This collection of over fifty essays is devoted, as the title suggests, to a number of lesser known authors of Polish literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Instead of limiting the subject of the volume to well-known themes of late romanticism, positivism and Young Poland (as Polish modernism was widely known), one of the main aims of the book is to present authors and works that did not fit into these pre-defined terms. The writers presented in Literatura niewyczerpana are people who created outside the mainstream, or who crossed the boundaries of literary epochs. Significantly, the collection is not only about those who were forgotten and lesser known literary figures, but also about recognised authors and their less popular writings. By avoiding any clear-cut categories when it comes to the periodization of the history of Polish literature, the book brings together essays which could be interesting for readers from beyond the discipline of literary studies.

The book is divided into three parts: "Reminders and Revisions" (Przypomnienia i rewizje), "Portraits" (Portrety) and "New Readings" (Nowe odczytania). However, when it comes to the content and topics of particular chapters, one cannot help but find the differences between each of the three parts a little far-fetched. Indeed, some essays in the last part present more details about some writers than the chapters in the second part. Given a mixture of both academic and more popular scientific approaches presented by the authors, it is difficult to determine the intended readership of the volume. For academics working in the field some essays may appear too short and lacking precise arguments, while those simply interested in learning more about lesser known authors may feel overwhelmed by the academic style employed in other chapters.

Regardless of whether some chapters discuss works by well- or lesser known writers, their authors rarely look at larger collections of writings. Instead, most of the chapters tend to concentrate on one type of publication (novels, series of poems, press articles. A few comparative studies in the first chapters of the book are exceptions rather than rules. The most interesting among them is the essay by Anna Pekaniec. The author takes a look at the autobiographies of three women. By examining how these women constructed their own narratives and presented the aspects that played the most significant role in their lives, in this case, family, Pekaniec concludes that this type of family histories points to broader social changes of the late nineteenth century.
these autobiographies, the female writers of the period laid out "individual paths towards emancipation" (p. 62).

In another comparative study, Ewa Paczoska analyses the archetype of the decadent and its presentation in Polish literature at the turn of the centuries. However, the author falls short of presenting anything else than a selection of literary images of decadents in Polish literature. Except for the introduction, the author does not offer any comparison between Polish and foreign (particularly French) images of decadents in literature, though it appears that the Polish versions of this archetype were based entirely on Western examples. In other words, there was no typically "Polish" decadent. Paczoska's conclusion, calling for a return to the popular literature of the fin de siècle in order to achieve a better understanding of mainstream literature of that time, is too short and too imprecise.

Instead of concentrating on modern literature, Jan Jakóbczyk analyses three works devoted to the history of literature. By examining collections of works of Antoni Potocki, Wilhelm Feldman and Julian Krzyżanowski, Jakóbczyk intends to determine what made them include particular authors and works in their studies. Similarly important are their representations of certain authors of that time, either just as part of long enumerations (used particularly by Feldman and Potocki), or in more detailed examples. As Jakóbczyk argues, all three were the most renowned and influential literary critics at the turn of the centuries, so the more these historians wrote about particular authors, the greater became their significance.

The book offers a number of interesting case studies, too – not only well-written, but also well-argued pieces of original research. Agata Skała presents an interesting approach to Władysław Kozicki's literary works by contrasting them with contemporary art and pointing at the ways in which the author dealt with art in his novels. It is one of the very few chapters offering an interdisciplinary argument and pointing at the necessity of analysing Kozicki's works using both literary and non-literary methods.

In her slightly provocative chapter, Marta Rusek offers a brief insight into the contemporary interest in a few literary works by Amelia Hertzówna and their unique, idiomatic character. Hertzówna is also in the spotlight of Magdalena Kowalska's article, in which she takes a comparative look at two of her plays, in order to present the writer's vision of the Middle Ages in France. Both scholarly and popular interest in this author is even more unusual when we take into consideration that only six of her plays were published. Despite being praised by Feldman, Hertzówna did not become a popular author. Educated in Paris, she is presented as one of those writers who did not fit into the modernist trends. It rendered her "very European", but not Polish enough (p. 391). This European, almost universal character of her writings can be seen in the historical background of the majority of her plays. The two that Kowalska analyses are set in France, two others (Wielki król and Zburzenie Tyru) take place in Byzantium and ancient Tyre.

Another writer who received attention from more than one author in this collection of essays is Adolf Dygasiński. The two essays devoted to this writer mainly concentrate on his fables, pieces that usually remain at the margins of analyses of the author's literary and pedagogical career. A teacher like Dygasiński considered fables yet another tool in child education. Karolina Szymborska's chapter sheds more light on how Dygasiński arrived at
his particular understanding of fables. As she argues, the author "noticed the social, moral and psychological consequences of a fable (...) which influenced the shaping of the young generation, its education and value system" (p. 351). As Katarzyna Lesicz-Stanisławska suggests, his volume Cudowne bajki should be regarded "as an element of a widely understood artistic (and educational) programme" developed by Dygasiński (p. 344). In her opinion, as well as that of other researchers, Dygasiński's fables, by breaking with the usual form, ushered in a new era in Polish literature.

Unfortunately, a number of essays in this volume offer very imprecise arguments. Agata Wąsacz deals with Stanisław Gabriel Kozłowski and his play Napoleon's Captive. Despite devoting the whole essay to this one work, Wąsacz falls short of explaining how Kozłowski contributed to the legend of Napoleon in Poland – having written just one play about the latter. Even positive reviews of the play written by contemporary critics (which Wąsacz quotes) pointed at its rather mediocre, even if engaging, quality. Daniel Radecki's work is an analysis of the last book written by Artur Górski, published fifty years after the author's death. However, what's the most striking about this chapter is the fact that the book was written after the Second World War. It belongs, therefore, to a completely different historical and cultural era, and even Górski's significance for Polish literature before 1918 does not justify the presence of this chapter in Literatura niewyczerpana.

The variety of topics and the large number of essays should be able to guarantee a high quality of the volume. However, in many cases the authors fail to deliver a convincing argument justifying the significance of particular writers or their works in the history of Polish literature. Only Gabriela Matuszek admits that the works she discussed in her chapter "were not exceptional" (p. 574). Very few other authors take the liberty to be this honest with the reader. While broadening our knowledge of less popular and less remembered authors, in most cases it only confirms their marginal position in Polish literature. However, as many chapters illustrate, their marginal role in literary studies did not mean similar insignificance for the readers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It can be easy to forget that these works were written, published and (widely) read. As Jan Jakóbczyk observes (cf. p. 78), instead of complaining about the invisibility of certain writers from the late nineteenth century, we should instead accept their position on the margins as a permanent element of the history of literature.

Zitierweise: