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Strong and Weak Forces of Otherness in Struggles
for Social Control as Reflected
in Jerzy Pilch's *Inne rozkosze (His Current Woman)*

After the great sudden change of social paradigms in the wake of the events of 1989, post-dependent literature across Eastern Europe was liberated of a long-standing socio-political egalitarian communist dogma insisting on 'sameness' — the sameness of society, citizens, and convictions. By the *ancien regime's* official version, the Polish nation-state was one homogenous entity. It did not comprise minority identities of any kind, be they ethnic, religious, or even intellectual in character. This insistence on equality, or rather on equalizing, meant to deprive those of a voice who did not fit the political mould of the atheist (or at the very most Catholic) ethnic Pole devoid of any regional identity or dialect. Naturally, the end of communist censorship in 1989 meant that a wealth of minorities finally and expeditiously reclaimed their voice. Sometimes they did that by proxy:¹ Poland's Jews, Silesians, or Lutherans, as it were in the instant case, suddenly and almost miraculously reappeared on the nation's cultural stage in a remarkable diversity, as if awaking from a half-century of glacial hibernation under authoritarian restraints. While ideological stifling had been more extreme during certain eras than others, minorities were always subjected

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¹ The majority of the Jewish population perished during the Holocaust, and survivors left Poland during and even after World War II. Ethnic Germans who were not expelled during and after 1945 were forced to assimilate just like Silesians, and the Kashubian dialect has almost entirely disappeared in nearly half a century of communist "standardization" of the official Polish language. At least Roma culture partially survived the forced settlement policy mandated for Roma families.

to the egalitarian party dogma that struggled to deny them a place on the map of Polish reality.

Jerzy Pilch, one of the most important contemporary Polish writers, takes otherness² and symbolic shifts to all new heights in his *Inne rozkosze* (*His Current Woman*): with characteristic eloquence and irony, he casts his Polish protagonist as a Lutheran with a Czech name³ who lives in a small Cieszyn Silesian town — his ‘small fatherland’ where German language use is part of cherished local tradition going back centuries while some of the elders, including Dr. Franciszek Józef Oyermach, still fondly remember the time of the Austrian imperial administration that ended with World War I.⁴ The region that is the setting of the action — Cieszyn Silesia — had been disputed territory for centuries. It had changed hands repeatedly even in recent history. The national border between Poland and Czechoslovakia in Cieszyn Silesia was resolved, however ‘conclusively’ only in 1958. Substantial parts of adjoining regions have been settled by the German element for almost a millennium. And Jerzy Pilch’s *His Current Woman* clearly contains more than just a few autobiographic elements.⁵ It may be consid-

² The “Other” is a term with a rich and lengthy philosophical history devolving at least from Plato’s *Sophist*, in which the Stranger participates in a dialogue on the ontological problems of being and non-being, of the One and the Other. See Rosen (1983), 269–290. Since then, that “Other,” as half of a signifying binary, at various times threat, responsibility, alter ego, and enigma to and of the self, has been a major preoccupation of Western thought and literature in the tradition of Herodotus, Plato, Hegel, Lacan, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Levinas, Derrida, Foucault, and Charles Taylor, and has become a particular focus in postcolonial, postmodern and postfeminist theory. See, e. g., Palacios (2009), 27–35. See also Taussig (1993), and Hartog (1988).

³ Kohoutek means “little rooster” in Czech. It is a common name that may be interpreted as an allusion to the symbolic virility of the bird, quite befitting a protagonist hunted by his inner “imp of carnality” (59).

⁴ Franciszek Józef is another word play, since its German version is Franz Joseph, the name of the next-to-last Austro-Hungarian emperor, still revered in the region even at the present time. Oyermach is clearly a German family name whose spelling has not been adapted to Polish conventions, contrary to the custom prevailing throughout recent history.

⁵ Jerzy Pilch, born 1952, is himself a Lutheran from Wisła in the Beskid region in Cieszyn Silesia, Southern Poland, the only town in Poland with a majority Protestant majority population. The topic of adultery is not a first impression

ered the author's tongue-in-cheek revenge on the Polish majority that, under the egalitarian cultural dogma of communist ideology, had until recently denied Pilch essential parts of his own ethnic minority identity.

The novel's plot is built upon a series of comical disasters befalling the protagonist, 40-year old married veterinarian Paweł Kohoutek, when his current female conquest from the big city unexpectedly shows up at his small-town family home to claim what she, by her understanding of his words, believes to be her rightful place in Paweł's life. The bulk of Pilch's narrative chronicles Kohoutek's manifold yet predictably futile attempts at preventing an evidently looming catastrophe from happening: he strives to keep his mistress out of sight in an abandoned attic above an old slaughterhouse on his property just as he struggles to keep his numerous relatives and lodgers from finding out about her by accident. Paweł's frequent, often hilariously desperate internal monologues purport to sound a solemn warning to other would-be adulterers. Deeply distraught by the seemingly inevitable vision of his "current woman" literally invading his family, and even more shocked by his own powerlessness at preventing it from happening, Kohoutek finds himself at the end of the plot compelled to leave his home town that is the very centre of his world. And just as he does, his "current woman" leaves town as well — albeit in a different direction.

The Other in *His Current Woman* is the somewhat secularized Polish Catholic majority, ably embodied and aptly represented by Justyna, Kohoutek's "current woman." Her mere appearance threatens the established order of things in the small rural town where everybody, just like Kohoutek's own family, is Lutheran and highly protective of their community's ingrained Protestant values. Justyna's very arrival almost feels like an act of counter-reformation. So strong is the locals' sense of identity that even their

among Pilch's oeuvre: already his second novel, *Spis cudzołożnic* ("List of Adulteresses," 1993), related the story of a failed eccentric writer who took a foreign guest on a tour of Kraków through a collection of national myths and the absurd socialist realities of the 1980s. A cinematic version was released in 1995 under the international title *List of Lovers*.

livestock is only half-jokingly referred to as “Protestant domestic animals.”(26)⁶ Common prejudice towards the Other is emphasized further when Kohoutek explicitly warns his ‘current woman’ about his grandmother who is always wont to ask strangers whether they might not be, well, Catholic? The old woman steadfastly reserves her trust for her own people only — who, in this case, happen to be proper Lutherans. Her identity as a member of a small ethnic and religious minority is boldly underscored by the name she is referred to by everyone: Oma, or grandmother in German.⁷ The elders indeed actively “practiced German vocabulary, because who knows whether they would not meet doctor Martin Luther in the Lord’s Vineyard, and then they would be expected to say at least, ‘Guten Tag, Herr Doktor Luther, ich bin also ein Lutheraner aus Weichsel in Polen.’” (51) (“Good afternoon, Doctor Luther, well, I am a Lutheran from Wisła in Poland”). Incidentally, the only time the author refers to the city by its name, it is in German. Wisła also happens to be Jerzy Pilch’s own hometown, and its German name is not widely known outside of the region. This cryptic reference to an actual location in Poland adds another layer of insider-outsider divide.

It may be quite useful to take a brief look at the irony of representing the Other as society’s majority infringing in a threatening way upon a minority in terms of a margin-centre dichotomy. The

⁶ Quotes refer to the Polish edition, Pilch, Jerzy. *Inne rozkosze*. Gdańsk: Tower Press (2000). English translations are the author’s own.

⁷ In Cieszyn Silesia, the distinct local dialect is based on the Polish language, but major German and Czech influences have remained strong, and the vernacular differs markedly from the Silesian dialect spoken in Upper Silesia. Jewish and Yiddish cultural influences, once also substantial, did not survive the end of German occupation in early 1945. Cieszyn Silesia was a showcase example of the success of the Habsburg empire’s liberal and pluralistic attitude toward national and ethnic groups, at least compared to the atmosphere in parts of Poland under Russian and Prussian administration. Not coincidentally, a senior member of the Imperial family was always styled Duke of Cieszyn (Herzog von Teschen). The first Habsburg Duke of Cieszyn was Karl, younger brother of Emperor Francis I, the victor in the battle of Aspern in the Fifth Coalition War, Napoléon’s first defeat in battle ever. Karl had been adopted by Duke Albert Kasimir von Sachsen-Teschen, a Free Mason and founder of the eponymous Albertina, the world’s largest collection of graphic art, in Vienna.

Lutheran minority in Poland finds itself inexorably at the outer fringes, both geographically and ethnically, of an overwhelmingly Catholic society. Its centre is unquestionably Catholic and ethnically Polish. And yet, the Augsburg-Protestant residents of this small Cieszyn Silesian town encapsulate themselves in the protective shell of an enclave that represents the centre of *their* world — and views the rest of the universe as being outside, at the margin. This reversal of the conventional margin-centre interpretation lay at the very core of the binary world view Pilch portrays: whatever is not part of their small town is considered to be more or less irrelevant — it barely exists. To protect the centre and its identity, the outside world is certainly not a factor to be consciously reckoned with, but is best ignored to the extent circumstances will permit.

This isolationist concept is also precisely how Paweł Kohoutek intends to ensure the safety of his philandering habits: by limiting his romances to the outside world, he protects his ability to play the assigned and expected role in his conservative small-town community and in his family. Unfulfilled and irrelevant in his domestic circle where he feels like little more than a piece of furniture, Paweł instead chases his dreams in Kraków, Poland's second largest and oldest city, familiar as the setting of the author's salacious second novel *List of Adulteresses*, by engaging in a veritable torrent of extramarital affairs. He lacks a clear sense that his diversimenti are in reality crassly deceiving his paramours: as he displays before them his vivid and inspiring visions of a life together, he truly believes at that very moment that his life could actually change. Of course, post-coital catharsis promptly returns Kohoutek to his inescapable reality: "God, what nonsense I was blabbering yesterday,' and he'd run away in utter panic." (19) A causal nexus between Paweł's remarkable, inspired and imaginative storytelling talent and his desires towards a live woman here and now is not altogether clear. In any event, the ladies' intimate favours are a pleasant and certainly not unwelcome side-effect of the remarkable persuasive powers of his imaginative and no doubt well-presented visions.

Paweł's neat and originally safe separation of life into a domestic and romantic sphere is cruelly upset and perturbed when his "current woman" boldly or naively takes him at his word and audaciously invades his heretofore isolated and well-protected domestic space. Kohoutek considers Justyna's arrival with all her humble belongings an incomprehensible and downright scandalous trespass, even though he had earlier promised her very explicitly and specifically a future together at his home in Cieszyn Silesia. At this point, Kohoutek's "current woman" is, to him, the Other: modern, independent, confident, Justyna behaves unpredictably by the standards of Paweł's small-town world view. She is free from outstanding commitments and considerably more progressive and imaginative than him who is steeped in anxiety about his home sphere and its domestic stasis. She prods him to reflect in more depth on his own provincial life. But in her capacity as mistress of a married man, Justyna is also the contrasting Other in the framework of her man's domestic sphere. Her exclusion is only accentuated when she attempts to join his family circle in futile hopes of eventually becoming one of their own. That conflict of interest between conservative family traditions and a young adventuress is brought to a head in a scene where Justyna flattens her nose against the window, watching grandma's birthday party from outside. Promptly mistaken for a burglar, Justyna becomes the subject of an indolent manhunt by the party guests that leaves her terrified and hiding in her refuge in the crown of an old apple tree.

Kohoutek tries in vain to re-separate the domestic and outside spheres of his world by confining his "current woman" to the attic of the crumbling slaughterhouse just across the yard. The attic is both inside and outside of his domestic realm: while it is certainly located on family property, it is nonetheless not a part of his house. It used to belong to his grandfather, but nowadays nobody really goes there anymore. The place is part of both the past and present: a carton box collection stashed in the attic emerges as a curious memento of family history since the interwar period, but it turns out that nondescript post-communist boxes also had somehow found their way up there.

By placing Justyna in the virtual limbo of his mouldy attic, Kohoutek primarily attempts to prevent her from penetrating his domestic sphere any further. The additional shelter built for her from carton boxes is at first blush only meant to prevent her discovery, but it can also be read as a walling-off of his outside life in the periphery to prevent it from seeping into the domain of his domestic centre. Yet, to his horror, Kohoutek discovers that the sanctuary he created for Justyna is by no means an impermeable bar to his family, because the least likely of his relatives, the barely mobile Oma, turns out to be using the very same attic as a hiding spot for her loot of certain edibles she had a kleptomaniac habit of removing from the common kitchen and then stashing away up in the attic. At this point, a confrontation between Paweł's carefully segregated domestic and outside lives seems to become increasingly inevitable. The iconoclastic nature of his "current woman's" presence is brought to the fore yet again when both Oma and Kohoutek discover independent of each other that Justyna had been using a secret passage to the attic, a place fraught with a plethora of family history, as her own personal outhouse.

At this point it can no longer surprise that the contrast between Kohoutek's patriarchal impotence in his domestic sphere and a savvy woman who thinks she is owed more and deserves better and who drives the action with her passionate initiatives, by her presumption of candor and veracity entirely regardless of the venerable, dusty and intransigent state of affairs, would eventually burst irrepressibly into the open. In those terms, Justyna is viewed as a 'madwoman'⁸ not for any reasons personal — since, after all, nobody except Kohoutek knows her even superficially at all, and even his awareness of her true self is rather shallow at best — but because, to the proponents of this judgment, the sheer attempt to change things, to depart from tradition, commitment, and estab-

⁸ Szawara (2011) derives from the venerable Victorian Leitmotiv "the madwoman in the attic" (Gilbert & Gubar (2000)) a feminist critique centered on the portrayal of women by men in accordance with parameters of traditional roles and expectations. It should be noted that Justyna does not rebel against tradition, but that she had rather never consented to its terms and conditions, having been lured into the situation by Paweł's lies and false promises.

lished ways is in itself axiomatic evidence of sheer madness, any redeeming factors notwithstanding.

Paweł's symbolic shifts are multi-dimensional: he becomes the author of his own story as he asks at the end of the novel how a book about him might begin. Not only does he begin to envision himself as the Other, both as subject and as object, as author and creator of multi-level meanings to the stories he portrays before his women, but more importantly, it is only in these fantasies that he is truly able to indulge his own desires freely — when, in truth, he is, and will most obviously remain, a captive to existing standards, yet he is also narcissistically obsessed with his good old self. Pilch's humour is not, as many might at first surmise, derivative of some deeper understanding reaching too far beyond descriptive social caricature. Much rather, what he describes is a very common facet of 'perfectly normal' male behaviour. In a bow to publicly acknowledged and acceptable standards of expectation, Pilch casts Kohoutek as some unusual and artful literary figure when, in fact, he implicitly acknowledges that his protagonist is far closer to the rule than to being an exception, manifested in the common male attempt at orchestrating a polyphony of significant others and a quest for multiple identities in an array of lives. Bringing Paweł's secret life to the fore, Pilch subtly denounces society's hypocrisy in denying the existence and indeed prevalence of a substantial number of Kohouteks right in its midst.

By breaking the principal social conventions of a conservative community where the illegitimate just needs to remain hidden, Kohoutek's "current woman" oversteps the bounds of her assigned role as a mistress, causing opprobrium even on the part of the few who personally have a fair measure of understanding for extramarital affairs, as Dr. Oyermach does. Justyna's effort to reclaim the legitimacy she was promised is thought of as outright insane by her promisor: "Kohoutek realizes that his current woman is a lunatic. He feels shivers running down his spine. No normal woman would ever come over in such a situation, yet she came nonetheless." (17). Family roles are rigidly assigned in this conservative society, and, more importantly, they are immutable. Therefore, attempts to change them are unthinkable.

Pressure to act according to expectations so as to preserve the social order even extends beyond death: in this small town, dying in winter is considered a serious faux-pas, since it inconveniences the living due to the remote location of the cemetery: “the path to the cemetery would become a steep, rocky, icy, drift-covered trail that was impossible to pass. Therefore, winter was not a time for dying in this region since generations. The old Lutherans tried not to die in winter.” (51). The individual is subordinated to the community, and acting against community interests causes inevitable opprobrium. Kohoutek’s grandfather Emilian “[d]ied as he lived — breaking generally accepted mores. He died in the middle of a cold and snowy winter.”(55).

Already rather evident, the profound chasm between Kohoutek and his “current woman” is further exacerbated by his lack of interest in intellectual endeavours: “I get bored even with reading books, not to mention writing. Reading bores me and tires me, because I move my eyes very slowly.”(39) His “current woman,” on the other hand, a college graduate having majored in Polish literature, is not only well-read but she also writes her own poetry. Her aptitude at haiku becomes a real thorn in their relationship. Paweł invariably brings up his utter lack of comprehension of poetry whenever he feels threatened and wants to hurt her: “I have no idea about books, I don’t know much about prose, and when it comes to poetry, I understand nothing at all. When it comes to poetry,’ he stressed and looked her in the eye, ‘I understand not even a comma.””(61) Their lack of mutual understanding and meaningful exchanges turns painfully obvious during Kohoutek’s soul-searching monologues, when he discovers that they never really communicated during their seventeen weeks of acquaintance: “I was constantly lying, and she talked incessantly about literature.”(14) Intellectually, his “current woman” is the incomprehensible Other for the much simpler wired, practically-minded Kohoutek.

Quite ironically, Justyna resembles Kohoutek’s wife in this regard, who, as he has resolved, is not only “too beautiful,” but also “too well educated” and “too smart.” Paweł discusses his deep sense of inferiority during a confessional conversation with Dr.

Oyermach, who berates him for marrying a woman who is “too beautiful and too smart” for his own good. Kohoutek’s defence “[w]hen she was getting married to me, she was neither that beautiful nor that smart. Beauty and wisdom came to her with age” (64), when taken together with Dr. Oyermach’s own pertinent experiences, showcases a powerful social taboo: that a suitable candidate for a happy marital union should never be superior to her husband, neither with regard to her looks nor intellectually. One can hardly view this as a phenomenon particularly germane to Polish civilization. It is rather a pervasive standard in male-dominated human societies in almost any culture, to a greater or lesser degree.

At the same time, such a philosophy naturally grants tacit permission to pursue superior women on extramarital territory, since it would be too difficult to enjoin men in the long run from acting upon their true attractions, whatever religious teachings or social pressures may command. Dr. Oyermach’s mention on that occasion of his own illegitimate granddaughter, Ola Krzywoniówna (26), supports this thesis. Altogether fittingly, she is the one who had once introduced young Kohoutek to carnal pleasures, reinforcing the double standard of respectable women of the community as opposed to women outside of it, both being necessary elements for the functioning of a conservative society. Accepted or not, it is universally understood that mistresses are the Others, but they are just as much an integral and indispensable part of a functioning society as its legitimate, married members. But all that notwithstanding, denial of visibility or indeed of the very existence of those Others is key to maintaining a social order that is based on a partial denial of reality in the first place. Paweł’s “current woman” threatens this established order by forcing him to accept, and gradually others to note, her visibility. Her literary references to Milan Kundera’s eerily similar story, “The Tale of Petrarca,” (61 – 62) only testify to Justyna’s personal awareness of her breach of social taboos with her arrival.

To Kohoutek, Justyna is the Other also in respect of gender. This obvious point is further exacerbated by his near total lack of any comprehension of the female psyche. Kohoutek describes his

“current woman” as a terrifyingly omniscient creature. He does not believe that he can conceal anything at all from her, neither his whereabouts nor the ‘infidelity’ he commits with his own wife. This particular quality echoes in the other women in his family: his mother, for example, has an almost supernatural intuition that she does not hesitate to demonstrate at every however inconvenient occasion. His rather estranged wife lets on to Kohoutek that she knows far more about his sexual escapades than he ever expected. When even his mentor, Dr. Oyermach, confronts him about his “current woman,” Kohoutek feels “surrounded by a tight circle of omniscient and constantly perorating men and of women gifted with a diabolic intuition.” (59). This way, he now becomes the Other himself — an adulterer and liar amongst the virtuous.

Kohoutek’s apparent disconnect with traditional and conventional values of his community is mirrored also in his attitude towards religion. Efforts at justifying his philandering with the Bible are quickly dismissed by the much better-read Dr. Oyermach who not only enjoys quoting scripture accurately but also staging *ad hoc* sermons that humiliate his pupil. Kohoutek’s prayers are replete not with regret of any sort but with complaints about his own dire predicament. His visceral reaction to those randomly timed, passionate sermons of the retired pastor who lodges at his home is nothing short of anger.

And Dr. Oyermach himself is the community’s Other in different ways. His position and advanced age make him stand out as a superior, not as an inferior Other. Well-travelled and profoundly educated, he is the go-to-person, the resident opinion leader to be consulted in any case of doubt. He is trusted precisely because he is not a part of Kohoutek’s inner family circle. Oyermach brings news from the outside world and interprets it for the community. Even his education is suitably foreign. More astounding yet, as Kohoutek realizes to his surprise, Oyermach still uses Russian rather than Polish or Latin terminology in the course of his veterinarian work.⁹

⁹ The “mythical book of [Kohoutek’s] childhood”(35) received from Oyermach was, in fact, a Stalin-era illustrated Russian language dictionary of veterinary medicine.

In his domestic sphere, Kohoutek finds himself the Other once again. He does not share a bedroom with his wife and is treated by her like a child: "The problem is that you are not a big, but still a little boy, and the cause of all your worries and problems is that you still live, like a little boy, exclusively in the world of prohibitions... Since when you can remember, the taboo of carnality was binding you." (52) Similarly, in spite of being a middle-aged man, Kohoutek is treated like a child also by his domineering mother who interrogates him for even small infractions, berates him, and impounds his forbidden cigarettes. Paweł's position in his family vividly reminds of Witold Gombrowicz's treatment of immaturity in *Ferdydurke*. Given his inferior rank in the domestic pecking order, Kohoutek does not have a relationship with his own child that would be worth mentioning. His offspring is never even referred to by a real name, only as "his doleful child" who usually lingers somewhere behind. Also rhetorically and in the use of figures of speech, Paweł is alienated from his family. By his nature and personality, he is unable to comprehend, much less accept, the style of the prevailing discourse where parties to a conversation threaten one another with death. Since childhood he has taken such figures of speech quite literally, imagining outright horror scenes following every domestic altercation.

Toward the novel's end, Kohoutek's alienation also takes on a broader and more general sense. His questionable morals are now all about to be disclosed to his family, and that fact alone may be safely presumed to cause his imminent expulsion from the circle of his relatives, his community, and his religious environment, all important parts of his domestic sphere. One retired pastor, still preaching privately, and that pastor's wife already live at Kohoutek's house, and Paweł's family plans to extend boarding facilities so as to accommodate even more retiring pastors. Now even Kohoutek's "current woman" turns against him, profoundly dissatisfied with her secretive attic existence in pathetic solitude and abject isolation in lieu of a promised family life. Their lack of personal and human understanding comes to be highlighted by Kohoutek's view that his duty to his "current woman" is an obligation limited to feeding her, whereas his duty to his family is lim-

ited to keeping his “current woman” out of their sight. Unable to resolve the situation, much less to face Justyna with even the barest apology or even a believable explanation, Paweł just hopes that the problem embodied by his “current woman” will somehow miraculously go away. He does not really come up with any practical plan or idea, not even with a vision of how exactly that salvatory change of circumstances might be brought about. A flair of fatalistic passivity, this absence of any bigger picture developed from experience or just a birds-eye view permeates Paweł’s domestic life and every manner of reflection. It may be a characteristic male response in many secondary relationships, but it is ultimately not a less frequently encountered phenomenon in primary, socially sanctioned and community-approved associations that, as the portrayal of Kohoutek’s interactions with his mother, wife and grandmother suggest, are equally characterized by stunning cluelessness and an unfortunate degree of absence of emotional intuition that seldom reaches beyond the prurient. Still, Pilch did not endeavor to write a feminist novel, nor has he produced one accidentally. The chronicle of this aspiring Don Juan is first-rate social commentary with an ironic bent, well-hidden as a literary sketch of rural small-town Poland.

The final scene brings fresh hope of inclusion for the increasingly estranged Kohoutek. As he sees no other solution but to flee from his hometown, Paweł calls out to his own child and takes him on the train ride to Kraków where he promises to show his youngster the zoo — a symbolically powerful gesture of reclaiming his paternal role. By that token, fleeing from home takes on a direction and becomes Kohoutek’s journey of return to his family in all his manifold capacities: as a recovered parent, a prodigal son, and as a wayward husband. This ending takes no turn to individualism, but actually quite the opposite — as an attempt to reconcile domestic reality and outer-worldly imagination, it reinforces and confirms the protagonist’s ultimately enduring hierarchy of values. One might call it an ode to the survival of tradition.

The otherness in *His Current Woman* is rather multi-faceted; it weaves through and between different personalities. Paweł Kohoutek is represented both as an insider and as an outsider trying

to find his way back to his family and community. His “current woman” is the Other on a great many levels, and this otherness both attracts and repels Kohoutek. The novel also has some intermediary figures, such as Dr. Oyermach, an honest broker and negotiator between the margins and the centre of society. Jerzy Pilch reverses the classical concepts of margin and centre by portraying a local and religious minority as the mainstream and centre as it struggles to protect its identity from numerous manifestations of majority influence. *His Current Woman* is far more than just an entertaining tale of a philanderer’s predicaments — although it is that, too, and in amusing ways. But it also raises essential questions of identity, tolerance, and personal integrity. By subtly, ironically, free of judgment but still unmercifully exposing the facts of society’s double standards, *His Current Woman* invites thoughtful and contemplative reflection about a whole array of fundamental issues involving truth and promissory fraud, of candour in inducements, and of conscious and subconscious misleading statements and reliance-inducing behaviour that affect every social interaction in general and the respective roles and rules of interaction between men and women in particular. Pilch’s concept of the Other may just be the result of a certain quasi innate prejudice and lack of tolerance toward fellow human beings, regardless of whether that Other is defined in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, education, emotional or other versions of intelligence or an uncommon liberality of views.

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