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Bloch's and Wokulski's Paris. Drawings by Charles Tronsens in the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw

In 1903 Emilia, née Kronenberg, widow of Jan Gottlieb Bloch (1836–1902), donated her husband's collection of European drawings to the Zachęta Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (now Zachęta National Gallery of Art). During the Second World War, they became a part of the permanent collection of the National Museum in Warsaw. Most exceptional in the collection is a set of French drawings of the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century, of long-standing interest to this author. As he acquired drawings by Old European Masters, Bloch was guided by the existing state of knowledge about them, the advice of museum curators and academics,[1] the works' provenance as documented by their collectors' marks and, finally and importantly, his own significant wealth. Yet his criteria for selecting works by contemporary artists, many of whom have been forgotten since and are waiting to be rediscovered, are more mysterious.

Standing out most prominently in this part of Bloch's collection, which according to his contemporaries numbered between several hundred and a thousand drawings,[2] are larger groups of works by individual artists who clearly appealed to the collector more than others. They include Clément-Auguste Andrieux (1829–81), Jean-Jacques Grandville (1803–47) and Charles Tronsens (1830 – after 1870). Years ago, Helena Domaszewska published drawings by Grandville, the famous Romantic and a precursor of Surrealism.[3] These and other genre and humorous drawings by the late French Romantics from Bloch's collection turned out to illustrate ideally the aesthetic tastes and, particularly, the sense of humour of Frédéric Chopin, and they greatly enlivened the exhibition celebrating his anniversary year 2010.[4] A new perspective on the art of the second half of the nineteenth century has allowed us to rediscover works by Tronsens (who signed some of his works Carlo Gripp), a prominent illustrator of many Parisian periodicals of the Second Empire.

1 Kazimierz Broniewski, "Zbiory rysunkowe Towarzystwa Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie. Zbiór rysunków i akwarel Jana Blocha," *Sztuka* [Paris], no. 2 (1904), pp. 7–73; no. 3 (1904), pp. 203–8, here, see p. 62.

2 Ibid. See also T.J., "Z tygodnia na tydzień," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 43 (1903), p. 845. I would like to thank Mr Roman Olkowski for bringing this article to my attention.

3 Helena Domaszewska, "Rysunki J.I.I. Grandville'a do 'Les Métamorphoses du jour' w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, vol. 9 (1965), pp. 265–77; ead., "Zbiór rysunków Grandville'a w Muzeum Narodowym w Warszawie," *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, vol. 19 (1975), pp. 537–74.

4 *Chopin. Ikonosfera romantyzmu / Iconosphere of Romanticism*, Iwona Danielewicz with Andrzej Dzięciołowski, eds, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 24 September – 14 November 2010 (Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 2010), p. 143, cat. no. III.3; p. 148, cat. no. III.5; pp. 233–9, cat. no. V.5–12; p. 249, cat. no. V.18; pp. 294–5, cat. no. VI.6–7.

Bloch's collection includes thirty-one drawings by Tronsens. In an ironic, mocking and satirical tone they portray daily life in Paris, its streets (**fig. 1**) and parks, theatres and playhouses, painting exhibitions, as well as the whole spectrum of its inhabitants, from the upper classes to servants, tradesmen and watchmen.[5] We cannot escape the impression that these drawings' directness and sense of humour simply amused Bloch, and that they brought back memories of his own experiences and observations. It would seem that this part of Bloch's collection simply reflects his tastes and is more intimate and personal than the masterpieces he collected because of their creators' fame.[6]

John Grand-Carteret's classic *Les mœurs et la caricature en France*, a history of caricature in France published in 1873, is the key to understanding what guided Bloch as he assembled this part of his collection.[7] It was established only recently that a rare copy of Carteret's book had at some time been transferred to the library of the National Museum from the library of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art.[8] Had it perhaps once belonged to Bloch? It seems that this very book, with its biographical sketches of artists, may have served as the perfect guide for a collector of nineteenth-century French genre scenes and caricatures. Of the more than two hundred drawings in Bloch's collection, next to works by famous and eminent artists, are pieces by others whose popularity has passed irretrievably or who may one day be rediscovered. Tronsens and the other two draughtsmen, Andrieux and Grandville, are represented in this part of Bloch's collection exceptionally well and by numerous pieces, but there is no shortage of works by other, well-known and valued illustrators of daily life, caricaturists and satirists who were active between 1830 and 1880, most of whom have been forgotten. Kazimierz Broniewski, who wrote the only article so far about Jan Bloch's collection of drawings, omits its nineteenth-century component (but does mention drawings that Bloch ordered, which arrived only after his death), yet stresses the exploratory role of Bloch's travels to improve his health. He spent time in both famous European spas and Europe's great capitals.[9] It is difficult to shake off the impression that the Paris he explored is the same city that Bolesław Prus wrote about in *The Doll*.

"'Look,' said Suzin, 'this is the rue La Fayette, and that the Boulevard Magenta. We'll drive all the way down the rue La Fayette to our hotel near the Opéra. Paris is more a miracle than a city, I assure you. Wait till you see the Champs-Elysées and the Seine and the Rivoli... Oh, it's a marvel, I assure you. Perhaps the women are a trifle too forward here. But tastes differ... [...].

It was a wide street, lined with trees. Just then, half a dozen carriages and a yellow omnibus, weighed down with passengers above and below, flew past [Wokulski]. On the right, far off somewhere, a square could be seen; on the left – at the foot of the hotel – a small awning, under which a throng of men and women sat at small round tables, practically on the pavement, drinking coffee. The men, as though *décolleté*, wore flowers or ribbons in their buttonholes and crossed one leg over the other precisely as high as was appropriate in the vicinity of five-storey houses [...].

[5] Drawings by Tronsens from the Department of Prints and Drawings of the National Museum in Warsaw are at the Digital National Museum (www.cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl).

[6] Justyna Guze, "Jan Gottlieb Bloch kolekcjoner rysunków na skalę europejską" (Lecture given on 6 February 2013 at the National Museum in Warsaw during the celebrations of its 150th anniversary). The museum is planning to publish all the lectures of its Jubilee Year.

[7] John Grand-Carteret, *Les mœurs et la caricature en France* (Paris: A la librairie illustrée, [n.d.]).

[8] The inventory of the book collection of the Zachęta Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw, currently at the National Museum in Warsaw, is the only surviving record of that institution's assets.

[9] Broniewski, op. cit., p. 62.

Wokulski turned to the left and saw, around the corner of the hotel – that very same hotel! – another awning, another throng of people drinking something alongside the pavement. [...]

The traffic of omnibuses and pedestrians grew at an alarming rate. Every few paces found verandahs, little round tables, people sitting by the pavement. A carriage, with a footman behind, was followed by a cart pulled by a dog, an omnibus overtook him, then two people with handbarrows, then a larger cart with two wheels, then a lady and gentlemen on horseback and again an endless stream of carriages. Closer, by the pavement, stood a cart with flowers, another with fruit; opposite was a pieman, a news vendor, a junk dealer, a knife grinder, a bookseller... [...]

'Nothing to it,' [Wokulski] thought, 'some hundred square miles in area, two million inhabitants, thousands of streets, ten thousand public conveyances....' [...]

In the course of these trips he climbed towers: St-Jacques, Nôtre-Dame and the Panthéon; he went up the Trocadéro in a lift, descended into the Parisian sewers and to the catacombs decorated with human skulls; he visited the world exhibition, the Louvre, and Cluny, the Bois de Boulogne, and cemeteries, the cafés de la Rotonde, du Grand Balcon, and fountains, schools and hospitals, the Sorbonne and the fencing halls, the Conservatory and musical halls, animal fights and theatres, the Stock Exchange, the July Column and temple interiors."[10]

Because Prus devoted a whole chapter of *The Doll* to it, we could continue reading his descriptions of Paris in Wokulski's – and Bloch's – era. Significantly, Prus, as he recorded his exceptionally evocative observations, first came to Paris in 1895,[11] after his novel had been published.[12] His sources must have included that era's indispensable guide, Karl Baedeker's *Paris und Umgebung, nebst Rouen, Havre, Dieppe, Boulogne und den Eisenbahn-Strassen vom Rhein bis Paris*, whose sixth edition had appeared in 1888.

Janina Kulczycka Saloni remarks in her 1963 article about the similarities in the "merchant" themes in *The Doll* and Emile Zola's 1883 *Au Bonheur des dames*, the eleventh volume in the Rougon-Macquart series.[13] Prus was familiar with Zola's books: his hero's beloved, Miss Izabela Łęcka, reads *Une page d'amour* (1878)[14] in French, and Prus had a copy of this romantic novel in his library, which otherwise had little in the way of belles lettres.[15] The sections of Zola's novel describing the modernizing city, the *grands magasins* being built on the boulevards, or his observations about local customs, could not avoid having an impact on Prus's – and his mouthpiece Wokulski's – impressions of Paris.

Even with the damage brought on by the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune, Paris on the threshold of the last decade of the nineteenth century, which Wokulski and Bloch visited and which Prus wrote about, remained the same city whose urban – and to some degree social – form had been set during the Second Empire, primarily by Baron Haussmann. The Grands Boulevards, the Opera, the axis connecting Place de l'Étoile with the Louvre via the Champs Elysées, place de la Concorde, the Tuileries, the parks and squares, the network

10 Bolesław Prus, *The Doll* (Budapest, London, New York: Central European University Press, 1996), David Welsh, trans., ch. XXII, esp. pp. 348, 350, 351, 361, 362.

11 His travels took him to Germany, Switzerland and France.

12 *Kurier Codzienny* (Warsaw) ran the novel in installments from 29 September 1887 to 24 May 1889; it was first published as a book by Gebethner i Wolf publishers in 1890.

13 Janina Kulczycka Saloni, "Dwie powieści kupieckie: 'Au bonheur des dames' Emila Zoli i 'Lalka' Bolesława Prusa," *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, no. 1 (1963), pp. 45–60.

14 *Une page d'amour* was the eighth volume in the series "Les Rougon Macquart."

15 Hanna Ilmurzyńska, Agnieszka Stepnowska, *Księgozbiór Bolesława Prusa* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Bibliotekarzy Polskich, 1965).

of paved streets, its plumbing-sewage system and the development of public transport gave Tronsens the background to his genre scenes. They show the lives of various social strata and classes of this enormous metropolis in which the lady comes in contact with the concierge, the maid with the drunkard and gentlemen flock to lorettes and artistes – all, of course, in exaggerated form.

Grand-Carteret repeatedly quotes from *La Nouvelle Babylone* by Eugène Pelletan (1813–84).[16] This epistolary novel published in 1863 is the literary equivalent of the genre drawings and caricatures of the French illustrators of the Second Empire and the Third Republic. Not to mention that the critical views of the Second Empire by this writer, commentator and zealous republican must have borne a resemblance to Prus's. Prus detested excess and luxury and advocated for the so-called woollen soirées,[17] unassuming social gatherings at which ladies wore wool dresses instead of the silk evening gowns that were the rule at dinners, *thés dansants* and receptions. These were extravagant in every way, ruining their partakers' health and wallets, especially during the carnival.

Tronsens is still an unknown, forgotten artist. Not only has he not been rediscovered, but even art dictionaries and encyclopaedias pay no attention to him. This makes Grand-Carteret a matchless source from his era. His biographical sketch reads: "Ch[arles] Tronsens was born in Tarbes in 1830, and in 1848 he founded the journal *Carilloneur*; he took [Charles] Philipon's advice and moved to Paris in 1850. There he became Ed[mond] Morin's student. He wrote for *Journal pour Rire* (as Tronsens), as well as for *Journal Amusant*, *Illustration*, *Bouffon*, *La Lune* and *Esprit Follet*; he co-founded the publications *Image*, *Paris Comique* and *Petit Paris Comique*; he illustrated Arsène Houssaye's *Les Grandes Dames* and Arthur Arnould's periodical *Foire aux Sottises*. In 1870 he took a bank job, thereby ending his illustrator's career. His most important series of drawings are 'Le Moment des Vacances,' 'Comme on écrit l'histoire,' 'Sur le trottoir,' 'Vieux Lions,' 'Au Bal de l'Opéra,' 'Le Palais,' 'Les étrangers à Paris,' 'Les Avocats,' 'La Timbropostomanie,' 'Les étrangers à Mabillon,' 'Paris l'été,' 'Les émotions d'un débiteur' and 'Le départ des Touristes.' He signed his works F. Pencil, Paul David, Niello, Grap and Fritz. He published 'Les enfants d'aujourd'hui' (1850) as Ch. Tronsens."[18]

The drawings by Tronsens (it appears that Bloch's collection includes more of them than do other public collections) are usually in pen and ink and use a nervous, hasty stroke. His types of figures and his practice of presenting his subjects fleetingly, which was important for press illustrations, are easily recognizable. It is important to remember that it was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that photography became the prevailing medium of visual information in newspapers.[19] Newspapers and periodicals were not keen to give up drawings, which lent them an artistic sparkle. Works by Tronsens can be dated by his figures' dress and by his own biography, since we know that he became a bank clerk in about 1870. In his drawings, men in top hats accompany ladies in crinolines, and a little later in dresses with tournure designed by that era's fashion dictator, Charles Frédéric Worth, who dressed Empress Eugènie herself. The crinoline was a favourite target of mockery by caricaturists of this period

[16] Eugène Pelletan, *La Nouvelle Babylone. Lettres d'un provincial en tournée à Paris* (Paris: Pagnerre, Libraire-Éditeur, 1863). We do not know whether Prus was familiar with this book; the inventory of his library (n. 15 above) does not mention it.

[17] Maria Ilnicka, "Wieczorki wełniane," *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 114 (25 April 1884), pp. 1–2.

[18] See Grand-Carteret, op. cit., pp. 648–9.

[19] See Pierre Albert, Gilbert Feyel, "Photography and the Media. Changes in the Illustrated Press," in *A New History of Photography*, Michel Frizot, ed. (Cologne: Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998), pp. 358–69.

(**fig. 2**), with added oversized shawls, throws and hats. It is thus easy to identify flower girls, concierges or maids by their clothing, as their modest dresses, which do not trail, contrast with the outfits of the grandes dames or of the lorettes, who wear them as hand-me-downs.[20] The demi-monde occupies quite an important place in the iconography, or rather panorama of customs, conceived by Tronsens. Even Wokulski attended the Théâtre des Variétés,[21] and everywhere one turned, Paris had countless little theatres, cabarets and other hotbeds of the doings of the "muse of frivolity" – which is what the priceless *Kurier Warszawski* newspaper called it in those days. The heroines of romance novels and the models for the eminent and less eminent artists of the era came from their ranks. Thus, the then-famous singer Thérésa,[22] a subject of countless caricatures in the Parisian periodicals of the day (**fig. 3**), sang at the Alcazar, which Tronsens immortalized in a drawing. A picture of the famous soprano Adelina Patti in the title role of Bellini's "La sonnambula" in the autumn of 1861 (**fig. 4**) also shows the boxes and the audience at the Théâtre aux Italiens, the lyric opera. The theatre played an important role in this era; debates about its artistic condition are the subject of other sketches by Tronsens, in which Don Quixote fights for his ideals with la Dame aux camélias, and the classical tradition, impersonated by Boileau, with the romantic Don Quixote (**fig. 5**). Tronsens would not have been a real chronicler of this period had his subjects not included an exhibition of paintings admired by some and disliked by others. This brings to mind the scandals well known in the history of art involving the works of Courbet and other innovators of the second half of the nineteenth century and the Salon des Refusés and the Impressionist exhibitions in Nadar's studio (**fig. 6**). In Tronsens's whole oeuvre, which also includes political caricatures, his favourite subject were the streets of Paris: their flow and their people (which also fascinated Wokulski), the theatres, the demi-monde, the ambiguous position of the woman in a man's world – in a word, Parisian life hot off the press.

Bloch, too, was captivated by Paris. This is obvious in his collection, with its many masterpieces by the old Italian and French masters, whose heart is filled with the chroniclers of Parisian life, with Tronsens prime in their midst.

[20] Lorettes were women of light carriage, whose name came from the church of Nôtre-Dame-de-Lorette, which was located in their neighbourhood, Bréda; see Pelletan, op. cit., pp. 79, 105, 302.

[21] The Théâtre des Variétés in Montmartre was founded in 1807 by Mademoiselle Montansier, an actress of Comédie Française, and it operates to this day; in the 1860s it put on the premieres of several opéras-bouffes by Jacques Offenbach.

[22] Alcazar café-concert in the Faubourg Poissonnière, which opened in 1858 and operated until 1902, was also called the Alcazar d'hiver after its summer counterpart was launched in the Champs Elysées. In 1863–90 the singer Emma Valladon (1837–1913), a.k.a. Thérésa, was the star of the Alcazar.