

BARTOSZ EJZAK  
University of Lodz



# Black Love: On the Colours of Feelings in *Confiteor* by Antoni Szandlerowski

“Black dove”, “black iris”, “dark cloud”, “black corridor”. The images of Antoni Szandlerowski<sup>1</sup> concerning love arouse anxiety. The writer’s letters to Helena Beatus were posthumously collected by the addressee in a collection titled *Confiteor* and published in 1912. Engaging in his discourse, the author uses expressions such as “black”, “darkness”, “dark” with great frequency, which has not received much attention to date<sup>2</sup>. His imagination is dominated by images of unlit corridors with no exit, the nothingness of the grave or vermin devouring a still living body. What is such a perception of reality caused by? How does the artist vent his emotions and why does he combine positive symbols, such as the dove or iris, with epithets such as black,

<sup>1</sup> Antoni Szandlerowski (1878-1911), a Young Poland writer, the author of, e.g., a lampoon attacking the clergy, titled *Elenchus cleri alias choleri* (1906), a Biblical drama *Paraklet*, and posthumously published letters collected in the work titled *Confiteor* by Helena Beatus. [Unless indicated otherwise, quotations and titles in English were translated from Polish].

<sup>2</sup> A. Szandlerowski was discussed by Krzysztof Biliński in his book titled *Literackie przejawy modernizmu katolickiego w Polsce*, Gdańsk 1994, pp. 45-70, as well as by Dariusz Trześniowski in his dissertation titled *Dramat mistyczny Antoniego Szandlerowskiego*, [in:] *Dramat biblijny Młodej Polski*, ed. A. Szubert, Wrocław 1992, pp. 241-261. These text focus mainly on the drama *Paraklet*. Apart from these, there were many more references: G. Legutko, *Miłość nasza jest jak Sfinks... Confiteor Antoniego Szandlerowskiego i Zachód Heleny Beatus*, [in:] *Postać księdza w literaturze*, eds. G. Głąb, S. Radziszewski, Radom 2014, pp. 97-114; W. Gutowski, *Antoni Szandlerowski, czyli próba mistyczno-religijna*, [in:] *idem, Nagie dusze i maski*, Kraków 1997; E. Jakiel, *Ks. Antoniego Szandlerowskiego literackie uobecnienia casus conscientiae*, [in:] *Etyka i literatura. Pisarze polscy lat 1963-1918 w poszukiwaniu wzorów życia i sztuki*, eds. E. Ichnatowicz, E. Paczoska, Warszawa 2006, pp. 214-222.

gloomy, dark? Expressions of this type appear in his writing much more often than in the case of other modernist authors (Przybyszewski, Miciński, Przesmycki or Baudelaire) and even representatives of dark romanticism (Słowacki, Tieck, Hoffmann, and Poe). It can be naturally assumed that in the case of Szandlerowski the sincerity of the literary discourse results from the epistolographic form of his work. However, the equally strong prevalence of darkness and blackness is not to be found in similar works.

Szandlerowski's internal conflicts result from, among other things, the author's temperament and the circumstances of his life. Szandlerowski caused scandals. The first one was the publication of a lampoon attacking the clergy (*Elenchus cleri alias choleri*), while the second one was connected with his love affair with a neophyte, a married woman, Helena Beatus. In *Confiteor*, Szandlerowski addresses her as Bożenna and the whole work is a literary proof of love between a priest and a Jewish woman<sup>3</sup>. The life of the modernist writer was complicated and surely had impact on the shape of his works and the selection of discussed issues. One should not, however, interpret such a heavily conventionalised text on the basis of a biographical or psychological interpretation of the work.

*Confiteor*, therefore, abounds in symbols characteristic of the literature of the Young Poland. They most accurately reflect the inner dilemmas of the author and his rich poetic imagination. Whereas purple waters in *The Fall of The House of Usher* by Edgar Alan Poe are supposed to – according to Gaston Bachelard – show blood, bringing terrible moral, spiritual, and physical fall of the characters<sup>4</sup>, black light in Szandlerowski's works depicts joy full of impurity – dirty, dominated by pangs of conscience and contradictory desires. This is why his texts are full of ambiguities; the author multiplies synonyms in his enumerations, breaks sentences, he is nervous, even neurasthenic, and at the same time painfully frank. *Confiteor* glitters with motifs taken from literature and culture (including the Bible) as the writer had a particular liking for complex allegories. This way of constructing the literary discourse was characteristic of modernist authors. Many writers created in the spirit of symbolism as this was one of the most important artistic postulates of that time<sup>5</sup>. In addition, this trend represented the development of romantic concepts concerning art by artists of the Young Poland<sup>6</sup>. Szandlerowski, though he expressed his feelings directly in his letters, was not free from the tendencies prevailing in his day; conversely, he favoured them, especially symbolism. He had a tendency to anthropomorphise his feelings and passions<sup>7</sup>, yet he was far from objectifying affections<sup>8</sup>. What

<sup>3</sup> A reference to the writer also appears in Artur Hutnikiewicz's work: *Młoda Polska*, Warszawa 2012, p. 432. Cf. entry: Antoni Szandlerowski, [in:] *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. 46, Kraków-Wrocław 2009-2010, pp. 601-603.

<sup>4</sup> G. Bachelard, *Zmarłe wody w marzenia Edgara Poe*, transl. A. Tatarkiewicz, [in:] idem, *Wyobrażenia poetycka. Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1975, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> M. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Symbolizm i symbolika w poezji Młodej Polski*, Kraków 1994, pp. 43-44.

<sup>6</sup> J. Abramowska, *Rehabilitacja alegorii*, [in:] idem, *Alegoria*, Gdańsk 2003, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> M. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

distinguishes Szandlerowski from many writers of the Young Poland is that he expresses his own emotions with descriptions of glows, colours, reflexes, fading, or descriptions involving a total lack of any light. Less frequently, he does this through involving somatic reactions of individual parts of the body or meteorological phenomena.

Great accumulation of gloomy 'landscapes' of this type is visible particularly in his first letters to Helena. Three most important symbols appearing in the text include: the dove, the iris, and the motif of fading. Szandlerowski uses them in a non-schematic way<sup>9</sup>, which is why it is worth looking into them in detail.

### The dove

In one of his first letters, Szandlerowski addresses his beloved in the following way: "My friend... my black dove..."<sup>10</sup>. The symbolic significance of the dove is obvious, it is associated with purity and innocence, inspiration, devotion, rebirth<sup>11</sup>. Szandlerowski obtained an oxymoron by means of adding the adjective "black": he reconstructed the meaning of the symbol which is deeply rooted in the European culture and mentality. *Beatus* still appears as delicate, sensitive, and beautiful, but at the same time becomes a forbidden allure, in a way jeopardising the peace of mind of the oversensitive, neurasthenic artist.

Monologues indicate that the addressee of the letters participated in the writer's dilemmas and he understood them perfectly: "Bożenno... let autumn set in soon - leaden, melancholic, weepy, turbid autumn! Let apparitions disappear - let vampires begin to bite and suck me... This is all for

<sup>9</sup> In his works, Szandlerowski prefers to use symbols in accordance with declarations of modernist authors: they may be understood in a number of ways and interpreted exclusively in the context of the given work. It does not mean, however, that he does not resort to allegories which are present in culture yet he tends to exploit the Biblical tradition. In order to understand the characteristics of the works of the modernist writer, it is necessary to comprehend precisely what symbol is. Hans-Georg Gadamer writes that "the symbolic representation becomes separated from the schematic representation. It is a representation (rather than merely an indication as in the so-called logical 'symbolism'), yet the symbolic representation does not present a concept directly (as transcendental schematism in Kant's philosophy) but indirectly, 'as a result of which the expression does not contain the proper scheme for the concept, but only a symbol for reflection'" (H.G. Gadamer, *Symbol i alegoria*, [in:] *Symbolie i symbolika*, transl. M. Łukasiewicz, selection and introduction: M. Głowiński, Warszawa 1990, p. 101). Gadamer further develops his thought: "Extending the concept of symbol to the dimensions of a universal aesthetic principle did not pass without resistance as the internal unity of the image and the meaning, which is the essence of the symbol, does not have absolute character. The symbol does not eliminate completely the tension between the world of ideas and the sensual world as it allows for the possibility of disproportion between the form and the matter, expression and content. In particular, the religious function of the symbol is based on this tension" (Ibid., p. 103). The last sentence is really important for the interpretation of Szandlerowski's letters as he repeatedly attributed his works with solemn or even sacred overtone. This topic should be developed and discussed in a separate paper.

<sup>10</sup> A. Szandlerowski, *Pisma Antoniego Szandlerowskiego. Confiteor*, 2nd edition, Warszawa 1912, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> The entry: *Gołąb*, [in:] W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 1990, p. 99.

you!..."<sup>12</sup>. Similar exclamations appear in the entire *Confiteor*. Calling Beatus a modernist *femme fatale* would make, however, her relation with the writer shallow. Their relationship seems to be deep, most probably pure, based most of all on the rare affinity of souls.

It is worth adding here that the symbol of the female dove – turtledove – comes from *Song of the Songs* and is a metaphor of a beautiful bride. The presence of Biblical associations is self-evident in the case of Szandlerowski; they constitute a way of perceiving the reality. In Szandlerowski's works there are many symbols and traces drawn from the Bible. In his letters, the *signifié* is his feeling for Beatus, while the *signifiant* becomes the passion of Christ, the metaphor of Mount Tabor, or the figure of seductive Mary Magdalene.

### The iris

In Szandlerowski's texts, the iris symbolises either Beatus or love for her. However, it is also a flower of the goddess of the rainbow. Being aware of the transitory significance of this plant, the author of *Paraklet* compares himself and his beloved to thunder, tempest, and the promises of sunny spells which come after the storm:

We are the last moment of accumulated electricity – the thunder... we are a double rainbow stretched on clouds where fervent sighs and tearful desires of whole generations met... And this is why our love is so overground, so heavenly... We are like that thunder... like that rainbow... Their kingdom – to heavenly regions... And we have an elevated flight... even more than that: the flight of our love is not only unearthly, but – unworldly!...<sup>13</sup>

This is a very erudite fragment when one bears in mind the symbolism of the rainbow in culture: having its curved shape, it represents a bridge between the earthly world and the heaven. This is why Szandlerowski calls her kingdom "heavenly regions" and the flight which he makes with his beloved elevates him not only over the earth, but even outside of it. By means of this gradation, the author created a description of transcendence occurring by dint of love ecstasy. It should be added that the thunder can represent either transformation or manifestation of the divine power; it begins "the *tremendum* of the storm"<sup>14</sup>. The thunder serves a privileged function in nature as it comes from heaven<sup>15</sup>.

The iris in black slightly changes the symbolism of the plant: it becomes a dark rainbow, devoid of colours, shimmering merely with shades of grey, visible – as in *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon* by Lycosthenes – only at night, being an omen of the end of the world or major changes approaching. The comparison to the "black iris" appears in one of the letters as many as

<sup>12</sup> A. Szandlerowski, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> A. Szandlerowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>14</sup> M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia. Wybór esejów*, 3rd edition, transl. A. Tatarkiewicz, selected by M. Czerwiński, Warszawa 1993, p. 129.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

three times: in the introduction ("My black iris... I flow down on you at night..."<sup>16</sup>) when Szandlerowski addresses his beloved; then for the second time ("My black iris... my destiny... my sorrow..."<sup>17</sup>) when he laments to her about how much distress is caused by his love to a woman; and, finally, in the last sentence, i.e. when he finishes his letter to the beloved, convinced about their mutual prayer ("I pray in humbleness with my black iris..."<sup>18</sup>). Therefore, in the case of the quoted letter the flower represents a concept around which the discourse directed to Beatus is constructed. Although the author is in unspeakable torment, he blesses God, and the purity of his beloved is redemption to him. In fact, this only seemingly inconsistent discourse exposes the internal conflict of the author of the letters.

Szandlerowski describes his love using also other names of flowers, for instance "black pansies"<sup>19</sup>, a symbol of memory. Yet it is the iris that appears in the whole collection many times; it is one of the writer's favourite symbols: "My black iris... bloom for that day with your sorrow... dress up in quiet lament..."<sup>20</sup>. Love also provokes remorse. Their materialisation is, according to Edward Jakiel, connected with ethical sensitivity; the researcher refers to this phenomenon as "materialising concretisation"<sup>21</sup>. Aware of the tragic situation, he finds himself encompassed with the desire to dissolve in oblivion. Szandlerowski confesses: "What I would leave from this world is you and the black irises"<sup>22</sup>. He wants nirvana, but he does not imagine his life without his beloved and their feeling, therefore he imagines happiness after death as the binding of two souls in eternal love. As a priest, he is aware that the affection which he is entangled in is forbidden on Earth. Meetings with his beloved take place at night and it is possible to see other colours than grey, sadness, and darkness only in the poet's imagination: "At night I flow down on my black iris... I rock it to sleep... illuminate its dreams with a rainbow tale..."<sup>23</sup>.

Comparing her to black irises does not always represent a way of metonymic (*totum pro parte*) description of Beatus; in some letters they also function as her attribute, decoration: "Give me your hand... Tears roll down my eyes... let them set into black irises on your hand... braid them into your hair... show me yourself like this... I am waiting..."<sup>24</sup>. Constructed from the matter of tears, symbolising pain tearing two people in love, they show love synonymously with suffering; in *Confiteor*, these two contradictory feelings are inseparable, they are connected with Helena Beatus and cannot exist without one another. The tragic situation dooms the couple to eternal torment, which is to last till the grave.

<sup>16</sup> A. Szandlerowski, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> E. Jakiel, Ks. Antoniego Szandlerowskiego literackie uobecnienia *casus conscientiae*, [in:] *Etyka i literatura. Pisarze polscy lat 1963-1918 w poszukiwaniu wzorów życia i sztuki*, eds. E. Ihnatowicz, E. Paczoska, Warszawa 2006, p. 220.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

## The motif of fading

This is one of the most frequent and most vivid motifs in *Confiteor*. When Szandlerowski begins to write about colours different than black, these hues tend to fade, turn pale:

I look and look... aprons shine in the sun like lupine... clover... like meadows green... I hear their cheerful laughter, playful from under rainbow browbands... Like the setting sun they shone with colour after colour in the distance – and vanished<sup>25</sup>.

The green and rainbow blur, and the author of the letters again falls into despair. The poem written to his beloved is pervaded by the vision of decomposition and the end, as is the case in the works of Paul Verlaine or Charles Baudelaire, French symbolists:

W złocistym pyłe słońca – blakną... więdną...	They fade... wilt... – in the golden dust of the sun
A nocą skarżą się w rozdreszczu cichem	At night they lament in quiet tear-shiver
Jednak... i one mają chwilę jedną, Kiedy zapachną... zaśnieją barw przepychem –	Still... they also have at least one short moment When they smell... shine with the splendor of colours –

This is a decadent perspective that is characteristic of the poetry of the Young Poland. Szandlerowski analyses love through transience and death. He contemplates the acute sensation of the end, which leads to the decadent attitude<sup>26</sup>, so inappropriate in the case of a person wearing a cassock – the concept of the void is contradictory to faith and the promises of Heaven. The author of the letters senses that human life is as elusive as the smell of flowers or their ephemeral beauty: “I can still smell the scent of wilted roses... They were hanging and crying after you had gone... and the smell was roaming and looking for you... (...) I was drunk with this strange fragrance of wilted roses...”<sup>27</sup>.

Floral motifs were willingly used in order to illustrate death and express the sensation of the end, particularly after the publication of *Flowers of Evil* by Charles Baudelaire, whose decadent, even nihilistic attitude played a vital role in shaping the trends of the epoch<sup>28</sup>. The quoted poem by Szandlerowski is parallel, in many respects, to the poem *Spleen* by the French poet, particularly with regard to the symbolic layer. Both works include a motif of diffusing sensory impressions, which accompany solely those things which are worldly. Baudelaire writes:

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> T. Walas, *Dekadentyzm wśród prądów epoki*, “Pamiętnik Literacki” 1977, no. 68(1), p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> A. Szandlerowski, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>28</sup> T. Walas, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

I am an old boudoir where a rack of gowns,  
perfumed by withered roses, rots to dust;  
where only faint pastels and pale Bouchers  
inhale the scent of long-unstoppered flasks.<sup>29</sup>

There are naturally no clues to think that the author of *Paraklet* consciously used Baudelaire. The two fragments can be juxtaposed to illustrate a certain literary process, highlight the prevailing trends in the way of thinking and writing that combine similar poetic sensitivity. The context can also be provided by well-known in Poland *Kwiaty* (*Flowers*) by Stanisław Korab-Brzozowski or *Powinowactwo cieni i kwiatów o zmierzchu* (*The Affinity of Shadows and Flowers at Twilight*) by Wincent Korab-Brzozowski. These works prove that the symbolism of wilting, decomposition, loss of colours is part of the aesthetics of the Young Poland – and this is precisely where Szandlerowski got his inspiration from while writing his letters to Beatus.

The specificity of Szandlerowski's works is precisely described by the neologism used in the poem, namely "quiet tear-shiver" ("cichy rozdreszcz"). The letters gathered in *Confiteor* are full of dark, unjustified fear as well as contradictory passions and desires, the fulfilment of which is synonymous with going against the values which he previously believed in. They vent not so much fear as sheer terror caused by overwhelming love. Szandlerowski illustrates anxiety with the use of aposiopesis. The nervous agitation of the priest is conveyed by understatement by means of numerous dashes which – in the literature of the Young Poland – denote poetic musing. Feeling the intense affection gives rise to a strong internal conflict. Thus, in his letters Szandlerowski multiplies synonymous enumerations and conveys contradictory passions with the use of elliptical sentences or infinitive complements: "began to tangle... toss... tear..."<sup>30</sup>.

Suspension points reconstruct the voice sticking in his throat: the modernist author does not find words to express how great his feeling and gratitude for Beatus are. The aforementioned techniques are aimed at reflecting the blurring reality and the disappearance of hues on the linguistic level. Szandlerowski's descriptions are pointillist, which makes his feelings look as if they were behind some fog. The author of the letters feels lost, he expresses his internal disorientation combined with adoration for the beloved through using accumulating apostrophes:

The irises are bowing... gilding... more and more transparent, closer and closer to shine away completely... They are dying. And do you know - why?... As in my four walls there are plenty of your heady thoughts... plenty of your angelic feelings... plenty of your incredible gazes... The irises feel this... and die in silence. Let alone – me!<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> C. Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, transl. Richard Howard, Londyn 1982.

<sup>30</sup> A. Szandlerowski, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The irises – symbolising, as it was already mentioned, Szandlerowski's love for Beatus – wane, wilt, die; the author of the letters is convinced that he fades together with the flowers. Fading flowers and feelings are transformed into the void. His beloved, being the source of suffering for the author, is at the same time a promise of his redemption. Szandlerowski, describing his feeling for Beatus, becomes often ecstatic and confesses that he writes his dramatic play, *Paraklet*, not for the want of fame but in order to leave some legacy after their feeling, which he referred to as “a baby”. However, he fails to find in the everyday reality the glow which would shine upon the greyness of his suffering, since nothing can give the world new colours. This is why he confesses:

I will get new treasure from you... new colours from your eyes... fresh feelings from your hands... You will give me all this as I have only one song left to finish my work... I value my work above everything else but you because it is you...<sup>32</sup>

He speaks of the benevolent influence of Beatus on his sense of emotional instability in the following way:

Emptiness opened before me – terrible, callous emptiness... Everything that surrounded me changed into some corpse eye sockets... I did not see any vermin, or even appendages to the skull in them... Emptiness... emptiness... And I slowly felt that I was lying down – like a corpse into the coffin – into these infinite and boundless eye sockets... I shivered. And then some radiant hands began to weave, tangle something over this void... The emptiness slowly started to fade, blur, disappear... These were your hands as you suddenly stood in front of me like daylight (...)<sup>33</sup>.

Contrary to appearances, this description is deprived of any coquetry which could be expected from a lover towards his beloved; this is more of an expression of sincere gratitude resulting from someone's unconditional devotion and possibility of feeling intimacy. The addressee of the message is, therefore, the only person capable of saving Szandlerowski from the sensation of falling into the void. The author writes that without his beloved he gets the impression as if he was sinking in a place completely deprived of light, which he compares to eye sockets. The vermin accompanying the images of decomposition enhances the anti-aesthetic expression of some letters.

Colours in the visions of the poet of the Young Poland blur to such a degree that he begins to express his fears *expressis verbis* that he is going to be blind soon:

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 38.



They say I strained my eyes... And it seems to me that it is something different.

I have the impression that I set my eyes into the void and in order to take them off it, I must have damaged them...

In any case – blindness was foretold to me...<sup>34</sup>

The vision of blindness is horrifying. Undoubtedly, Szandlerowski hears the whisper of the emptiness which makes him describe the world as black, gloomy, dark – devoid of any colours or having them only for a brief moment. The escape from *horror vacui* is again possible because of the beloved; it is only thanks to her that the writer “has not got stuck in whimpering yet”. In his artistic visions, he sees Lucifer whom he compares to “a blind thunder”. Similar motifs may be found in Tadeusz Miciński’s poetry, it suffices to quote the volume *W mroku gwiazd (In the Darkness of Stars)*, where star light was used to create an image of sin, guilt, and transcendental experiences. With the eye of an artist of the Young Poland looking into the void, Szandlerowski notices that God’s light, once bright and being a signpost, is becoming a “dark, dead infinity”. The eyelids of his beloved are compared to “golden sunrises”, but also to “sunsets of faded glows<sup>35</sup>” and they are the only thing which could save the artist from emptiness rampaging around him and devouring everything.

These images result from the dilemma between the obligations of the oath of priesthood and the desire for love; they are manifestations of the excruciating feeling of sinking in sin. Paul Ricoeur speaks of a similar issue in the following manner:

The first conceptualization of the sin, which is totally different from the conceptualization of the stigma, may be described in a variety of ways on the level of symbols: missing the target, straying from the path, rebellion or being lost denote to a greater extent a violated bond than some harmful substance. Changes in the symbolic intentionality, caused by a new experience of evil, takes place due to the change in basic images. The relations of contact in space are substituted with signposting relations: path, straight line, getting lost, like the metaphor of wandering represent analogies of movements of existence understood globally. At the same time the symbol shifts from space to time: “the road turns out to be a spatial trace of movement which the fate follows<sup>36</sup>”.

All the symbolic images mentioned by the French philosopher accompany Szandlerowski in *Confiteor*. The author speaks of himself: “I – son of the earth, son of the curse, rebellion, tossing, highs and lows (...)”<sup>37</sup>.

Pessimism and prevalent darkness in the literary discourse may have yet another source. The first letters clearly show the author’s frustration

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> This quote and the preceding one: Ibid., p. 12

<sup>36</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Symbolika zła*, transl. S. Cichowicz, Warszawa 1986, p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> A. Szandlerowski, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

– not so much sexual as artistic – as Szandlerowski is suffering from a creative crisis. He thinks that *Paraklet* is his last work:

My work moved on... ran... dashed – galloped... I cursed you, suffered from you, blasphemed and prayed with you... People will read it... Poor things – they will not understand even if I were to tell them – that everything I wrote – this one grand word – You!... Nothing more... I have written two big acts... I will write no more – until I come back... Until I come back! And I am still not going anywhere... And yet I can write no more as I am left with no words as I disentangled all the thread...<sup>38</sup>

When he brings Act III to a close, there is a lot more optimism in his discourse; the writer appears serene or joyful, perhaps even ecstatic in his speech:

You see – how far we have to go... how many grand conquests await us – how much common victorious loot... Oh Bożenna... blood is coming to my head... We are not going – like Dante – through hell, purgatory and heaven – but though some roads which are not roads, through air waves which have no name in the human language! Aren't you scared by this road? Doesn't it seem to you to be a dream?<sup>39</sup>

In the following letters, descriptions of darkness and emptiness appear with much lower frequency. This may indicate an improvement in the mental condition of their author, who discovered the joy of creating and found a way of expressing his affection to his beloved through art. Nevertheless, the motif of fading and losing colours returns many times: "The irises are bowing... gilding... more and more transparent, closer and closer to shine away completely... They are dying..."<sup>40</sup>

In almost each letter, Szandlerowski describes longing for his beloved and love so great that it is almost impossible to endure, causing indescribable bliss, but also piercing pain. What terrifies him the most is death and, as a result, the necessity to separate, which is why the motifs of transiency, dying, longing, and sinking into the void constitute inseparable components of his correspondence.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

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## SUMMARY

The imagination of Antoni Szandlerowski in his collection of letters to Helena Beatus (*Confiteor*), his beloved one, is dominated by black. The aim of this article is to show that this colour plays a major role in *Confiteor* therefore it is used by the author most of the times. When he writes about how pure and beautiful Helena Beatus is, he uses metaphors such as: black dove, black iris, dark cloud, dark corridor. It shows how pessimistic about the future and how guilty about the love he felt Antoni Szandlerowski was. The internal conflict was caused by the will to fulfil as a lover and the duty to continue priestly services. Antoni Szandlerowski is full of doubts. He misses Helena Beatus and feels that he cannot be happy without her. On the other hand, he knows that they cannot make their desire to live side by side real. Since the world is a place of pain and misery where the love cannot thrive due to social norms, lovers can bind together only after death. This way of thinking led Szandlerowski to many neurological disorders, caused nightmares and a painful impression that the whole world around fades away. Szandlerowski uses symbols such as a black dove and a black iris to describe his beloved one and to show the dichotomy of his perception. Therefore love is the source of all the pain and suffering for him.

## Keywords

Antoni Szandlerowski, *Confiteor*, symbolism, epistolography, black colouristics

**Bartosz Ejzak** (born in 1992, in Kutno) – a Ph.D. student studying at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Lodz, at the Department of Literature of Positivism and Young Poland.  
e-mail: bartoszejzak@gmail.com