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Two Regionalists of the Interwar Period

Józef Mackiewicz and Mária Berde

John Neubauer and Włodzimierz Bolecki

The Treaty of Versailles reconstituted Poland and Yugoslavia, and created Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Czechoslovakia. In addition, it redrew borders, significantly enlarging Romania (returning to it some of its historical northeastern territories and adding Transylvania) while depriving Hungary of a very large part of its population and territory. The presumed principle was that all people have the right to self-determination and independence, whatever the nation they live in. However, the redrawing of borders and the (re)creation of new states after World War I did little to solve the problems of multi-ethnic communities. As Paul Johnson writes, the Treaty of Versailles actually created more and angrier minorities, armed with more genuine grievances. The nationalist regimes thought they could afford to be far less tolerant than the old empires (38). Central and Eastern Europe “was now gathering in the grisly harvest of irreconcilable nationalisms which had been sown throughout the nineteenth century. Or, to vary the metaphor, Versailles lifted the lid on the seething, noisome pot and the stench of the brew therein filled Europe until first Hitler, then Stalin, slammed it down again by force” (40).

Johnson points to one of the greatest political dilemmas of Eastern Europe, but we could ask whether nationalistic states and new totalitarian empires were the only alternatives after the disintegration of Austria, Russia, and Germany. Indeed, the Soviet and Nazi totalitarian states that emerged merely aggravated national conflicts in Eastern Europe, because they were in themselves extremely nationalistic: “replacing the lid” on the seething pot of nationalism ended in genocide, the *Endlösung*.

Our article discusses two East-Central European efforts that sought alternatives during the interwar period to the nationalist and totalitarian states, and advocated, unknown to each other, multinational regions or homelands in the Vilnius area and Transylvania. These efforts were partly based on the self-perceptions that Poles and Lithuanians in the Vilnius/Wilno area, as well as Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania, have different cultural orientations than their ethnic brothers and sisters in the main part of their country. As the distinguished Lithuanian poet Tomas Venclova writes in his article on Vilnius in the second volume of our *History*:

nationalism in Vilnius was usually complemented and corrected by regionalism. Every ethnic group found in Vilnius an alternate identity. For the Poles, the Wilno identity was always opposed to the identities of Warsaw and Cracow. For Lithuanians, the diversity and openness of Vilnius were opposed to the self-enclosed, “native,” and peasant Lithuania (later a new opposition emerged between the “eccentric” Vilnius mentality and the narrower mentality of Kaunas, the “true Lithuanian center”). (2: 12–13)

We shall focus on two representatives of these regional ideas, the Polish Józef Mackiewicz and the Transylvanian Hungarian Mária Berde. They were not alone in advocating a certain regional independence: as we shall see, the Krajowcy prepared the way for the articles that Mackiewicz published during the 1920s and 1930s, while Berde was a Transylvanist (see our *History* 2: 269 ff), a member of a diffuse Hungarian interwar movement associated with the name of Károly Kós. We foreground Mackiewicz and Berde because they have not received the credit they deserve.

Józef Mackiewicz and the Krajowcy Idea of a homeland

As Venclova remarks, Vilnius has remained through all the changes of regimes, cultures, and languages, “a borderland city, mixed and multilingual” (2: 11), inhabited by Lithuanians, Poles, Belorussians, and Jews, for whom Vilnius/Wilno was for a long time “the Jerusalem of Lithuania” (title of an article by Seth Wolitz in our *History*: 2: 185–88).

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, founded in 1569 and partitioned in 1795 between Russia, Prussia, and Austria, provided a reasonable political framework for this multicultural and multilingual population. The difficulties that emerged in the course of the nineteenth century were a combination of imperial suppression and the emergence of national “monocultural narratives” (Venclova) that clashed not only with the suppressive powers but also with each other.

In the early twentieth century, the Krajowcy turned against these nationalist tendencies by envisioning a polycultural Vilnius/Wilno Region. They were mainly Polish-speaking intellectuals from the Vilnius Region who opposed the division of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth along ethnic and linguistic lines. Most of them came from the nobility of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but identified themselves with Polish culture and maintained a sense of loyalty to the Grand Duchy. They sympathized with the earlier Commonwealth but did not advocate its revival. The Krajowcy wanted to neutralize ethnic nationalisms by proposing the creation of a homeland in the former territory of the Grand Duchy that would include Lithuanians, Poles, Jews, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and other people. National identity was unimportant as long as the person would identify with the former Duchy and feel a certain loyalty to it. The homeland would be based on citizenship rather than ethnicity, and hold up the principles of humanism, democracy, and equality among nations. The homeland idea opposed Lithuanian, Polish, and Belarusian nationalism. From a homeland perspective, borders were unimportant and the attachment of the region to a state insignificant. All borders were to be purely administrative forms of the natural, geographical, and cultural homeland. Proponents of a homeland opposed the political programs of the nationalists and the division of the territory into artificial administrative units.

The democratic Krajowcy, led by Michał Römer, Tadeusz Wróblewski, and Ludwik Abramowicz, sought to continue the cultural ties with Poland, for they regarded these as a natural part of Lithuanian history and heritage, but the group was small, dispersed, and unable to cope with the rise of the Lithuanian National Revival and the growing differences between the Polish and Lithuanian cultures. Römer founded the *Gazeta Wileńska* (Vilnius Gazette), the main organ of the Krajowcy; Wróblewski contributed to it in 1905–1906. Abramowicz, who edited the *Przegląd Wileński* (Vilnius Review) in the years 1912–13 and 1921–38, recognized that the nationalists could not accept the idea of a homeland because it advocated a sense of community, which asks for the surrender of exclusive national demands. Homelands would be superfluous in a state that uniformly treats all the nations inhabiting it, and necessary in multi-national states. The homelander wanted to create such a multi-national state within the territory formerly occupied by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In their view, only in this kind of state would the various nations feel at home and be empowered evenly, as in the case of Switzerland. Vilnius should become the capital of a multi-national state, for only then would it cease being a

pawn, whose fate is determined by feuding nationalists (see Abramowiczówna). Abramowicz returned to Vilnius in 1919 and actively promoted the idea that the Region should be transferred to Lithuania and not be tied by means of a union to Poland, proposing, however, a cultural autonomy for the Poles.

The idea of the homeland was interpreted in a similar manner by Ludwik Chomiński, who assumed in 1919 the editorship of the Vilnius gazette *Nasz Kraj* (Our Country):

Our homeland covers the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It is a tradition of the nations that once had their capital at Vilnius; it is an amalgam of Lithuanian, Polish, Belarusian blood mixed in with Jews, Tartars, Karaites, and Old-believers. It is a vast country with its center at Vilnius, which, like a lens, brings together the territories that were once ruled from here. [...]

We homelanderers, who believe in the idea of a whole country rather than of parts, were misunderstood, ridiculed, and removed from positions from where we could sway public opinion. However, we believe that Vilnius will become a bridge of peace between all the nations of this land – Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Jews – and not an item of contention between them. (*Gazeta Codzienna* 1939)

Unfortunately, newly independent Poland and Lithuania fought a war in 1919–20 that was intertwined with the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–21. The cease-fire on November 29, 1920 left the Vilnius region under Polish occupation, and a “Republic of Central Lithuania” was incorporated into Poland as the Wilno Voivodeship in 1922. Under international pressure, Lithuania accepted the status quo in 1923, though it continued to regard Vilnius as its constitutional capital. No diplomatic relations existed between Poland and Lithuania until 1938. Most of the Krajowcy gave up their double loyalty, declared loyalty to Poland, and started supporting federalist ideas. However, some, for instance Römer, chose to support Lithuania.

It was Mackiewicz who kept the idea alive that Lithuanians, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Germans, and Jews could coexist in the area of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. He wrote about this in virtually all of his interwar reportages, reviews, and political articles, as well as his post-1945 short stories, articles and memoirs (*Fakty. Przyroda. Ludzie* [Facts, Nature, People]; 1984), and his novels, among them *Droga donikąd* (A Road to Nowhere; 1955) and *Lewa wolna* (Let them Pass on the Left; 1965). His interwar publications constituted a quest for an answer to the question whether a non-nationalistic order of social values was possible in Eastern Europe after 1918. As he argued in 1940:

Lithuania was once a vast and powerful state. And Vilnius was among the greatest capitals in Europe. The passage of time, through the brilliance of victorious princes, kings, and hetmans, brought it into the dark of internal disintegration, decline, and then into rebirth within the borders of an ethnographic, nationalistic republic. I cannot come to terms with this break, especially among the younger generations of Lithuanian society, who treat a single linguistic unity as the absolute political ideal for Lithuania and place this ideal above all others. I am not juxtaposing this concept of a great Lithuania to the concept of small Lithuania because I see real possibilities for its realization today, but because I am puzzled by the abrupt distaste towards everything that was tied in some way to that grandeur. I mean a distaste both for the Russian character of Witold's Lithuania [Witold or Vytautas was the Great, Grand Duke of Lithuania (1392–1430), who had a major role in defeating the Teutonic Order in the Battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg) of 1410, and in laying the foundations for a Polish-Lithuanian Union],

towards certain fragments of its history, towards its great alliances, towards its multi-lingual nature, internal anti-nationalistic structure, or distaste to words like “empire” or “a country from sea to sea” (this was once Lithuania!). Today these words are despised, yet once they determined a totally different right of state, for which Vilnius, as the capital, became a symbolic flower. (“Młodotureckie wzory”)

Such ideas were untimely. They were by the Poles, for they regarded them as camouflaged efforts to eliminate the Republic, while the Lithuanians suspected that they encouraged a Polish coup against the Lithuanian Republic. World War II was not the only barrier. The internal logic of the homeland idea was unacceptable then, for it subverted traditional understandings of the relation between nation and state. For all nationalists, the basis for the nation-state is “to have,” to possess an area enclosed by borders, and to hold power over all minorities within it. For the proponents of a homeland, administrative boundaries had only secondary significance: the historical and cultural integration of the geographical area was paramount for them. What mattered was to not “to have” but to coexist with others, to share an area common to all the nations that had been inhabiting it for centuries. The state and the rule of a single nation were unimportant.

This was, then, a concept of a “native land of native lands,” a common homeland of nations that belonged to one family as equal members. Homeland – not a federation or a confederation, a common territory shared because people of various nationalities and cultures call it their native land. This was undoubtedly one of the most beautiful post-romantic utopias that twentieth century Eastern Europe had engendered.

As the result of an ultimatum that Poland gave to its neighbor in 1938, Lithuania reluctantly agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Warsaw, and thereby de facto renounced its claims to the Vilnius Region. However, Lithuania continued to insist that Vilnius belonged to it de jure. When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Wilno was taken over by the Red Army, according to the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. It seemed that the Lithuanian nationalists achieved their goal of incorporating the Vilnius Region.

The fall of 1939 was undoubtedly the least opportune moment for the homeland idea to resurface, though it was also the last possible one. Most Poles were convinced that Vilnius was simply taken over by Lithuania and striking any deal with the occupier would mean national treason. The Poles responded to the ever more strident Lithuanian nationalists with a wave of nationalistic gestures. We should not forget, however, that, from the historical point of view, Lithuanian nationalism was modeled on the Polish nationalist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Polish Nobel Prize-winning poet Czesław Miłosz, who associated himself with the tradition of the multi-ethnic Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and categorically refused to identify himself as either a Pole or a Lithuanian, recalls that brief moment as follows:

The Vilnius of that short period of time, [the] Vilnius incorporated into an independent Lithuania, overloaded with refugees, subjected to accelerated “Lithuanization,” through laws and by force when necessary (those who were recently beating Jews were now being beaten – though not exclusively – for singing Polish in church), was a land of milk and honey [...]. The government of the Lithuanian state did not make things any easier for us. On the contrary, it implemented an unreasonable policy in Vilnius, contrary to its own interests. The division of inhabitants into various categories labeled most of them as “incoming inhabitants” or “refugees,”

these two groups often included Vilnians whose families had been there for many generations. [...] However, beyond mutual obstinacy, a basic humane behavior existed in Lithuania during the days of the September ragedy, and, as I mentioned, the national disputes were inappropriate, even ridiculous. (“Koniec Wielkiego Księstwa”)

These disputes – despite their “ridiculousness” – were becoming harsher. Neither the Lithuanians, nor the Poles, nor the Belarusians wanted Józef Mackiewicz’s dreams of a Lithuania of many cultures, many nations, religions, and languages.

In June 1940, the Soviets gave an ultimatum to Lithuania, demanding to form a new pro-Soviet government and admit an unspecified number of Russian troops. Lithuania accepted the ultimatum and lost its independence: the Bolsheviks re-entered Vilnius on June 15, 1940; a pro-Soviet puppet government and legislature converted Lithuania into a Soviet Republic, which joined the Soviet Union on August 3, 1940. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union the following year, Lithuania declared independence, but the Nazis disregarded this. The Soviet Union reoccupied Lithuania in 1944–45, and the country remained a Soviet republic until 1990. After World War II, the homeland idea became incompatible with the national political passions and historical reality.

The homeland idea was a post-romantic utopia, a return to the idea of a *Heimat* without a *Vaterland*. It confronted the idea of the state, especially as it manifested itself in the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, yet it had no chance of materialization because it was rejected by all nations of the region. Though it emerged specifically from the region of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the homeland idea could also have been applied to other regions in Silesia, Bohemia, Slovakia, Transylvania, and Yugoslavia.

Mária Berde and the Idea of Transylvanism

On September 28, 1929, a remarkable event took place in the Redut Hall of the Braşov/Brassó/Kronstadt: the Transylvanian-Hungarian writers of the journal *Erdélyi Helikon* introduced themselves to the Transylvanian-Saxon writers of Heinrich Zillich’s journal *Klingsor*. One of the highlights was Mária Berde’s reading of her “Erdélyi ballada” (Transylvanian Ballad), now all but forgotten.

The ballad portrays a dramatic event of the 1848–49 Hungarian revolution that involved Berde’s maternal grandfather, Ónodi-Weress Károly, and his family. When the Austrian and Russian troops invaded Transylvania in the spring of 1849, the Ónodi-Weress family had to flee to Kolozsvár (Cluj). The ballad evokes distressing images of refugee life before turning to a long discussion between Károly and his pregnant wife. He had been called up to sit in a court-martial that was to try Stefan Ludwig Roth, leader of the Transylvania Saxons, accused of having led the Saxons to support the Emperor against the revolutionary Hungarians: “he is to blame that his people are the Emperor’s pawns.” Károly rehearses the official arguments, while his wife thinks in broader terms. Though she suffers under the Austrian rule, she urges the Hungarians to fight for their rights instead of taking revenge. If Roth worked against the unification of Transylvania and Hungary, perhaps he thought about it differently, considered other solutions better. She is unable to reply to Károly’s revolutionary slogan, “Whoever wants things differently now is a

traitor,” but she passionately urges him to vote against a death penalty, not so much on humanitarian grounds (although she reminds Károly that Roth is a Protestant minister with a family) but, above all, because voting for death would betray Károly’s own convictions. Saying farewell to him she assumes the voice of her eighth, yet unborn child: he would rather be a refugee than the child of a murderer.

Károly’s silence indicates consent, but the readers are left in the dark for a while about his actual vote. The ballad skips eleven years, to a scene in which Károly and his wife mourn the death of their eighth child. Károly is ready to curse God for the injustice, but she calms him down. After another leap in time, a granddaughter finds in Károly’s Bible the words that constitute the ballad’s closing lines: “God gave it, God took it.” More significantly, she finds next to it a Transylvanian saying penciled in: “happy is he who did not deserve his cross.” The death of the son could not be a punishment, because Károly refused to vote for the death penalty.

Roth’s execution was still a divisive issue in the 1920s, and reading a ballad on it to the Saxon hosts was not merely an evocation of a past event but also a performative tightrope act in a delicate interethnic situation. Berde managed to sway her audience. Otto Folberth, the Saxon editor of Roth’s works, reported with pleasure in the *Mediascher Zeitung* that Berde’s ability to speak openly in public about this painful historical event showed how much better Hungarians and Saxons understood each other now. After the war, Folberth became Professor at the University of Salzburg. As late as 1981, he recalled Berde’s ballad in his acceptance speech for the Mozart Medal.

The historical Stephan Ludwig Roth (Ritoók 28–32) was a student of Pestalozzi and the author of *Der Sprachkampf in Siebenbürgen* (The Language Fight in Transylvania; 1842). He pleaded for tolerance and equality, and he even consented to Transylvania’s merger with Hungary in March 1848, because he assumed that all civic rights would be extended to all of the people in Transylvania: “When Hungary declared his inhabitants free, and formally declared the equality of all citizens, my heart was also beating for the Union, I don’t deny it, because at that time one could choose only between two very unequal things, namely Hungarian freedom and Austrian bureaucracy” (qtd. in Ritoók 28, who follows Göllner 44). Roth switched to the Austrian side when the Hungarian diet did not guarantee the minorities their rights and the freedom to use their own language. The new Austrian Constitution of April 25, 1848, split the Saxons between supporters and opponents of the Union with Hungary. The opponents appealed for help to the Russians at the end of 1848, and Lajos Kossuth ordered on January 27, 1849, that they be court-martialed. Roth was condemned to death and immediately executed in Kolozsvár, on May 11, in spite of the safe conduct that Józef Bem, the Polish military leader of the Hungarian troops in Transylvania, had granted him. Learning about the execution, Bem claimed he would have come to Roth’s rescue had he been notified in time; Kossuth called it later a “misunderstanding.” As Commissioner of Küküllővár, Roth opposed imperial orders that would call for revenge against the Hungarians. Accepting his fate with dignity, he wrote in his farewell letter that he was never against the Hungarians: “I wanted the good of my nation without any damage to other nations” (Imre Mikó qtd. in Ritoók 204).

Berde wrote to the Saxon writer Erwin Wittstock on October 29, 1929, that her ballad repeats what she had often heard as a child from her mother. After 1919, when the Hungarians lost their power in Transylvania, the family affair became for her a symbol. Its minimal message

was the need for a wise tolerance; but the nations would have to go beyond tolerance by getting to know and love each other. She added that she did not know that the ideas of Stephan Ludwig Roth went in certain respects “so much further than all this chattering about the rights of individuals and nations” (qtd in Ritoók 145).

During the neo-absolutism of the 1850s, Austria did not reward the Romanians and Saxons for turning against the Hungarian revolution, but this was insufficient to reconcile them with the Hungarians in the 1850s and 60s, and even less so after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. The ethnic relations worsened when the Versailles Peace Treaty awarded Transylvania to Romania. The Saxons actually acknowledged and accepted, however reluctantly, the new Romanian rule, but the Hungarians bitterly resented and rejected it in the early 1920s, which became the source of tension between the two largest minority groups in Transylvania.

While national and international politics became hopelessly mired during the 1920s, the conflictual and confrontational situation surprisingly allowed the emergence of significant new literary works in all three of the major Transylvanian languages. Even more importantly, ideas for a culturally autonomous Transylvania emerged that could be compared to the homeland idea for the Vilnius Region discussed above. The key concept, Transylvanism, could be summed up with the slogan “Transylvania belongs to the Transylvanian nations” (on Transylvanism, see our *History 2*: 269–70; Kós, and Pomogáts). However, Transylvanism was just as utopian and unrealizable as the homeland idea for the Vilnius region, partly because it was also rejected by the nations involved (Romania and Hungary), but partly (and here the two stories diverge) because the ideas came from the “losing party,” the Hungarians, and was, therefore, doomed to be rejected by the Romanians, who now enjoyed their new national identity, and by the Saxons, who were not ready to form an alliance with the Hungarians to work towards a regionalism of equal national constituents. As Zsigmond Vita wrote in 1934, Teodor Mureșanu and other Romanian writers suspected irredentist political motives behind Hungarian Transylvanism, which clashed with the national-regionalist convictions of such Romanian writers as George Coșbuc, Octavian Goga, and Ion Agârbiceanu.

The Hungarians should have advocated Transylvanism when the territory was still part of the Dual Monarchy – but they didn’t. To be sure, Miklós Bánffy’s trilogy *Erdélyi történet* (Transylvanian History), written between 1934 and 1940, projects the origins of Transylvanism back into the prewar years (see our *History 2*: 270–71), but the cultural movement actually started only after World War I, gaining momentum with Bánffy’s return to his ancestral home in Transylvania and his becoming a Romanian citizen in 1926 (he had previously been Director of the Budapest Opera and of the National Theater, and Minister of Foreign Affairs). Immediately upon his arrival, he became the leader of Helikon, a loose but pivotal association of Hungarian writers that gathered every year in János Kemény’s castle at Marosvécs/Brâncovenesti. This “literary plein-air parliament,” as Mihály Babits called it in *Nyugat* (1931:481), was dedicated to the ideals of coexistence and cooperation with the other Transylvanian nations, though not everybody subscribed to these principles all the time. The writers of the Helikon strongly supported the high-quality publishing house *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh* (Transylvanian Artist’s Guild), which Károly Kós had already founded in 1924, and they published its prestigious journal *Erdélyi Helikon*, which, launched in 1928, became a true window unto the world. Apart from publishing translations of classics and romantics like Virgil, Catullus, Blake, Chaucer, Goethe,

Schiller, Shelley, Sidney (and even a number of Japanese poets), the *Erdélyi Helikon* introduced to the Transylvanian Hungarians the Polish poets Ignacy Krasicki and Juliusz Słowacki, and such leading Western modernist poets as Charles Baudelaire, Stephen Crane, Günther Eich, Paul Éluard, Langston Hughes, Carl Sandburg, Francis Jammes, Rainer Maria Rilke (the first eight of the *Duino Elegies!*), Georg Trakl, Paul Valéry, Siegfried Sassoon, and William Butler Yeats. Most important, however, was the opening towards Romanian literature, with translations of poems by thirteen poets, including Tudor Arghezi, George Bacovia, Mihai Beniuc, Lucian Blaga, Mihail Codreanu, Mihai Eminescu, Emil Isac, Ion Minulescu, Ion Pillat, and even the by now fervently nationalist and anti-Semitic Octavian Goga (see our *History 2*: 170, 264, and 272). In striking contrast to this wealth of Romanian poetry, Transylvanian Saxon poetry was represented in the *Erdélyi Helikon* with only two poems by Heinrich Zillich – perhaps because another Hungarian journal, the *Pásztortűz*, gave more attention to it.

The writers invited to the Marosvécs Helikon meetings were overwhelmingly Hungarian, but they also included some Romanian and several Saxon ones. Octavian Goga is said to have been present when János Kemény proposed to start the Marosvécs meetings (Tabéry 81–82). Emanoil Bucuța, at that time Romanian Minister of Culture, attended the 1934 meeting and announced that the publishing company Fundația Regele Carol, which had just published Goga's translation of Imre Madách's *Az ember tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Man), was planning to publish ten Hungarian novels (*Erdélyi Helikon* 1934: 555) – which unfortunately never materialized. The very first meeting, which took place in July 1926, was attended by the leading Saxon writer Heinrich Zillich, initiator and editor of the German quality journal *Klingsor*, who later also attended the 1929 and 1930 meetings. Indeed, just prior to the 1926 meeting, *Klingsor* came out with a Hungarian issue. Robert Maurer, another Saxon writer present at the meeting, reported in *Klingsor*'s following issue that he sensed at the meeting both the tragedy and the inexhaustible vitality of Transylvania. The first meeting unanimously accepted Resolution 4, which stated:

the mutual introduction and transplantation of the most important Romanian and Transylvanian Hungarian and Saxon literatures is a prime cultural task that will further the close cooperation of our people. One of the tasks of the enlarged Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh and its journal [the *Erdélyi Helikon*] will be to further the cause of serious and valuable translations, by getting into contact with the Association of Romanian Writers and with the Saxon writers. (qtd. in Ritoók 160)

This program of cooperation was pursued with varying success, and taken up again at the Helikon meetings of 1927 and 1928. Most important were the joint meetings: in July 1928 at Nagyenyed/Aiud, in November 1928 at Kolozsvár/Cluj/Klausenburg (where the Saxon writers “introduced” themselves, and the Romanians Emil Isac and Ion Clopoșel were also present), and in September 1929 in Brassó/Brașov/Kronstadt, where Berde read her ballad (see also Berde's “Helikon-napok”). The same month, *Klingsor* came out with another Hungarian issue, which contained contemporary Hungarian novellas and poetry, as well as Zillich's friendly report about the 1929 Helikon meeting (Ritoók 80–81). Unfortunately, this was the last of the Saxon-Hungarian meetings, though a Saxon-Hungarian-Romanian meeting was still held at Mediaș/Medgyes/Mediasch on March 19, 1931 (Ritoók 67). Another Hungarian issue of *Klingsor* appeared in June 1932.

Berde was perhaps the most important Hungarian organizer of interethnic meetings and exchanges. She was a main contributor already to a 1922 Petőfi commemoration at Segesvár/Sighișoara/Schässsburg (where the poet had died in battle), and she also wrote a poem for the occasion (Ritoók 59–60). She was active at the first Marosvécs Helikon meeting; she prepared the later meetings and gave accounts of them in the *Erdélyi Helikon*; she worked towards a trilingual Transylvanian anthology that was to be published in France (Ritoók 141, 163, 222); she translated into Hungarian works by the Romanian writers Mihai Eminescu and Ion Creangă, and by Zillich, who, in turn, translated and published her novella “Két gyász” (Two Mournings; 1931). In 1920–21, Berde edited the journal *Zord Idő* (Grim Time), which carried the title of a novel by Zsigmond Kemény. Indeed, she had a key role in resuscitating the Society named after this nineteenth-century Hungarian writer. As its Vice-President, she encouraged meetings with Romanian and Saxon writers. Berde and Károly Molter were the initiators of triple meetings in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș), which started with Berde’s lecture on Ion Chinezu’s book of Hungarian literature in Transylvania and continued with lectures on Eminescu and several Saxon writers (Berde, “kistükre”; Ritoók 72–73 & 228). She was the Vice-President of a controversial and short-lived Hungarian section within the Romanian PEN Club.

Berde earned her living by teaching German – in Nagyenyed/Aiud, Marosvásárhely/Târgu Mureș, and Nagyvárad/Oradea – but her true vocation was to write short stories, novels, poetry, and even some plays, most of them on women and their struggle for emancipation. This was the topic of her first successful novel, *Örök film* (Eternal Movie; 1917). *A szent szégyen* (The Sainly Shame), which came out in 1925, told the story of an unwed mother, and was rejected for breaking a taboo. Only one copy of it seems to exist today in Hungarian libraries. Her best-known novel, the two-volume *Földindulás* (Landslide; 1931), portrays the disintegration of a Transylvanian Hungarian aristocratic family. It was rejected by both Hungarian and Romanian nationalists, but the leading Saxon writer Erwin Wittstock greeted it with superlative praise (Ritoók 153–54). Berde’s study of the Swedish Nobel Prize winner Selma Lagerlöf initiated an exchange between the two of them (Ritoók 222–23). Her admirers included the Romanian writer, historian, and politician Nicolae Iorga, who was Prime Minister of his country when Berde turned to him for help: a chauvinist bureaucrat had failed her in the Romanian test she had to take, though she was a seasoned translator. Iorga took care of the matter (Ritoók 71–72, 220). In 1932, Berde received the Romanian Meritul Cultural, and in 1942 the highly prestigious Hungarian Baumgarten Award.

Upon the initiative of Aladár Kuncz, editor of *Erdélyi Helikon*, Berde wrote for the journal the article “Vallani és vállalni” (To Confess and to Accept; 1929/8: 623–25), in which she pleaded for a realistic (rather than irredentist) outlook, and for a concern with contemporary life. The article triggered a heated debate. Áron Tamási, the leading Transylvanian Hungarian writer, supported Berde, but others, including Zillich, were hostile. Berde became gradually alienated from the *Erdélyi Helikon* after 1931, and she broke with it in 1934.

Transylvanism, as well as the promising literary meetings and exchanges, had to face a growing chauvinism in Europe. When Hitler came to power in Germany, Saxon/Hungarian relations rapidly deteriorated. Kós translated in 1933 Adolf Meschendörfer’s novel *Die Stadt im Osten* (City in the East; 1931) about young people growing up in Kronstadt/Brassó/Brașov, but his contribution to Saxon/Hungarian cooperation backfired. Berde took Kós severely to task for

the many howlers in the translation (Ritoók 237), and Transylvanian-Hungarian writers seriously criticized the novel's depiction of the Hungarians. Zillich and many Saxon contributors of his *Klingsor* became Nazi sympathizers, and would not tolerate criticism for it. The breakdown of the Saxon/Hungarian literary relations forced both minority groups to look for closer ties with the Romanian community, but it, too, was ideologically torn. Transylvania's tender interethnic relations fell apart, save for valiant but mostly ineffective attempts in 1935 by the Romanian journal *Familia* (see our *History 2*: 274–75 and Neubauer, "Conflicts and Cooperation" 177 f). Berde became isolated and fell silent. After the war she edited a women's magazine, but could not find her footing in the communist system.

Regionalism?

Józef Mackiewicz and Mária Berde both worked towards regional interethnic understanding and cooperation under unfavorable political circumstances. Though Transylvanism was both more diffuse and politically less ambitious than the homeland idea in the Vilnius region, both sought to resist the chauvinism that turned each region into a contested national property. Both were bound to fail under the circumstances.

Short of describing the situation in these two regions today, we may ask in conclusion whether regionalism can generally counterbalance Europeanization and globalization, as it is so often claimed in contemporary discussions. The question is a vital one for a project of regional literary history such as ours, and the answer will depend on the constitution and disposition of the region's community. Both Mackiewicz and Berde envisaged multiethnic regions, which have meanwhile become all but monolithic. Paradoxically, postmodern critics of globalization sometimes advocate regionalism in order to preserve the tradition of homogeneous ethnic enclaves, which range from local folklore to dialect and special forms of religion. Such endeavors, whatever their merits in preserving "endangered species," differ from the regionalist visions of Mackiewicz, Berde, and their handful of colleagues that encompassed territories of mixed species. More than ever, their visions need support, for in East-Central Europe mixed regions have become even more endangered. The old regions cannot be resuscitated, for most of the minority populations are no longer there. But there are various processes of migration at work that just may create regions that bring about something that approximate the dreams of Mackiewicz and Berde.