

**REGIONAL AND UNIVERSAL  
IN EUROPEAN MODERNITY**

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RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES,  
HUNGARY

# REGIONAL AND UNIVERSAL IN EUROPEAN MODERNITY

Editors

Péter Hajdu, Yonka Naydenova



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# Anti-Utopia and Dystopia in Hungarian Modernism

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## ABSTRACT

The paper is an overview of the dystopic texts produced by Hungarian modernist writers. Anti-utopia is the dominant approach in the speculative fiction of interwar Hungary, which is demonstrated on the examples of Frigyes Karinthy's satiric Gulliver sequels and Sándor Szathmári's *Kazohinia* that functioned as a cultic read in a not small circle for a while. *Pilot Elza* by Mihály Babits is a genuine dystopia, which was celebrated because it refuted the concept of belatedness in Hungarian literature. Babits wrote his dire vision of eternal war and cultural decline simultaneously with the grand modernist dystopias of world literature. However, despite some remarkable features, the novel cannot compete with those.

*Keywords:* Frigyes Karinthy, Sándor Szathmári, Mihály Babits, misogyny, cultural decline

Dystopia is one of the major genres of modernism, one which, through the trinity of Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), has achieved a standing canonical position. It is hardly surprising that modernist writers tended to be concerned about the social, political, cultural, and sexual aspects of modernity; utopian writing offered them an opportunity for a rather direct kind of reasoning. The Hungarian examples (to mention only the literarily prestigious ones among a plethora of lowbrow utopian writing) are mostly anti-utopias, satiric parodies of utopian thinking,<sup>1</sup> a

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<sup>1</sup> I do not think I need to explain my usage of the terms utopia, anti-utopia, and dystopia, but it is in line with, for example **Vieira**, Fátima. The Concept of Uto-

generic tradition mostly connected to *Gulliver's Travels*, which was so strongly present in the Hungarian literary production that both Frigyes Karinthy (1887–1938) and Sándor Szathmári (1897–1974) presented their anti-utopias as Gulliver sequels. Karinthy put Gulliver's name in the subtitles of both of his anti-utopias: *Voyage to Faremido: Gulliver's Fifth Voyage* (1916), and *Capillaria: Gulliver's Sixth Voyage* (1921). The first edition of Szathmári's novel was entitled *Gulliver's Voyage to Kazohinia* (1941); in the later editions Gulliver's name disappeared from the title (1946: *Voyage to Kazohinia*; 1957: *Kazohinia*), but remained the name of the protagonist, and the first chapter still provided a continuity with Swift's frame narrative. What did not fit in this anti-utopian trend was the genuine dystopia created by Mihály Babits (1883–1941), a central figure of the Hungarian modernist movement. His *Pilot Elza, or The Perfect Society* (1933) received praise for being in tune with the contemporary developments of European literature.<sup>2</sup>

Frigyes Karinthy (1887–1938) was one of the greatest humorous writers of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. His humour shines most brilliantly in his short sketches and literary parodies. *Voyage to Faremido* describes the perfect world of the ethereal machines—the *solasis*—that communicate through pure music and regard organic matter as contamination. Midore, the machine that introduces Gulliver to the reality of Faremido, explains that if an artificial brain is contaminated with organic matter, the *solasi's* eye turns inside and the *solasi* sees its own brain instead of the world.<sup>3</sup> As the only possible cure, their whole brain must be replaced. The contrast of intelligent inorganic matter and contagious organisms is later extended to the whole Earth. The *solasis* regard Earth as a “primitive and regressed, rudimentary and diseased *solasi*” (33), attacked by the parasitic *dosires*, which Gulliver

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pia. – In: Claeis, Gregory (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 3–27 and **Moylan**, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> **Lengyel**, Balázs. “Babits Mihály “világirodalmi szemekkel.” – *Nagyvilág* XXVIII, 1983, p. 1705.

<sup>3</sup> **Karinthy**, Frigyes. *Voyage to Faremido. Capillaria*. Transl. Tabori, Paul. New York, N.Y.: Living Books, 1966, p. 25.



understands to be human beings and animals. Although Midore's explanation necessarily regards all organic material as contamination, the slightly more detailed history of Earth seems to identify the *dosire* parasites mostly as humans. The Earth's sickness, according to the *solasis*, started in the Ganges and the Euphrates areas, then spread all over Asia. At that time, when Earth was still healthy enough to communicate with the ethereal *solasis*, they advised it "to emit a little heat," because "the *dosire* was a very miserable and helpless parasite, and a few degrees' increase in heat—maybe eighty or a hundred—would kill and exterminate it" (34). However, the *solasi* realized that no drastic measures would be necessary to cure Earth because the problem would solve itself. Since the inorganic *solasis* are practically immortal, they can easily wait a ten or twenty millennia. Therefore, the insight that organic creatures kill and eat each other gives the hope that life will destroy itself, thus curing the Earth.

The *dosires* simply used the Earth to germinate and then, thanks to the organ of instinct, exterminated each other. [...] The *dosires*, however badly they infested the planet's body for a while, would certainly annihilate each other.<sup>4</sup>

Karinthy wrote *Voyage to Faremido* during the Great War, which may explain why he envisioned the end of civilization or organic life on Earth as the result of fight. The image of Earth as a single intelligent being may make the book interesting for current Ecocriticism, although the inorganic nature of the only worthy kind of intelligence marks the limits of that interestingness. The warming of the globe as a cure against parasitic humanity still can resonate in the current context.

Karinthy wrote the blatantly misogynous *Capillaria* while in a happy relationship,<sup>5</sup> which seems to have been a rare phenomenon in his life. Gulliver's ship sinks, and he continues his life at the bottom of the Atlantic, due to the advanced technology of the *bullpops*. In the deep ocean two kinds of intelligent creatures live: *Oihas* are beauti-

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<sup>4</sup> Karinthy, *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

<sup>5</sup> Robotos, Imre. "A természet lángelméje vagy tréfája. Karinthy Frigyes nőszemlélete". – In: Angyalosi, Gergely (Ed.). *Bíráló álrühában. Tanulmányok Karinthy Frigyesről*. Budapest: Maecenas, 1990, p. 124.

ful, bigger than human females, while *bullpops* are penises that have developed their own organs for movement, sensation, and thinking. An *Oiha* is interested only in joy and pleasure, making use of all the goods the hard working *bullpops* produce, and also eating *bullpop* brain. The *bullpops* practice all the human disciplines of science and humanities, and their prime aspiration is to build towers to reach the ocean's surface. The *Oihas* live in half ready bullock towers; when a tower is high enough for their use, they invade it, kill the *bullpops* and move in. For the *bullpops* the *Oihas* appear as transcendental deities they adore. The *Oiha* queen explains to Gulliver (while interpreting his reports) that the human society functions similarly; it is a false impression that women are oppressed by the patriarchy: in the reality they enjoy a life of leisure, letting men do both the hard work and care about all the uncomfortable and joyless problems of *logos*, to use a notion that is alien to the *Oiha* queen but offers a rather accurate description of the conglomerate of knowledge, problems and aspirations *bullpops* are crazy about and *Oihas* could not care less about. This representation of human society in which men are mercilessly exploited by cold-hearted women is supported by the frame story of Gulliver's marriage, which is entertaining because any reader can understand how cruelly he is used, while he, the I-narrator, does not seem to have a clue.

Although the book's moral is clearly misogynistic, it may be read also as a critique of logocentric male society. Although Gulliver's discourse about the *bullpop* world is entirely laudatory, the *bullpops* infatuation with *Oiha* beauty and their inability to face the reality of the *Oihas'* destructive effect reveals them as fallible and of limited intelligence. The fact that *bullpop* communities working on different tower building projects tend to start wars against each other also makes it impossible to see the *bullpops* as symbol of an otherwise ideal society that is regrettably held back and oppressed by the females. Read this way, *Capillaria* becomes a double anti-utopia mocking both female and male communities. The mockery is remarkable in such images as males as self-sustaining penises, or Gulliver talking directly to the *Oiha* queen's vagina because that is the best way the highly sensual creature can understand things. However, the two butts of mockery

are far from balanced; the cruel and indifferent *Oihas* (i.e. the women) are obviously the villains here.

Sándor Szathmári (1997–1974) regarded himself as Karinthy’s disciple (or “spiritual son”).<sup>6</sup> *Kazohinia*, which was his only book of literary significance and influence, shows the classical travelogue structure of utopias. Gulliver survives a shipwreck and arrives on an unknown island named Kazohinia, which he manages to leave after various adventures. The island is populated by people who call themselves *Hin*, but a part of the area serves as a reservoir for defective individuals, the *Behin*. From the author’s confessions and especially from his introduction to the second edition one can conclude that his intention was to juxtapose a genuine utopia (the description of the perfect society of the *Hin*) and an anti-utopia (the world of the *Behin*, which mocks human society).<sup>7</sup> The perfectly ordered *Hin* society is regulated by the principle of *kazo*, which is something like the rationally understandable harmony of things. Emotions or passions cannot disturb a *Hin*’s mental balance or influence his or her actions, and therefore the society as a whole functions in perfect balance too. Szathmári’s representation strategy, however, differs from classical utopias in the narrator’s character and attitude; usually the witness understands and admires the perfect society, while Gulliver finds the *Hins* annoying, boring and shockingly immoral. His attitude is well demonstrated by the scene in which he thinks to get an apartment of his own by abusing *Hin* customs. *Hins* live in uniform apartments, but they do not own them, since they do not have private property. Gulliver simply enters an apartment and tells the occupant to move out because he, Gulliver, needs it more, as it is very close to the place where he works. The *Hin* accepts this argument as *kazo*, and leaves.<sup>8</sup> For the *Hin* the most suitable arrangement of flats is *kazo*, and he does not feel attached to a given flat just because he has spent some time in it. For Gulliver the lack of enthusiasm for owning things is ridicu-

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<sup>6</sup> **Tófalvi**, Éva. “A hazatérő író: Szathmári Sándor”. – *Confessio* XV, 1991, № 2, p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> For the authorial intention and its failure to be realized in the text see **Berkes**, Tamás. “Az elgondolhatatlan utópia”. – *Literatura* XXXVIII, 2012, № 1, pp. 90–99.

<sup>8</sup> **Szathmári**, Sándor. *Kazohinia*. Transl. Kemenes, Inez. Budapest: Corvina, 1975, p. 127.

lously strange. However logical and fair the Hin reaction in this particular case seems to be, many readers tend to find the emotionless, eventless, cold lifestyle of the Hin unattractive and boring. Gulliver thinks that the Hin have no soul and that a soul is necessary for humanity. Szathmári makes it clear that Gulliver is unable to understand the real advantages of the Hin life-style, but he probably failed to make the Hin utopia convincingly attractive.

Gulliver is no happier when sent among the Behins, a society that is a parody of the European one. The Behins oppress and hurt each other continuously because of concepts that can be decoded as abstract and exaggerated versions of Gulliver's own, such as religion, aesthetics, prestige, or gender morality. Travesties of European habits are usually funny, and it is even funnier that Gulliver cannot see the obvious similarities between the Behins and himself. He completely understands the ridiculous nature of the Behin society without adapting this lesson to himself.

The Hin world is not an ecotopia, but some of its features show remarkable similarities to some ecocritical insights. The recycling of human corpses—which shocks Gulliver—indicates an advanced technology that tries to minimize waste. As it seems, Hin society does not overconsume, which may be a consequence of the lack of any competitive male ego (or as Gulliver calls it: a soul). This impression is strengthened by the contrast to the Behins, who have developed a fully hierarchized and sexist society. They take their “spiritual values” so seriously that they do not have time to produce food or anything else—except what seems to be the equivalent of art. The Hins regard the separated Behin colony as a big hospital or lunatic asylum, and so provide enough food for every Behin. However, the ruling caste of the Behins collects and redistributes the personal food ratios to create social inequalities and force many people, especially women, to starve. The Behins really have an inexhaustible external source of goods (exactly what the human race seems to think they have), but competitive male subjectivity leads them to create both deprivation and overconsumption.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Hin doctor cannot even understand Gulliver's society in which people want to have more food and work less, “while it is a general balance what our organs

The biggest fault of the *Kazohinia* is the naïve pseudo-scientific explanation for the differences between Hins and Behins. They are biologically different: every brain functions as an aerial to receive the cosmic rays that emanate from the sun, but the brains of the Behins function incorrectly due to self-oscillation (174–175). The Behins' brain is thus incapable of clear logical thinking, because it listens to its own phantasmagoric waves instead of reality. Even if the reader accepts Hin society as genuinely utopian (as the author intended according to the paratextual testimony of the second edition), it is impossible to imagine it as a remotely possible option for mankind, since such a society depends on a different (not really human) kind of body. The way Szathmári explained the dichotomy of clearly thinking and rather crazy intelligent creatures recalls Karinty's *Farecido*, where the contamination of organic matter confuses the mind, while the juxtaposition of two (anti-)utopias echoes the structure of Karinty's *Capillaria*.

Mihály Babits was a towering figure of Hungarian modernism. Through his positions as editor-in-chief of *Nyugat*, the most influential literary magazine of the interwar period (1929–1941), and as the curator of the Baumgarten Foundation (1927–1941), which was giving away substantial sums as the era's most prestigious literary prize, as well as his immense production of critiques and book reviews, he succeeded in shaping the life and taste of at least one, but a decisive, segment of the Hungarian literary field. Although his literary fame has been based on his tremendous achievement in lyric poetry, he was also a prolific prose writer of five novels and several hundred pages of short stories.<sup>10</sup> His narrative output had negligible influence on the development of the Hungarian novel, perhaps due to his lack of talent in the very art of storytelling. One may expect that a dystopia, with its inclination to reasoning, to contain long discursive passages, is more suited to Babits's prose writing style, but *Pilot Elza* – despite

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needed, and overburdening was equally harmful whether the strain was on the stomach or the muscles" (92).

<sup>10</sup> For the latter see **Babits**, Mihály. *Kisprózai alkotások*. Ed. Némédiné Kiss, Adrien and Szántó, Gábor András. Budapest: Argumentum, 2010.

the sensation it caused in the short run<sup>11</sup> — is the least discussed of his novels.<sup>12</sup>

A number of weaknesses may explain this lack of vivid scholarly reception. Firstly, the structure seems rather unbalanced. The book contains five parts of broadly similar length, but the first two mostly dwell on a single night Mr. and Mrs. Kamuthy spend in a bomb shelter, in the company of Dr. Schulberg. The protagonist Elza Kamuthy appears only in Part 3, after which her parents play no further major role in the narrative. Although it is not unusual to stage situations in the beginning of a story in which other people can speak about the protagonist who is to take the floor later, to use more than 40 % of the text for such preparation is rather extreme. Secondly, all the five parts end with “Notes” that tell a different story about the small earth, an artificial, miniature world a scientist created in the past to see the development of life, and maybe society. The ending of the novel reveals that the main story was set in small earth, suggesting an endless chain of smaller and smaller earths. History is determined: life necessarily develops on any planet, and evolution necessarily leads to an intelligent race that at one point in its history will create a small earth to understand its beginnings, before starting the eternal war<sup>13</sup> as the end of civilisation. And then the small world also creates its small world. However, during the main narrative Dr. Schulberg is reading a book about the small world he is part of. The illogical relationship of the two narratives is not solved in any satisfactory way.<sup>14</sup> Having two unrelated stories in a book would not be a problem, of course, as some great examples of modernism show (William Faulkner’s *The Wild*

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<sup>11</sup> **Kocsis**, Lilla. “Én csak jel és szimbólum vagyok.” Utópikus vonások Babits Mihály *Elza pilóta vagy a tökéletes társadalom* című művében. PhD dissertation, University of Szeged, 2009, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> **Lengyel**, Zsolt. “Narratív pozíciók az Elza pilótában”. – In: Nédli, Balázs, Pienták, Attila, and Sipos, Lajos (Eds.). *Közelítések... Babits Mihály életművéről születésének 125. évfordulóján*. Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 2008, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> Although the critical response has mostly understood Pilot Elza in the context of contemporary literature, the expression “eternal fight” (*örök harc*) literally quotes the subtitle of the first volume of Mór **Jókai**’s *The Novel of the Century to Come*, the most influential utopian novel in Hungarian literature. Babits obviously criticizes that novel, in which the eternal peace follows the eternal fight.

<sup>14</sup> **Lengyel**, Zsolt. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

*Palms* may suffice as an example). However, the weakness in Babits' novel is the impossible and scarcely elaborated way these two narratives are connected in the end. Thirdly, a dystopia is supposed to give some ideas about the represented society, but from *Pilot Elza* we can extract only very little and contradictory information about how the dystopian future actually works. Babits focuses only on a few issues, the eternal war, the decline of culture, and gender segregation, while dropping casual remarks on everything else. As Zsolt Lengyel put it:

Taking the contemporary world as granted he only explains what and how has changed in the world of eternal fight.<sup>15</sup>

This seems rather similar to what is called the principle of minimal departure in possible worlds theory.<sup>16</sup> However, it does not work well here. The eternal warfare is repeatedly said to depend on collectivism, which is contradicted by both the hierarchical levels of the bomb shelter (in which the rich have first class private cabins, while the third class is atrocious) and the bourgeois household of the Kamuthys.<sup>17</sup>

What Babits focuses on is the general decline or the end of culture. His vision of the eternal war presents a world in which fight is regarded as the only and genuine purpose of human existence, and everything from economy to science and to procreation is subordinated to that purpose. Culture is not needed for the fight, therefore it dies. The two antagonistic warring entities are said to differ in their relationship to the concept of nation. The alliance where most parts of the story develop is said to cherish the nation, while the enemy is international. The entities are not named, but Elza's city is indicated with an initial "Sz..." and we learn that is located by the river Tisza, and over the river it contains a part called "Újsz..." [New Sz...]. These

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<sup>15</sup> Lengyel, Zsolt. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>16</sup> See Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana UP, 1991.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., the scene when Mrs. Kamuthy has to open the door for a visitor herself: "Her maids have joined the army, and as it seemed even the richest bourgeois households had to do without maids." Babits, Mihály. "Elza pilóta". – In: Babits, Mihály. *A gólyakalifa; Kártyavár; Timár Virgil fia; Elza pilóta*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1982, p. 611.

little pieces of information strongly suggest the setting to be Szeged in Hungary. Not only do most of the characters have Hungarian family names, but once (maybe as a slip of tongue) the narrator also mentions that their characters are Hungarian: “The Hungarians, as every nation, were spread widely along the frontline” (635). However, it is difficult to see how nation can be important for a cultureless political unity, and actually nothing national features in the represented society. The nationlessness of the dystopian nation state, however, is not a weakness of the novel, but a conscious feature. The final moral we learn is that there is no difference between the enemies. Nationalism and internationalism are nothing more than ideological slogans useful for war propaganda. Schulberg had already explained this in the bomb shelter:

This practically realizes the idea of international unity without giving up fierce pride in national existence. This way the old opposition of national and international has been successfully overcome. Our enemies fight with an international slogan, but we are as international as them, and (in the separation of their military units) they are as national as us.<sup>18</sup>

Elza also finds her place in the enemy army in the end, functioning as a bomber, while no cultural or linguistic barrier seems to cause problems. Although she does not understand the language, she can perfectly perform the combative task of bombing her home town Sz...

The plot centres around a final turn in the decline of culture, namely the decision that women should be recruited for combatting forces and front duty. In the beginning, society is segregated: men are fighting in the underground tunnels of the frontline, while women and cripples<sup>19</sup> live in the cities and the former go to universities to do historical research and sustain some residues of culture. One can see a

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<sup>18</sup> Babits, Mihály, 1982, p. 498.

<sup>19</sup> Most of the cripples are artificially made. The wealthy families with good connections bribe the doctors to cripple their new born sons so they will be immune of war duty, although with the automatized equipment they could easily perform any task. While the others are in war, the hereditary cripples can accommodate wealth and political power. The crippled ruling class can be regarded as a black humor allegory.



stroke of misogyny in the narrator's evaluation of a culture sustained by women:

Universities had become girl schools. They did "research" with the naive meticulousness and ardent diligence without any initiative, which is characteristic of female students... What kind of culture was this? Perfectly sterile!<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Schulberg represents a kind of alternative culture: he is a very elderly gentleman who nostalgically sticks to his bourgeois erudition and passes his free time reading old books, while cynically performing his duties as an army general and scientist. He offers a similar option to Elza when she is recruited. Elza, who learned how to fly an airplane as a bourgeois pastime, can be his private pilot when he visits the frontline, which may keep her relatively safe and provide immense free time to continue her studies in the history of religion, which is her academic field. Elza flies through the enemy lines and lands Dr. Schulberg's plane on the other side. Both of them are used by the enemy: Dr. Schulberg as a laboratory assistant, Elza as a bomber. With Elza's failed attempt to escape, an attempt to find another reality beyond the eternal war destroys even this last option of sustaining culture in the last reservoir of the private sphere.

*Pilot Elza* was not the only text in which Babits wrote about his anxiety about the decline of culture. "For sure, from the '20s on Babits did not trust in the development of culture. He was afraid of further decline," summarises Mihály Szegedy-Maszák.<sup>21</sup> And to prove that his pessimism was far from being exceptional in the Europe of the time, it is enough to quote Robert Musil's note:

*Once again the uppermost problem: [...] collapse of the culture (and of the idea of culture). This is in fact what the summer of 1914 initiated.*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Babits, Mihály, 1982, p. 553.

<sup>21</sup> Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály. "Esszéírás és irodalomtörténet". – In: Szegedy-Maszák, Mihály (Ed.). *A magyar irodalom története. Vol. 3. 1920-tól napjainkig*. Budapest: Gondolat, 2007, p. 252.

<sup>22</sup> Musil, Robert. *The Man Without Qualities. Volume 2. From the Posthumous Papers, 1961*. Transl. Pike, Burton and Wilkins, Sophie. New York, N.Y.: Ran-

At the beginning of the plot, before women are allowed/forced to join the fighting army, men and women are practically segregated and have completely different life experiences. This makes reproduction a challenge for the society of eternal war, one which is solved by making reproduction a war duty. People are obliged to get married and fulfil a quota of children. Meeting a suitable partner, however, is difficult, since men and women cannot easily talk to each other because of their different interests and attitudes; they do not even want to spend much time together. At least this is how Elza and the university students she is surrounded by are described, although in a bomb shelter quick sexual encounters are also mentioned between men on short leave from the front and easy women. It is difficult to tell if the family life of the Kamuthys should be read as a critique of the pre-eternal-war bourgeois marriage or a representation of the dystopian couple. They do not seem to share any values or agree on anything; when they speak they annoy each other, and if any emotion can be detected between them it is hatred. In such a society homosexuality is the obvious choice to fulfil one's emotional and sexual needs. And while "sexual relations in canonical utopias have been overwhelmingly heterosexual"<sup>23</sup> until the last decades of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, Babits explicitly takes the homosexual option into account. The female students' general lesbianism is frequently mentioned, and Dr. Schulberg also declares to Elza that he used to be homosexual before aging has made him asexual. Although it is tempting to appreciate Babits' taking homoerotic practices into account as an innovative feature in the contemporary context of dystopian writing, one should not forget that the text's attitude towards homosexuality is rather derogatory. Girls are always criticized for "consoling themselves with girlfriends" for the lack of men, and Dr. Schulberg thinks it does his reputation good to hire a woman as his personal pilot. Elza, the protagonist, whom everybody (including readers) is supposed to like, is never tempted by homosexual desire. She even experiences a (not too rewarding) sexual encounter with a sensitive young man. Despite hints at ubiquitous ho-

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dom-Vintage International, 1996, p. 1809. – <https://uberty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/musil-2.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> **Tower Sargent**, Lyman and Lucy **Sargisson**. "Sex in Utopia: Eutopian and Dystopian Sexual Relations". – *Utopian Studies* XXV, 2014, № 2, p. 301.

mosexual practices in Babits' dystopia, it represents a society defined by a default heteronormativity endorsed by the implied author: homosexuality can be seen as just another symptom of cultural decline.

Babits' novel also seems unique among modernist dystopias in the way it handles resistance. Resistant groups usually play a central role in the plot, but this is not a case in *Pilot Elza*. In Moylan's taxonomy the alienated protagonist is either crushed by the power structure, or finds allies and "enters collectively into outright opposition," which may end in another, but memorable, defeat or in "the organization of a resistant enclave" or in a new political movement of liberation.<sup>24</sup> None of these happens to Elza. She knows of the existence of resistant groups, as everybody does, but never has any thought of joining them or even looking for them. It is sometimes said by minor characters that deserters and revolutionaries have their own secret bomb shelters, but such people never appear in the narrative itself. The bombing in the eternal war is a gas attack, and the attacked states use them as disciplinary means: at the entrance of a bomb shelter everybody goes through an identity check, so deserters and unreliable elements must choose between dying on the streets and surrendering, unless they build their own secret shelters. But there are also rumours about fake air raids when the state actually attacks the secret shelters of the resistance. Neither the protagonist nor any major character knows anything about the resistant groups for sure or tries to contact them. The middle class bourgeois characters may look suspiciously at the revolutionaries anyway. When Elza in her final despair flies over the front line to land in the country of the enemy, she is not crushed by the power system, but simply used by the enemy as a valuable asset. What is also different from the major modernist dystopias is that the totalitarian states of the eternal war do not expect commitment from their citizens. They are quite satisfied with cooperation, which they can easily enforce through brutal violence (or the threat of it). The idea that the gas attacks of the enemy are used to dispose of domestic opposition suggests a cynical cooperation between the overtly antagonistic enemies to stabilize each other's totalitarian systems.

Utopian writing is basically intellectual, yet the most memorable utopian (including anti-utopian and dystopian) novels are emotion-

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<sup>24</sup> Moylan, Tom. Ibid. XIII.

ally loaded narratives about alienated characters – in addition to the vivid fantasy of an alternative social reality. For an anti-utopia the alternate reality does not need to be consistent or logically convincing; it is enough if it is funny and formulates some strong statement about our own social organisation. Karinthy's Gulliver sequels are undeniably funny; their plots are very simplistic, just like the classic utopias: Gulliver goes to a strange place, learns the inhabitants' language and understands their society (or rather listens to them explaining his own human society), then returns. Being funny is not enough of an excuse for the misogynistic ideas in *Capillaria*, though the positive ethos of a non-human, artificial intelligence remains thought provoking even in the context of the later developed dystopian tradition of robots. Szathmári's novel may have remained popular because of its ambiguities, rooted in the satirical tradition: a fallible (or rather stupid) narrator-protagonist criticises two different societies without understanding the basic faults of his own world. The fun may take on a grotesque, sometimes even Kafkaesque, quality. In a genuine dystopia, inconsistency and fallible logic are much less acceptable, especially when a rather uneventful narrative – like that of Babits' – solicits an intellectual approach. *Pilot Elza* suffers from inconsistencies, and despite some remarkable features its dire vision of eternal war and cultural decline, suggesting the futility of both hollow nostalgia and resistance, lacks the impressiveness of the modernist dystopias.

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