate with children and hired workers at a table. One morning, when breakfast was served and the tea poured into the glasses, the maid called to come and eat. The people sat down at the table and began to drink tea. But, one by one, they put down their glass again and ate their bread without the tea. The farmer also made a sour face, but continued to drink calmly. After a while, he looked at the others questioningly, “Why don't you drink the tea?” “It tastes so funny,” said one hired man. “So, you can still drink it. You will sometimes get something else to eat in life than funny-tasting tea.” And everyone had to drink his glass. But no one poured himself a second one. When everyone was outside, the farmer angrily asked the maid: “What kind of stuff did you put in it? Look in the tea maker, it seems to me that the tea tasted like a hair comb or something like that.” In fact, a half-overcooked hair comb appeared at the bottom of the tea kettle. The farmer looked sternly at the maid: “Just want you to know that this is not going to happen a second time!”

The news of the found hair comb entered the farmyard to the hired men. They scolded and spit. “Wait, I will pay it back,” said the yearly hired man, “feeding a hair comb tea.” When the hired man and maid met later in the farmyard, he hissed at her: “Hair comb tea cook, I am telling you: you and I are not going to eat Pentecost cakes together on the Yard Farmer yard. If you do not go, then I am going. Do you think I want to eat your corruption throughout the whole year?” Weeping, the maid complained about the matter to the farmer. “Will it also annoy the hired men so that they are angry with you? With such a tea in my stomach, I cannot blame them either.” But then he commanded the hired men that the hair-comb story should no longer be mentioned.

If Yard Farmer Hans went hunting, he did not come home without a roast. His brother, on the other hand, rarely had hunting luck. If he did at one time hunt down a rabbit, he was so excited that he could not eat any of it.

After years, Yard Farmer Hans fell ill, and when no doctor could help him, and he felt that he was about to die, he had his brother Franz called. “Franz,” he said, “it is over with me. When I am gone, take care of my wife, my children. Make sure that they become good, useful people.” Then they shook hands and looked deeply into each other's eyes.

They were brothers despite their different characters, despite their differences of opinion and despite all external differences. They were connected by the inner harmony that brought them together again and again and which did not allow a rift to arise.

[Translation Ends]