



## Recenze / Reviews

### Félicien Rops – Artist, Whose Fairy Grandmother Was the Devil

Félicien Rops – umělec, jemuž sudičkou byl ďábel sám

ZDENKA MECHUROVÁ

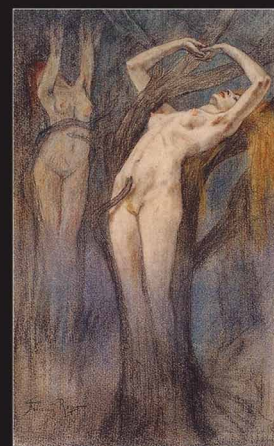
*Katedra kulturologie Univerzity Konštantína Filozofa  
v Nitre, Hodžova 1, 949 74 Nitra*

*„Through those black eyes, by which your soul respire,  
Pitiless demon! pour less scorching fires.“*

Charles Baudelaire

Barbora Půtová, Czech culturologist and art historian, presents in her new book the life and work of the Belgian painter, graphic artist and illustrator Félicien Rops in a broader historical and sociocultural contexts. It is a unique publication not only in the Czech Republic, but also in a narrower Central Europe at all. Contribution of this publication lies in several aspects: in the topic itself and the chosen approach to its elaboration, in the art analysis of selected works, in the conception and interpretation of his work and in portrayal of his path through life, which makes clear the nature of his work. In our opinion, the mysterious personality of Félicien Rops is still poorly researched in the Central European context. Especially if we take into account professional publications and studies, not only the gallery and museum activities. Rops' work was despised for some time, so the lack of research works is not surprising. On the other hand, when we consider its overall importance in terms of art history with a focus on symbolism and decadence and his impact on the improvement of artistic techniques, it is more than surprising. There were, of course, feedback and criticism on the works of Félicien Rops in the Czech environment, but it lacked a detailed visual analysis of his works. Barbora Půtová, on the contrary, has created an extremely complex and precise visual and art analysis. Galleries introduced the work of Rops not only in Czech Republic but also in Hungary. Rops had a special mysterious relationship to this country. He created a series of paintings here and made friends with one of the most important figures of

Hungarian romantic painting, with Mihály Zichy. Rops' individuality and his uniqueness disappeared behind the curtain, which was formed over the aesthetics of realism. Legend says that the genius was breathed into Félicien Rops by the Devil himself. It seems that serious and at the same time frivolous Rops was really always in thrall to the devil. This would perfectly explain his penchant for enjoyment, but also in the demonism and death. Rops brilliantly handled the symbolism that comes from medieval thought that everything physical, instinctive and sexual comes from the devil. The artist only gives aesthetic context forms of sexuality and demonism of the 19th century.



Barbora Půtová

**FÉLICIEN ROPS**

enfant terrible decadence

Barbora Půtová (2013): *Félicien Rops – enfant terrible decadence*. Praha: Nakladatelství dybbuk, 272 str., ISBN 978-80-7438-098-3.

Furthermore, the author's publication contributes to the disruption of unspoken myth that artistic creation (especially symbolic and decadent) is a tool of autopsychoterapeutics for desperate persons, on the contrary, it demonstrates that it is valuable and that otherness is not bad, but it just may be a very desirable factor affecting the overall result. Anyway, (neo)psychoanalytically oriented readers will enjoy it. This work is beneficial, because it reveals that Rops, in essence, was neither decadent, as it may seem to be at first glance and nor deviant (neither Půtová nor other authors mentioned this information), but first and foremost he was an artist who watched the world through the prism of symbols, he loved elation, sadness, joy and bliss. Last but not least, his focus on erotic illustrations shows that he had also a business sense, although it was not proved to be fully effective. Sometimes it seems that Rops criticizes his work and himself too. Rops liked criticizing, and ironically pointed to corrupted and warped morals

just by using symbols that can be easily termed as bold. One of the minor characters of Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* says: "My God, the world needs criticizing today – criticizing to death" (2009: 37). This enables us to keep value, importance and timeless meaning of Rops's work for former and later generations. Félicien Rops was certainly a man with an exciting special restless character full of contradictions and ambivalence. It certainly requires a particular amount of courage "to peek" into the soul, mind and work of Félicien Rops.

#### References:

Lawrence, D. H. (2009). *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Restored Modern Edition. El Paso: El Paso Norte Press.

Contact: Mgr. Zdenka Mechurová, Ph.D., Katedra kulturológie Univerzity Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, Hodžova 1, 949 74 Nitra (externí spolupráce), mechurova.zdenka@gmail.com