Frigyes Karinthy (1877-1938), a man of humour, grief and superb intelligence, a journalist and polyglot, interested in medical and technical sciences, was obliged to work as a journalist and translator to make ends meet. As such, he translated H. G. Wells’s *The Sea Lady: A Tissue of Moonshine* (A tengerkisasszony) in 1913, and he retranslated *The Country of the Blind* in 1936 following its first Hungarian publication in 1927. He was the most popular literary personality of his time; a humorist, a parodist and the author of innumerable short sketches, a poet of considerable depth and a writer of utopias. He was a contributor to the fantastic-utopian tradition of Wells, Aldous Huxley, Karel Capek, Franz Kafka and Eugène Ionesco and he enriched the tradition through his unique blend of merciless satire and deeply philosophical fantasy. He published two significant fantasies, the Swiftian *Voyage to Faremido* (Utazás Faremidóba 1917), and *Capillaria* (1921). One of his chief occupation was the composition of a new encyclopaedia, following in the footsteps of Diderot, on which he hoped Wells would cooperate. His lifelong engagement with Wells’s work and thought is well-documented by some fifteen publications of differing length, to be discussed below, which contributed significantly to Wells’s popularity in Hungary.

The translation of *The Sea Lady*

In the late-nineteenth century, Karinthy thought highly of Jules Verne’s work, but this gradually gave way to admiration for English science fiction, and in particular to that of H. G. Wells. In 1913 Karinthy published his translation of *The Sea Lady* in the Modern ‘Library’ series of the Athenaeum Publishing Company.¹

Experiencing difficulties with the translation, Karinthy took refuge in his fantasy, and this resulted in a special treatment of *The Sea Lady* (Wells 1902): the ‘translator’ reshaped the work by cutting it to slightly more than half of its original length and he modified its theme. He made the story more compact and easier to digest for his Hungarian readers by stressing the two extremes: the sexually attractive, lax and lawless “moonshine” character of the title and, in sharp contrast, the rational, restrained and austere fiancée, with the weak, puppet-like male vacillating between the two, enchanted by the night-lure of the mermaid, but restrained by the daylight reasoning of his fiancée, the ‘agent general of his duties’.
Pál Tábori, the Hungarian writer and translator, indicated in his research on occultism that the Wells story had much to do with Henrik Ibsen’s *The Lady from the Sea* (1888; *Fru fra høvet*; English translation 1890) which was widely discussed in contemporary British literary circles. Tábori argued that Wells was inspired by the topic of mesmerism, the magic qualities of the ‘devil’s eye’, and that he composed his own version of it. In *The Sea Lady* the literary technique of Ibsen was mixed by Wells with witchcraft; the sheer presence of the charmer mesmerised both Ibsen’s heroine, Ellida, and Wells’s Chatteris, all within a frame of detailed realism. Both Ellida and Chatteris are enchanted by the personality, voice and especially the eye of the mysterious alien, who has arrived from and attracts them to the open sea. Although a suggestible dreamer susceptible to influences, Ibsen’s heroine still has the freedom to choose, which her Wellsian counterpart, Chatteris, lacks completely. Wells modified the Ibsenian theme by turning the female into a powerful charmer, while the male becomes the victim, incapable of resisting the temptation of the Sea Lady (cf. Tábori’s manuscript in OSZK s.a.).

Karinthy’s edited translation of the Wells original resulted in a major structural modification. As the story advanced growing portions of it were condensed or entirely omitted. Thus in Wells’s book Chatteris appears one third of the way through the plot, whereas in Karinthy’s version we meet him in the second half, as if stressing that his fate was so hopeless that there was no point in dealing with his self-torture, remorse and defeat in great detail. Again, in the middle of Wells’s original the narrator explains the fate of Chatteris, which does not come to light until near the end of the Karinthy ‘translation’. Consequently, the adaptation-like ‘translation’ makes the story less lyrical and changes its atmosphere. Wells’s original highlights the logic of the final outcome, thickening the shroud of mystery through the use of mystical sounds and lights urging an answer to the question of the fate of the young man chasing after ‘better dreams’. The ‘translation’, shrinking the original eighty pages of this section to ten, emphasises the elemental power of nature and of the feminine will, while the English original concentrates on the reflections on how Chatteris may have faced death. This was how Wells’s romantic love story, mingled with social criticism, was turned by Karinthy into the tragicomedy of a weak male victimised by female oppression.

**Capillaria**

In 1918, five years after Karinthy’s ‘translation’ of *The Sea Lady*, he published the first part of his *Capillaria*, the subject of which was akin to that of *The Sea Lady*: the juxtaposition and contrast of the weak human being to omnipotent nature, or of the weak male to the omnipotent female. Karinthy’s translation of *The Sea Lady* may have convinced him of the in-
completeness of the story. He may not have believed that death claimed the man sinking into the depths of the sea in the arms of the mermaid, but imagined him continuing his life among the immortals. He may have felt obliged to shed light on the underwater world of the Sea Lady, which was facilitated by the cunning and insidious secrecy of Miss Waters, who ‘volunteered no information, contenting herself with an entertaining superficiality’ (Wells 1902: 60). This provided Karinthy with the artistic freedom to create a fantastic seabed, which was not the scene of romantic love between a human and a demigod, but rather a land of women; a feminist paradise depicted with the profundness and irony of Jonathan Swift.2 Having identified himself with Wells through his work as translator, Karinthy continued the story in his own novel.

The final motif of *The Sea Lady*, with the mermaid bearing her victim to the depths of the sea, represents the starting point for *Capillaria*: ‘Down these [stairs] it must have been they went together, hastening downward out of this life of ours to unknown and inconceivable things’ (Wells 1902: 268). This was where Karinthy’s main character, Gulliver, the henpecked husband, arrives as if a shipwreck victim. His life was saved by the ‘filthy and mongrel’ (Karinthy 1965b:70) bulloks, the ‘dwarfed, stunted males’ (Karinthy 1965b:79), the caricatures of men whose name clearly indicates that the story was rendered for the readers of the then imminent New York edition of the book; with the bulloks, bearing a close resemblance to bullocks and bullocks, with all their sensation-seeking connotations, including castration. This ‘small monster, completely backward and primitive, imprisoned in the shape of a despised and humiliated domestic animal’(Karinthy 1965b:70), is the provider for the dominant females, the Oihas, whose name means ‘Human Being, the Perfection of Nature’(Karinthy 1965b:69) and whose translucent dream-like bodies are the unattainable but constantly desired target of the bulloks’ passionate love. Being mistaken for a female, Gulliver lives among the Oihas, whose queen, Opula, asks him about the land creatures. Her interpretations of his answers regarding gender relations reveal numerous satirical implications: in the battle of the sexes man is the helpless victim of woman’s tyranny. Eventually, Gulliver falls in love with the queen, but she, after realising that he is a male rather than a distorted female, banishes him to bullok society. After his expulsion Gulliver observes the struggles of bullok society which caricature contemporary terrestrial political life. There is an open reference to Wells when the bulloks, equipped with organs with double functions which increase their military capacity, are described as a kind of ‘homo faber’ or ‘technical man’ ‘that only writers with the most unbridled imagination – an H.G. Wells or a G.B. Shaw – would have dared to dream about [...] and even they only in their most extreme and far-fetched utopias’ (Karinthy 1965b:114). In another place, Gulliver describes his own appearance at the bottom of the sea ‘as if a Martian had landed in London’ (1965b: 65), a clear reference to Wells’s
The War of the Worlds (1898). In the end, the disillusioned Gulliver returns to the land.

The use of a first-person narrator which allows the reader to decide whether to believe the story or not was a practice characteristic of both Swift and Wells. Aware of this, Emil Kolozsvári Grandpierre (1984: 401) rightly referred to Karinthy's Voyage to Faremido and Capillaria as not only reminiscent of Gulliver's fifth and sixth travels but also of Wells's fantastic stories, which clearly indicates that Capillaria is a continuation of both Gulliver's Travels and The Sea Lady.

The chapters in Capillaria dealing with underwater reading and methods of propagation undoubtedly have Wellsian roots, but they are handled and developed with the irony of Karinthy. The kinship between Capillaria and The Sea Lady is at its clearest in the descriptions of underwater reading and books. Wells's 'extremely well-read' mermaid (Wells 1902: 33), a member of the distinct underwater reading public, is well informed through 'Deep Sea Reading' (Wells 1902: 34). The source of her information and 'soft clear grammatical manner' (Wells 1902: 45) is the 'submerged library' (Wells 1902: 35), consisting of copies of the Times, the Daily Mail and the Encyclopaedia Britannica, along with a 'rain of light literature' (Wells 1902: 40) such as illustrated magazines and fashion papers. These 'saturated books' (Wells 1902: 43) are contrasted with the government Blue Books and the 'Condition of the Poor' texts read by Adeline, Chatteris's fiancée and, in this way, the mermaid's mesmerism is contrasted with Adeline's bourgeois blue-bookishness.

These 'drowned scraps of paper' (Wells 1902: 43) recalled the diet of the few most tasty bulloks of Capillaria, the scientists, who consume or are fed much bullok sweetmeat, 'special feeding stuff [...] drifting down [...] from time to time from the upper regions, [...] thin sheets with many layers, covered with small black dots...' (Karinthy 1965b: 81). These bulloks are pupated to produce from their brains the very thin, long threads of ink-like material, which can be 'spun into a fabric' (Karinthy 1965b: 81), providing the clothes and the 'favourite tit-bits' (Karinthy 1965b: 81) of the Oihas. By means of this bullok-keeping, which parallels marriage, the male brain becomes both sweetmeat and woven textile-text.

Both Wells's mermaid and Karinthy's Oihas symbolise the irresistible elemental whirl of nature paralleled with female qualities. The mermaid refers to all earthly problems with 'a certain sceptical levity' (Wells 1902: 41). She does not take earthly existence seriously, almost laughs outright at things that are most important and vital to humans, and lives for her own whims, as did Karinthy's Oihas in their 'oddly petty and childish' (Karinthy 1965b: 65) and 'incredible indifference' (1965b: 65), as 'in their eternal pursuit of pleasure' (Karinthy 1965b: 72) they regarded the struggle of the tiny males with frivolity and satire. Their irresistible femininity, just like that of the Sea Lady, subjugates and destroys the will of the fragile males.
Chatteris’s defeat by and subordination to the strong female will has some degree of dignity, though he is clearly to become no more than an ‘article of pleasure [...] a possession, [...] a plaything’ (Karinthy 1965b:86) in the underwater world. Karinthy stretched Wellsian sexual servitude to the remotest boundaries of the absurd; in *Capillaria*, the weak male becomes a ‘loathsome little worm’ (Karinthy 1965b: 57), ignored both as provider and maintainer of female society and as propagator of the race, and doomed to a shameful death. The irresistible charm and sometimes merciless austerity of the Oihas lies in the fact that they are a perfect but complex alloy of the charming mermaid and the career-conscious fiancée, “Venus Anadyomene” and “Michel and his Sword” (Wells 1902: 253), who require considerable armour to subdue the male.

The former utilises charm and cunning to entangle and mesmerise her long-selected prey, while the latter displays firmness and austerity. The exaggerated heiresses, the Oihas, need no tricks to subdue the degenerate offspring of the male sex. The sheer presence of the females mesmerise both Chatteris and the bulloks, and drives them into a state of delusive trance, hypnosis and fantastic hallucination, such that they were even happy to go to their deaths. The mermaid and the Oihas aim self-confidently at sensual enjoyment and take unscrupulous advantage of their immortality and invulnerability. They are able to destroy the male with fatal femininity, but are rather insensitive than wicked, like Nature and its elements, which they represent.

Wells revealed little about the mode of propagation of the underwater immortals, with the mermaid ‘born of the elements and resolved into the elements again’ (Wells 1902: 48). Although the fully-grown Oihas are similarly unaware of the means of their own propagation, Karinthy was quite clear that the degenerate representative of the male sex, the tiny bulloks, whose ‘body is not even one fiftieth in size of the Oihas’s,’ this ‘pint-size’ monster, was the necessary partner; they are the ‘male organ’ existing ‘like a parasite around the Oihas’ (Karinthy 1965b: 70).

As to his social criticism, Karinthy took the Wellsian condemnation of society to the absurd, following in Swift’s footsteps, and concentrated his criticism on the British political parties and their programmes which differed little from those of the warring bulloks, destroying each other for petty causes and building their towers to be ‘conquered’ by the Oihas. Their deeds are quite simply a waste of energy; even if they reached the surface of the sea to meet their counterparts on land, the only creatures they could encounter would be the oppressed males, proud in their blindness and ‘bred’ by their wives within the framework of marriage.
The encyclopaedist

Besides Wells’s ideas and literary message, his encyclopaedism exerted a deep influence on Karinthy. Thus, following the publication of Wells’s *The Outline of History* in 1920 and the complete version of *Capillaria* in 1921, the Hungarian writer published a letter, full of sincere enthusiasm for Wells in 1921 in *Nyugat*, the finest Hungarian literary periodical between the two world wars. In this letter, Karinthy refers to Wells as a follower of the long tradition of adventurous travellers, a fantasist and utopist eager to ‘bridge the gap between the finite and infinite, Art and Metaphysics, Cognition and Thinking’ (Karinthy 1921: 941, translation by K. Cs.).

Wells’s fantastic art was opposed to that of Verne and Swift, its aim being to give shape to the vague picture of the unknown without stripping it of its empirical, philosophical and speculative message. In contrast to his opinion of Verne’s art, Karinthy regarded Wells’s fantasies as possessing the strictest logical structure, borrowing more from the logically possible than from the fantastic. This explains why Wells’s unmystical fantasies were of greater interest to him than Verne’s dream-worlds, since Wells’s extraterrestrial and unreal fantasies afforded a better, clearer and more comprehensive picture of the real world. Karinthy was enthusiastic in his conclusion that Wells’s political views closely paralleled his practical political activities and had to be taken seriously by ‘the most theoretical literary critics’ (Karinthy 1921: 943). Writing once more on *The Outline of History* in the literary journal *Nyugat* in 1925 he repeated the introductory motif in his 1921 article, describing the book as an exciting adventure-story that clearly exposed the merciless logic of history. The main character, ‘man’, could not be blamed for his mistakes; his excuse was youth, and the hopeful promise of his future lay in his gradual development towards adulthood (Karinthy 1925a).

In 1927 Karinthy wrote a preface to the first major Hungarian study on Wells, *H. G. Wells*, by Tivadar Szinnai, subtitled *The Life and Ideas of the Most Popular Author in the World*, to mark the English writer’s sixtieth birthday. This preface is merely a summary of the articles of 1921 and 1925 in which Karinthy spoke openly of his kinship to British encyclopaedists in general and Wells in particular. A two-volume collection of Karinthy’s journalism, published between 1925-1930, was later collected under the title *Entries to the Great Encyclopaedia* (Karinthy 1975), and it was on the strength of these pieces and his other writings that Karinthy became considered ‘the Hungarian Wells’ (Fráter 1987); an association he readily accepted, for it was his most ardent wish to co-author a new encyclopaedia with Wells and others. As one of his friends wrote about him:

*If he had had his way, he claimed, he would have devoted all his time and ingenuity to create a new encyclopaedia. Although he was unable*
to work systematically on the new definition of ideas, he did at least produce many scattered, occasional pieces under the various headings of his imaginary *New Encyclopaedia*. He used quite often the sub-heading “an article in the New Encyclopaedia” for his essays; even his humorous pieces, sketches, short stories, novels were all part of a great comprehensive plan. (Tábori in Karinthy 1965a:xix)

Despite the fact that both Wells and Karinthy were intelligent men engaged in popular writing, they had completely different motives for desiring a world encyclopaedia. Karinthy sought ‘the simplest manner to express the basic ideas so that all men could understand him’ (Tábori in Karinthy 1965a:xix) and he hoped to contribute to new interpretations of the problems of his age by providing a poetic explanation of the human qualities which were so inconceivable and elusive. Wells, on the other hand, sought to reinterpret the whole of human biology and history including art.

While the differences in their approach to the problems of their time must be stressed, what they shared was the sense that there was a niche to be filled. Wells pursued the illusion of a world state, for the attainment of which he exploited all the means at his disposal, while his Hungarian counterpart was tried to grasp the right verbal expressions for the most incomprehensible ideas.

**The preface**

In 1925, Karinthy wrote a letter of considerable length, covering some twenty pages, as a preface to the German edition of *Capillaria*, which must have been translated by the novel’s translator, Pál Tábori, but which has been missing ever since. This letter was addressed *To the poet of “The Short History of the World” and to the scientist of the “First Men in the Moon”* (Karinthy 1925c, all quotations from this text have been translated into English by K. Cs) as an expression of the book’s artistic inspiration. Ever since its publication, it has been a puzzle why this preface, entitled *A Letter to H.G. Wells* (Karinthy 1925c:139) was indeed addressed to Wells. In the letter he placed himself, as an encyclopaedist, on the same level as the English encyclopaedists in general and their most important representative, the greatly respected Wells, in particular. Karinthy began by explaining the circumstances of the novel’s creation, describing his ‘disturbed state of mind and terrible living conditions’, adding that initially he had not wanted to write this book, but ‘merely to tell the story to a lady’ (Karinthy 1925c:139), who did not have the faintest idea what he was talking about. Similarly, he failed to tell the story to a man. So, as a last resort, he selected the most splendid contemporary writer and encyclopaedist, H.G. Wells; to tell him publicly what nobody wanted to listen to individually.
The preface analyses the irreconcilable antagonism between man and woman with a great deal of sparkling wit. Karinthy blames the unfavourable tone of his opinion of women on his intrusive relatives, who prevented him from establishing a proper relationship with anyone of the opposite sex by forcing him into vague politeness. This happened in his childhood, when he was still unaware of the characteristic female figures of the nineteenth century; the ‘chocolate angel’, the seductive ‘Manon’, the ‘regular sergeant’ and the emancipated ‘Nora’ (Karinthy 1925c: 143-146), all hinting at the heroines of The Sea Lady, both of whom forced men ‘to give up part of their human pride’ (Karinthy 1925c: 152). This was facilitated by descriptions of the difficulties of English writers in depicting female characters: they became comically paralysed and helpless, as when Chatteris is ‘touched by the air of the Secret Depths of Life’ in the shape of the ‘blond woman in a moonlit postcard’ (Karinthy 1925c: 71).

The letter

This preface – most likely with the novel itself – must have been sent to H.G. Wells in 1925 or 1926, perhaps more than once, but it appears, at least initially, to have remained unanswered. However, as a result of repeated requests, the preface of Capillaria was graced with ‘very kind and warm lines’, according to a recently discovered letter by Karinthy in the Rare Book and Special Collections Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Karinthy 1929). This letter, dated 12 April 1929, was sent to Wells’s holiday cottage in Grasse, France, but a typewritten copy was delivered to London personally by ‘one of Karinthy’s friends’, Leutalia Vértes Lengyel. A letter written by Vértes Lengyel confessed that Karinthy’s letter was delivered to Wells’s secretary, whose name is not mentioned, ‘at an inopportune moment,’ though as an excuse she added, that ‘My reason for calling was to have a personal interview with you concerning Mr F. Karinthy’s book: Capillaria, that shall be published in New York. I am bringing a letter from Mr Karinthy addressed to Mr Wells, which I would like to hand to you personally’ (Karinthy 1929). This letter, coupled with the secretary’s apparently unfriendly behaviour, is a strong indication of Wells’s polite indifference to Karinthy’s proffered friendship. Wells’s ‘very kind and warm lines’ addressed to Karinthy personally did not conceal the offence that Wells had not even read Capillaria. Despite this slap in the face, Karinthy asked Wells for introductory notes to the then imminent New York edition of the book:
(the MS of this was sent to Grasse some time ago)

Dear H.G. Wells,

With pleasure do I take the opportunity to-day and thank you for the very kind and warm lines in which you remember the Preface addressed to your estimated person in my work “Capillaria”.

If I can hope, that since you have already found the occasion to read Capillaria itself, and still recall the thought expressed in the Preface – and if you do feel, that you would have something to say about the latter, for I indeed have the feeling, that this Preface is not complete without your remarks, you would oblige me greatly by writing them, so as not to deprive the English edition that is soon to appear, of this precious supplement.

I have already an English editor and am only waiting to have the book printed, for I sincerely hope, you will not refuse me the favour to lend me some of your mighty and powerful words as an introduction to my modest voice, that is to reach the delicate ears of English readers.

I hope and I thank you for it in advance very devotedly yours
F. Karinthy

A posthumous book (Fráter 1987) gives Karinthy’s account of the story in his tongue-in-cheek, but disappointed, style:

One of my friends delivered to him [Wells] the Preface of Capillaria asking for a written opinion. In his answer, Wells claimed to have read all my works (though only a few of them had been published in English), adding that he felt overwhelmed by the sparkling and coruscating wit of the Preface, which discouraged him from reviewing it. This was, of course, irony against the humour, which he felt had been exhibitionistic and was replied to with polite refusal. – Well, do tell me how to respond to this arrogance. Do you think an equally polite rejection of all the world histories, including his, would be a worthy revenge? – And what could it be substituted by? By my encyclopaedia, of course. (Fráter 1978: 279-280)
The puzzle-maker

Karinthy was at his best when composing word-puzzles. He certainly created a puzzle when he gave his book the title *Capillaria*, the origin of which has not been satisfactorily explained so far, though the version “capillotomist” had been used by Wells to describe a hair stylist with the stare of a “mesmerist” in *When the Sleeper Wakes* in 1899. I have considered but rejected the physical phenomenon of capillarity as a possible explanation. The key to the puzzle appears rather to lie in the paragraph that describes the difference in size of the Oihas and the bulloks.

In *Capillaria*, Karinthy discourses on certain sea animals, the females of which are far larger, better developed and stronger than the males, the latter being in constant danger of being swallowed by the huge female during copulation. The association of these species with the nematodes of the Capillaria family leads to the explanation of the title: they share sexual dimorphism, their males and females differing both in size and in shape. Their females are at least three or four, but even ten times larger than the males. They are unconscious of being fertilised, enjoying only a sensation of “comfort” caused by the males, who function as their parasites. To please the females, the males have more “jewellery”, a curled tail and more external ornamentation, such as bursae, lae, and papillae, in this way recalling the bulloks, with their “stunted, under-developed” feet, hands, wings, fins, hair, fur, feather and scales. Like Oiha and the bullok, the huge female and the tiny male fertilising her unnoticed are interdependent: there is no propagation for the female without the participation of the tiny male hiding in her intestines. This is how the wheel comes full circle: the oppressive mental dominance of “Venus Anadyomene” and “Michael and his Sword”, projected into physical dimensions, lead ad absurdum to an enormous, beautiful and voluptuous female and a virtually negligible male.

A further puzzle of this most puzzling book stems from its well-known Hungarian translator Pál Tábori. For no clear reason, he turned the word “bullok”, which had obviously originated from the English “bullock”, into “bullpop”. Though his translation was not published before 1965, the letter by Karinthy to Wells strongly suggests that it was completed before 1929. At that time, Tábori still lived in Hungary, as a close neighbour of the Karinthy family, and had already translated a fair number of English books, so he could well have translated the work initially and then, made the modification with Karinthy’s consent in order to increase the absurdity of the situation. “Bullock”, a slight modification of “bollock”, meaning a testis, did not reflect the shape of the creatures in question, while, “bullpop”, the bull’s protrusion, was rather the sense the author had in mind. It might as well have been a reference to a tiny dog, following its master in a slave-like manner with no doubt or hesitation.
Epilogue

Karinthy's life-long interest in Wells exhibited mood swings between fair criticism in the 1910s, open adoration in the early 1920s, and growing disillusionment by the end of the decade. A letter written in 1917 to Mihály Babits exposed Karinthy's critical attitude to Wells (Karinthy's manuscript in OSZK 1917), though until the mid 1920s his adoration for Wells must have been paramount. The fact that the 1925 article, mentioned above, merely supplemented the one from 1921, and that the publication on Wells's birthday only further reshuffled these articles, indicates that by then Karinthy had given up his one-sided adoration of Wells due to the unhappy shaping or unshaping of their friendship. Karinthy's polite letter to Wells in 1929 revealed sober disillusionment with the author of The Sea Lady; there can be little doubt that Karinthy had the intention of becoming world-famous or at least of making the New York edition of Capillaria more marketable through Wells's friendship.

The early thirties saw a degree of inconsistency in Karinthy's attitude towards Wells, being either critical of Wells's educational efforts or offering praise for his early literary achievements. Thus, in 1930 Karinthy highly praised Wells's The Science of Life, calling it 'The Second Part of the Great Trilogy.' In 1933 Karinthy wrote at least three articles mentioning Wells, one of them criticising his The World of William Cleisold (Karinthy 1933a, 1984), and another two negatively contrasting him with Mihály Babits (Karinthy 1933c, 1984) and G. K. Chesterton (Karinthy 1933b, 1984). Further, in 1934, Karinthy openly criticises The Outline of History calling it a 'thumbnail-sketch' (Karinthy 1934b, 1979: 117, translation by K. Cs.) of world history that could easily be taken as a pill, and he caricatures Wells's over-simplification and distortion of facts.

In the same year, marking the publication of Wells's Experiment in Autobiography, Karinthy describes Wells as the only mentally-mature, though ordinary, brain involved in describing the future through an analysis of the past (Karinthy 1834a, 1984). He praises Wells for producing a new genre by interweaving autobiography and science fiction, and thus stretching the boundaries of the novel. Later in the same article Karinthy notes that, 'I have read few lines as “poetic” and “warm” as those of Wells's résumé', while nonetheless reproaching Wells for being 'little more than an average educator of the masses' (Karinthy 1934a, 1984: 439 translation by K. Cs.).

Despite these ambivalent representations of Wells, swinging from adoration of his contribution to literature, to criticism of his populist educational efforts, it is interesting to note that, in an article of 1935, written during Karinthy's visit to London as a correspondent for the daily, Az Est, he mentions incidentally that 'I will meet Wells tomorrow' (Karinthy 1935). No further mention is made as to whether this meeting actually took place, or whether it was the first or the last of a series of meetings, or whether it
had any effect on their mutual relationship, but Karinthy's sober, disillusioned mood in the article suggests low expectations on his part. No doubt the two writers knew each other personally, but their acquaintance never resulted in any fruitful literary cooperation.

Karinthy’s explanation for the negative treatment of *Capillaria* by Wells, and Wells’s refusal to provide him with an introduction to the novel, was that the sensitivity of the older writer, with his set ways, had been deeply hurt by his being compared with a younger, and moreover Hungarian, writer. Being an English gentleman, Wells might have wished to avoid getting entangled in a long dispute about the merits or shortcomings of *The Sea Lady*, nor might he, the world-famous celebrity, have been willing to devote his energy to defending his novel from the criticism of an ‘inferior’ parodist. It must have been apparent to Wells that his revelation, in his only letter to Karinthy, that he had not read *Capillaria* and he was unwilling to write an introduction to the novel, would be sure to inflict a wound on Karinthy’s self-estimation.

Karinthy’s ouvre sheds light on a contradictory relationship with Wells: he greatly appreciated Wells’s educational efforts and admired the plot of *The Sea Lady*, but he never concealed his critical thoughts. Karinthy’s preface calls on Wells to cooperate in composing an encyclopaedia, a joint redefinition of the ideas of the new world of the twentieth century. With its abundance of sparkling wit it was put before *Capillaria* only later: Karinthy hoped that the personal address and the coinciding plot would help Wells to discover the relationship between the two books and thus between the two men. In return for his commitment and contribution to the ideas of *The Sea Lady*, he expected Wells to react appropriately by including Karinthy’s ideas into his would-be encyclopaedia. The unbridgable difference between their interpretation of encyclopaedism, that of the British ideologist and the Hungarian dreamer, may have had something to do with their failed friendship; while Karinthy tried to capitalise on his celebrated humour in approaching Wells and attempting to stimulate him to cooperation, Wells felt offended by the comic lines of the preface to *Capillaria*, and so he chose to take revenge by ignoring Karinthy’s appeal.

**Notes**

1 *The Sea Lady* was retranslated by Dezső Kiss for serial publication in 1928 with a slightly modified title, *A tengeri tündér* (The Sea Fairy). This was then published in book form by Genius Publishing Company in 1928 and Pantheon Publishing Company in 1930.

2 Swift’s influence on Karinthy is undeniable as, in 1914, Karinthy had translated *Gulliver’s Travels*. 
3 The first part of the trilogy was *The Outline of History* (1920), the third was *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1932).

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