

German Literature in Bessarabia 04—Emanuel Schlechter

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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.

In the following document, Emanuel Schlechter uses two German languages—Hochdeutsch and the Schwäbisch dialect. I have struggled with how to show the difference of the two when translating everything into English only. My conclusion was to not only show an English translation in this document, but to also show the German Hochdeutsch and Schwäbisch so that the reader, who might have an interest in how the two differ, can compare the translation with the original. In the third section, the poetry is also given in the original German to understand the rhyming which is difficult to reproduce in English

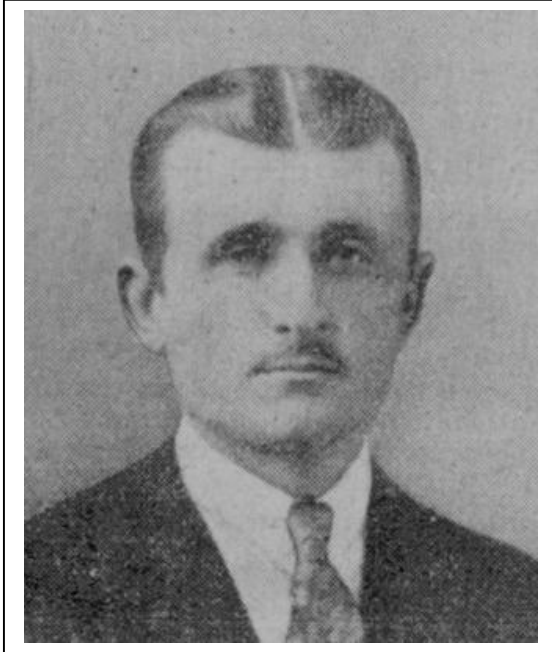
[Note: Comments in square brackets in the document are those of the translator.]

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[Translation Begins]

Emanuel Schlechter (Solo)

Born New Year's Eve 1895-96 in Plotzk. In 1899, family moves to Sofiental. There he attended a village school until 1908. From 1908-1912, attended the Werner School. Expelled from school in 1911 because of overly cheeky poems, then allowed to return. In 1912, he entered the Nikolayev Secondary School. In 1915, after completion of the 8th grade, in the war at the



Turkish Front. In 1919, a strolling excursion through Europe. In 1920, teacher and sexton at Sofiental at the same time notary/clerk until 1924. From then on, shopkeeper, farmer, winemaker and private individual. On 28 December, 1929, married to Lilly, née Voßler; to date 2 sons: Kurt 4 and a half years, Viktor 4 months.

As a young student, he was a tireless verse patcher and passionate poet. After entering secondary school, he proceeded to Russian verses and all together wrote a lot of it. All the poetic outpourings of youth were lost during the war,—Thank God! After the war, a rapid maturation and realization that I actually had no training, as a mixture of German, Russian and Romanian, and that I actually did not speak any language well. For that reason the inhibition and caution with his own

poetic productions. For that reason the excessive modesty and seclusion before the public. Then the stomach worries and, as the biggest obstacle, finally the apathetic environment, the nothing stimulating wasteland and emptiness! —Maybe talent, but little will and even less faith! Writer only out of hobby and sometimes even passionately, unfortunately I never ventured for a second time to an unfinished manuscript, which then mostly got lost. With the increasing years, and family worries, there is less and less time for this hobby, which, unfortunately, already brought me many inconveniences.—Never thought of taking up writing as a profession, since it could never feed its person here in Bessarabia. Therefore, as said: Some talent and motivation would be there, but little will and even less self-confidence. (From the pen of Solo comes the best German-Bessarabian short story: *Der Konradvetter* [Cousin Konrad], which would deserve a worthy place even in general German literature.)

[Two Stories and a Poem by Emanuel Schlechter]

Village Buzz.

I. The Strange Fox.

Yes, with the hunters this is a very special thing. They have enthusiasm and also make a mistake accordingly. And sometimes quite appropriately. In addition, at the beginning of the hunt, the

young wine has fermented, which in turn affects their enthusiasm. It then happens that the hunter often sees two rabbits running over each other: the upper one he shoots away, the lower one jumps to the devil—and remains lying down....at best the hunter.

But this is a chapter in itself. I wanted to talk about a fox — or rather about a melon, that is, actually a cucumber, — or no, let's stay with the fox.

So I will start from scratch; for I am not strong in botany, and I only pursue natural sciences as far as it is to the advantage of my stomach. As a friend of rarities and delicacies, I ordered cucumber seeds, very special, toward the end of winter; referred to in a catalogue as snake cucumbers, length 1 to 1½ meters, next to it a likely picture of giant cucumbers twisting like snakes in the arbor. — A rarity, isn't it? — So I plant these miracle things, take care of them, water them and wait for the result. — They really thrive excellently, become huge, snake-like and I enjoy them. Of course, only with the eyes; for with the delicacy it was nothing for the time being: I could not find or determine any taste at all. To come to the point: a rotten thing, like generally all rarities.

Now comes the miracle. In addition, I had planted sugar melons and pumpkins, which grew over to the snake cucumbers and, as it seemed, established a huge love affair with them. If there is no sixth commandment in botany, the cucumbers have seduced the melons, or the melons — the cucumbers; perhaps also the pumpkins managed the first two, — unfortunately I could not determine that as a layman. The fact is, however, that cucumbers, melons and pumpkins bloomed throughout the summer in peaceful, mutual entwining and diligently bearing fruit. — What had no further consequence, by the way, was that the melons — they were melons, the pumpkins—remained what they were. Only the taste was gone: the pumpkins tasted like cucumber salad, the cucumbers — like pumpkin pie and the melons — well, you can already imagine it yourself. — I attributed it all to bad weather, and my pigs, by the way, found everything tasty.

Winter passed and I had forgotten about the snake cucumbers and everything. This year, I did not plant any more snake cucumbers, only sugar melons from my own seed from last year, of course. But who understands my amazement when the first melons began to bear fruit? — Melon (*Melone*) — no melon; — cucumber (*Gurke*) — no cucumber; — pumpkin (*Kürbis*) — certainly nothing to mention, — a complete miscarriage, — something unprecedented. — Imagine a thing, something like an Armenian bagpipe, long, round curved, — or even better: take a Bessarabian smoked pork belly, paint it golden yellow and you have a comparison with such a combination “*Gurmekür*” [first German letters of cucumber, melon, pumpkin]. —Taste? —Better you don't ask! Take a frozen potato, cut in onion and garlic, mix it with vinegar and castor oil, sprinkle sneezing powder on top...and eat for health, — then we shall continue to talk about taste. So I go home quietly and do not tell anyone about my miracle melons. Let grass grow over it, literally, so that no person sees it. — But fate is horrible: it does not shy away from anything. Now we finally come to the actual story.

Chickens were stolen from a farmer at night. The following night again. Finally, a light went on in the farmer: the thief was a clever fox who walked through the passage hole every evening and collected his indirect taxes. As luck would have it, this good man—namely the farmer, and

indeed also the fox—was a passionate hunter. So he had nothing more urgent to do than to sound the alarm to all gullible hunters and mobilize them. Which could only be right for the other hunters. On another day, the big circle and force hunt took place. From early in the morning until late in the evening, circles were established, powder was exploded, wine was drunk, stories were told and even once two rabbits were shot. Of course, more were hit, but...well, you already know. Finally, at dusk, the robber was tracked down. He escaped a circle and fled into the grassy “fruit and vegetable garden” (*Baschtane*). That is what a hunter claimed, so it had to be so. The “garden” was surrounded with great jubilation; the circle drawn ever tighter. The big moment gets closer and closer. — There, attention! — The hunter who had been robbed saw the chicken thief first: he throws himself flat on the ground. His neighbor to the right did the same: he falls like a sack. His neighbor to the left did the same. The other hunters are on their knees. — Well, fox, — your song is over! Three double shotgun barrels vouch for your death. Like Indians, the first three crept closer. No doubt about it, there lay the clever chicken thief, stretched out and believes himself safe and hidden in the melon vines. Taking good aim, cocking both barrels, shots were fired in quick succession...That is when the spectacle starts. Six shots thunder into the twilight of the evening. At the same time, all hunters storm to the spot with a loud hello...What do they see!...Three shot miracle things: half a melon, half a cucumber, half a pumpkin...No trace of a fox. — what a disappointment! — The hunters shake their heads, look at each other to see who is the most wary, and even forget to laugh. — “It's getting late,” says someone at last, and everyone goes home quietly, as if everyone had been shot themselves...

What next?... The End! That same night the last chickens of the good hunter were carried off and on the door there was a note:

Undoubtedly the thief was here again,
If not the fox, then the melon.

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II. The Life Resilient Tomcat.

Do you have any idea how many lives there are in something like a cat? Especially if this animal is a tomcat? — Unbelievable! — Simply not getting them all! Well, you will hear in a moment!

My neighbor, cunning Frieder [Freddy], had a most amazing tomcat. As long as it was young, it remained most decent and useful. Over the years, however, it became accustomed to various bad habits. Besides, just as one has to deal with people, so also with the cats. Frieder's tomcat eventually became a true house tyrant. It was not a mouser, but neither was it a miser. Cellar and kitchen were its field of activity: butter, sausage, cheese, cream, — it found everything to be tasty and became a genuine consumer of luxurious food. For a change, it also caught young chicks, pigeons or ducklings — just not mice. The mice were too little for it and the rats too distressing.

But Frieder's wife, Marie, is doubly quick-witted: with the tongue as well as with the hand. One day, when the tomcat knocked over a full cream pot so as to be able to eat on the sly more comfortably, she abruptly took a stick and clubbed the tomcat to death. By the way, naturally, the pot too.

“Frieder,” schrie sie vom Keller ‘rauf, “do schlepp den Schmantschlecker fort, der hat vor emmer g’nug!”

“Frieder,” she screamed up out of the cellar, “come here and drag the cream licker out, it has finally had enough!”

Frieder, who secretly liked the tomcat because it constantly annoyed his wife, had nothing more urgent to do than carry out the order.

At noon, when both are sitting at the table, the tomcat comes solemnly into the room, as if it had taken a pleasant walk, and strokes its whiskers heartily. — Startled, Marie got a mouthful stuck in her throat.

“Frieder,” würgt sie heraus, “der Kater isch jo wieder uffg’lebt!”

“Frieder,” she blurted out, “the tomcat has come back to life again!”

“Hajah!” schmunzelt dieser schadenfroh, “kannst du a Katz totschлага? Du muscht bei deine Flöh bleiba!”

“Well, of course!” he grins gleefully, “can you beat a cat to death? You have to stay with your fleas!”

“Was?” kreischt die Marie nun erbost und ergreift den Schürstecken, “i will doch gucka!” — Doch der Kater empfiehl sich rechtzeitig mit einem richtigen Katzenbuckel und der Hieb trifft einen Milchhafen, daß er in Tausend Stücke zerfliegt.

“What?” shrieks Marie angrily and grabs the poker, “Indeed--I will see to it!” — But the tomcat took its leave in good time with a real cat hump-back and the blow hits a milk container so that it shattered into a thousand pieces.

“Hasch guckt?” neckt Frieder und geht rasch an die Arbeit, denn er weiß, daß es im Zimmer nun ungemütlich wird.

“Did you see to it?” teases Frieder and quickly goes to work, because he knows that it is getting uncomfortable in the room.

Am anderen Tage hat die erboste Marie den Kater in den Küchenschrank eingeklemmt und knüppelt ihn zum zweitenmal regelrecht zu Tode. Frieder kommt dazu und sagt: “Das Aas lebt doch wieder uff!”

The next day, angry Marie has trapped the tomcat in the kitchen cupboard and literally beats it to death for the second time. Frieder comes along and says: “Indeed--that rotten carcass is alive again!”

“Was, i will doch gucka!” schimpft Marie und der Kater muß vorläufig in der Küche liegenbleiben. Er ist diesmal wirklich mausetot. — Doch nein, nach einer viertel Stunde fängt er schon wieder an sich zu bewegen. “Hasch guckt?” schmunzelt Frieder, “der hat sieba Leba, den kriegsch nett Kauptt!”

“What! Indeed—I want see to it!” Marie scolds and the tomcat has to stay lying in the kitchen for the time being. It is really dead this time. — But no, after a quarter of an hour it starts moving again. “Did you see to it?” grins Frieder, “it has seven lives, you won’t be able to kill it!”

“Was, i will doch gucka!” eifert die Hausfrau und knüppelt wieder frisch drauflos. Zum drittenmal wird der Kater totgeschlagen. Diesmal engültig. Für alle Fälle knüpft die wütende Hausfrau noch eine Schlinge und hängt den toten Kater vorsorglich an einen Kleiderhaken. Nach einer halben Stunde, als er kein Lebenszeichen mehr von sich gibt, muß ihn Frieder wieder beiseite schaffen. Für immer, wie beide fest überzeugt sind.

“What! Indeed—I will see to it!” the housewife says angrily and starts clubbing all over again. For the third time, the tomcat is beaten to death. This time for good. Just in case, the angry housewife ties a noose and hangs the dead tomcat carefully on a coat hook. After half an hour, when it shows no sign of life, Frieder has to get rid of it again. Forever, as both are firmly convinced.

Am anderen Morgen ist der Kater wieder da und verzehrt gerade zum ersten Frühstück ein junges Küken. — Marie setzt sich vor Schreck auf die Türschwelle und schaut sprachlos zu. Frieder nimmt aus allerhand Respekt die Mütze ab und sagt, nun selbst erstaunt: “Hasch guckt?” der kriegt vom Totschlagen noch bess’rer Appetit!”

The next morning, the tomcat is back and eats a young chick for the first breakfast. — Marie sits down on the doorstep in shock and looks on speechlessly. Frieder takes off his cap out of all sorts of respect and says, now astonished himself: “Do you see to it? It gets an even better appetite by beating it to death!”

“Schaff den Kater weg, du Duckmäuser, sonst geh i selber d’rvon,” fängt Marie aus Aerger plötzlich an zu schluchzen.

“Get rid of the tomcat, you coward, otherwise I will go and do it myself,” suddenly Marie begins to sob out of anger.

“Des wär jo net’s g’fährlichste,” brummt Frieder leise und pfeift seinen Hunden. Kläffend kommen diese angerast und setzen sich auf Frieders Zeichen hinter den Kater. Mit einem elegante Satz klimmt jedoch der Kater auf den nächsten Baum und streicht sich wieder ganz froh den Schnurrbart. Frieder schaut dem Manöver zu und bekommt plötzlich einenen hellen Gedanken. “Wart, Halunke dich werd’ i lerna!; droht er hinauf und holt sich eine Leiter und einen alten Sack. Marie muß die Leiter halten und Frieder klettert siegesbewußt hinauf. Die Hunde merken den Spaß und kreisen freudig bellend um den Baum. Der Kater merkt natürlich auch den Braten und steigt mißtrauisch geworden etwas höher.

“Now that would not be the most risky thing,” Frieder mutters softly and whistles for his dogs. Barking, they come up to him and, at Frieder’s pointing, set out after the tomcat. With a graceful leap, however, the tomcat climbs the nearest tree and happily strokes its whiskers again. Frieder watches the maneuver and suddenly gets a bright idea. “Just you wait, scoundrel, I will teach you!” he threatens and gets a ladder and an old sack. Marie has to hold the ladder and Frieder climbs up triumphantly. The dogs notice the fun and circle happily around the tree—barking.

Of course, the tomcat also notices what is happening and, becoming suspicious, climbs a little higher.

“Paß uff, fall net!” mahnt Marie.

“Look out, don’t fall!” Marie warns.

“Ha, heb’ doi Schurz und fang mi uff!” scherzt Frieder und greift nach dem Flüchtling. Der Kater bedankt sich aber so heftig, daß Frieder vor Schmerz losschreit.

“Okay, hold out your apron and catch me!” Frieder jokes and reaches for the fugitive. But the tomcat declines the helping hand so violently that Frieder cries out in pain.

“Was hasch denn?” fragt Marie.

“Das Aas kratzt jo!” schimpft Frieder.

“Ha, du alter Esel, muscht schmaichla,” belehrt ihn Marie.

“Mies-mies, Satan verdammter, mies’ mies, Schmantschlecker, komm her, mies’ mies,” schmeichelt Frieder zähneknirschend und will dem Kater den Sack über den Kopf stülpen. Dieser fliegt aber fauchend dem Verfolger ins Gesicht und...

“So what happened?” Marie asks.

“The scoundrel scratched me!” Frieder scolded.

“Well, you old jackass, you have to coax,” Marie instructed him.

“Pussy cat, pussy cat, Satan cursed, pussy cat, pussy cat, cream licker, come here, pussy cat, pussy cat.” Frieder flatters with gritted teeth and wants to put the sack over the head of the tomcat. But it flies hissing in the face of the pursuer and...

“Hasch ihn?” fragt Marie, blinzeln auf den Baum. “Au!” antwortet Frieder zugleich unter dem Baum. Der eine Hund klemmt den Schwanz zwischen die Beine und fegt davon; der andere schleppt heulend einen Hinterfuß nach. — Frieder kratzt sich in der Gegend von Hinterpommern und Marie schlägt die Hände zusammen, als ob sie applaudieren wolle. Dann spuckt sie vor Entrüstung aus und verschwindet schimpfend in der Küche.

“Did you get it?” asks Marie, blinking up at the tree.

“Ouch!” replies Frieder at the same time under the tree. One dog clamps its tail between its legs and scamper off; the other, howling, drags a hind foot, following behind. — Frieder scratches himself in the area of posterior Pomerania and Marie clasps her hands together as if to applaud. Then she spits out in indignation and disappears into the kitchen, scolding.

Frieder seeks bloody revenge. — After some time, when the tomcat purrs unsuspectingly at the stove, it is possible to catch him in the sack. Frieder takes the sack on his back, a good stick in his hand, whistles for his dogs and goes straight to the field.

“Wo’naus?” ruft Marie hinternach.

“Hasa fanga!” lacht Frieder und denkt bei sich: “Werden sehen, was der Kater macht, wo keine Bäume sind!”

“Where are you going?” Marie called out after him.

“I caught it!” Frieder laughs and thinks to himself: “We’ll see what the tomcat is going to do where there are no trees!”

Far out in the open field, Frieder puts the sack down, incites the dogs and pours out the tomcat. The dogs attack furiously. But with a large leap the tomcat makes a wide circle and suddenly lands with a magnificent jump on Frieder's head, without him being able to use his club.

“Blitz Donnerwetter!” flucht Frieder und packt den Kater am Schwanz, um ihn von seinem Kopfe herunterzuzerren. Weit gefehlt! — Die Mutze fiel zwar herunter, doch der Kater saß fest! Je mehr Frieder am Schwanz zog und zerrte, desto fester krallte sich der Kater. Zum vollen Unglück rasten auch noch die Hunde an Frieder in die Höhe, so daß der Kater auf Frieders Schädeldecke einen buchstäblichen Hexentanz ausführte... Und Sie können mir glauben, wo des Katers Pfoten sich festkrallten, da wachsen seiner Lebtagene Haare mehr.

“Lightning thunderstorm!” curses Frieder and grabs the tomcat by the tail to drag it off his head. Far from it! — The cap fell down, but the tomcat held on tight! The more Frieder pulled and tugged by the tail, the harder the tomcat clawed. And totally unfortunate, the dogs raced up to Frieder, so that the tomcat performed a literal witch's dance on Frieder's scalp... And you can believe me, where the tomcat's paws clawed, there, all the days of his life, no hair grow anymore.

Frieder cursed, Frieder coaxed. The dogs raced and jumped in the air at Frieder. The tomcat meowed atrociously and clawed deeper and deeper...

Nothing helped, — the tomcat held on firmly.

Marie füttert gerade ihre Enten, als sie ein sonderbares Bild gewahrt wird. Ihr Mann, der Frieder, kommt langsam daher, Kopf hoch, Körper gerade und gestrafft, wie ein Seiltänzer mit dem Prügel das Gleichgewicht suchend. Auf seinem Kopfe balanciert, einen mächtigen Katenbuckel krümmend, den Schwanz wie eine Fahne gen Himmel erhoben, der vermaledeite Kater. Links und rechts je ein Hund hüpfen bellend in die Höhe und vervollständigen das Bild einer wandelnden Pyramide. — Marie hält die Hand über die Augen und erstarrt zur Salzsäule. Als aber der Spuck doch nicht verschwindet, die Bremer Stadtmusikanten immer näher kommen und Marie sogar schon den verhaßten Kater miauen hört, wird sie wütend. Kampfeslustig stemmt sie beide Fäuste in die Hüften und schreit: “Alter Esel, spielsch Du Theater oder bisch verrückt!” — Als keine Antwort erfolgt, nimmt sie einen Stock zur Hand und geht drohend dem Spuk entgegen. Jetzt bekommt aber der Kater plötzlich Füße: ein Satz und er verschwindet im Hofe.

Marie is feeding her ducks when she becomes aware of a strange scene. Her husband, Frieder, comes slowly, head up, body straight and tense, like a tightrope walker with a stick seeking balance. Balancing on his head, a mighty tomcat humpbacked, his tail raised to the sky like a flag, the cursed tomcat. On the left and right, a dog jumps into the air barking and completes the picture of a walking pyramid. — Marie holds her hand up over her eyes and freezes into a pillar of salt. But when the dumbfounded does not disappear, the Bremen Town Musicians come closer and closer and Marie even hears the hated tomcat meowing, she gets angry. Combatively, she puts both fists on her hips and screams: “Old jackass, are you playing theater or are you crazy!” — When there is no answer, she picks up a stick and goes threateningly toward the dumbfounding spectacle. But now the tomcat suddenly gets feet: one leap and it disappears into the yard.

Wie Marie jedoch Frieders Gesicht und Kopf blutig zerschunden sieht, läßt sie erschrocken den Stock sinken: “Ja, Friederle, um Himmelswilla, was isch denn los?”

But when Marie sees Frieder's face and head bloodily scratched, she lets the stick sink in shock: “Well, little Freddy, for heaven's sake, what's going on?”

But when the tall and skinny (*fadenlange*) “little Freddy”, finally freed from his tormentor, angrily attacks the dogs with his stick, so that they, howling, sought to put some distance between him and them, — Marie also disappears into the kitchen as a precaution. Frieder is pale with anger and does not speak a word in his rage.

He hastily harnesses his best horses to the wagon. With a lot of effort, he gets hold of the tomcat again. Without a word, he ties it to the rear wheel of the wagon, lengthwise on the iron tire. Then he sits down on the wagon and drives off. “Meooooow,” cries the tomcat heart-rendingly (*Steinerweichend*) at the turn of the wheel. The horses are spooked and like a ghost the cart disappears. When Frieder returns home for the evening, the horses are tired from the long, wild ride.

This time, the tomcat was actually dead.
And Marie, for the first time, started to have respect for her Frieder.

Weihnachten

*Weihnachtsjubel, Weihnachtsfrieden!
Rätsel dieser heil’gen Nacht,
Die uns Müden Ruhe bieten
Und Erlösund uns gebracht.*

*Warum plagen sich mit Fragen,
Wo der Schatz so nahe ist?
Fort die Klagen—laß dir sagen:
Glaub’ an Christ und sei ein Christ!*

*Dieses Kleinod laß uns hüten
Warum im Herzen—fromm und rein!
Weihnachtsruhe, Weihnachtsfrieden
Zieh’ in unser Herze ein!*

Christmas

Christmas rejoicing, Christmas peace!
Mystery of this holy night,
They that offer us tired ones peace
And brought us salvation.

Why plague yourself with questions,
Where the treasure is so close?
Away the complaints—let me tell you:
Believe in Christ and be a Christian!

Let us guard this treasure
Why in the heart—devout and pure!
Christmas rest, Christmas peace
Move into our hearts!

[Translation Ends]