

Laughter Seriously in the Novel "The Truth about the Harry Quebert Affair" by Joël Dicker

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Abstract: *We propose here to study the humor present in three forms: that of ridicule, that of cynicism and that of irony, with the aim of demonstrating how they are linked in crescendo to support the literary value of the novel "The Truth about the Harry Quebert Affair" by Joel Dicker. This approach starts from the acceptance that, on the one hand, a successful novel deserves several answers to the question why it is a successful novel, and on the other hand, that humor, which is generally integrated into a work very far from comic genre, powerfully reinforces its message, which can be summed up in a lively questioning on the essence of writing, on the relationship between passions, and moral values, as well as on human relations and contemporary society.*

Keywords: humor, ridicule, cynicism, irony, message

The novel *The Truth About the Harry Quebert Affair* by Swiss writer Joël Dicker, published in 2012 by *Editions de Fallois* and quickly became a bestseller, winning the 2012 Prix Goncourt des lycéens and the Grand Prix du Roman of the French Academy 2012, manifests itself tempting exploration in several aspects. We propose here to study the humor present in it in three forms: that of ridicule, that of cynicism and that of irony, with the aim of demonstrating how they are linked together in a crescendo to support the literary value of the novel in question.

This approach starts from the understanding that, on the one hand, a bestselling novel deserves several answers to the question why it is a bestselling novel, and on the other hand, that humor, integrated into a work generally far removed from the comic genre, powerfully reinforces its message, which can be summed up in a lively questioning of the essence of writing, the relationship between passions and moral values, as well as human relations and contemporary society. However, according to Bergson, the pleasure of laughter is mixed with an unacknowledged intention to correct, which explains why comedy is much closer to real life than drama.¹ In her reflection on humor, Anna Kamenova rightly notes that the comedian presents the world as it is, all its imperfections understood and pointed out, to pay homage to the inevitable. It is in this sense that humor has points in common with tragedy.² The work of Dicker of which we are going to speak, while putting the drama in the foreground, integrates the comedy in filigree.

We will attempt, first of all, a brief sketch of the content. In New York, in the spring of 2008, while America is agitated by the upcoming presidential elections, the young writer Marcus Goldman, who has just known glory with his first novel, is in turmoil: he is unable to write the new novel that he must submit to his publisher within a few months. He confides his plight to his friend and former college professor Harry Quebert, one of the country's most respected writers. This one invites his disciple in his house at the edge of the ocean in Goose Cove, on the outskirts of Aurora, a small

town in New Hampshire where, suddenly, ghosts of the past return to give the dramatic impetus to a plot that ties on two levels: the realization of the new book by Goldman whose writing is pressing, and the judicial inquiry, triggered after the discovery, in the garden of Harry Quebert, of the remains of the body of Nola Kellergan, a young girl of fifteen disappeared in 1975. The famous writer finds himself accused of a double murder, his love affair with the young Kellergan emerging little by little from an unsuspected secret space. Shocked to see his dear professor on the edge of the abyss, to prove his innocence, Marcus Goldman undertakes his own investigation which quickly becomes the subject of his second urgent book. The young writer-investigator is quickly overtaken by events, while Joël Dicker leads the reader through the tangle of facts, feelings and characters that interact in two eras at the same time. The truth, falsely revealed several times, manifests itself at the end in the most unexpected way, making a clean sweep of the two representations that have served as pillars for the reader throughout the 430 pages of the novel: that of Harry Quebert as a man and that of Harry Quebert writer. In reality, it was not he who had truly loved the missing girl; neither was he to blame for her death; but above all, he was not the real author of the novel that had once propelled him to the clouds of glory.

Insofar as *The Truth About the Harry Quebert Affair* represents, among other things, a critical reflection on modern society and moral values, humor plays an important role in it.

The Ridiculous

According to the Larousse dictionary, the adjective "ridiculous" can have the following meanings: 1. which one is inclined to laugh at, to make fun of; 2. who is unwise, unreasonable; 3. which is insignificant, derisive.³

We would dare to call the character of the mother of the young writer Marcus Goldman ridiculous. It appears from the beginning of the personal investigation that Marcus undertakes when he leaves for New Hampshire in June 2008, just after Harry's arrest. From the start, her character

¹Bergson, p. 151.

²„Хумористът представя света с неговите несъвършенства, отбелязва ги и се прекланя пред неизбежното. Хуморът има допирни точки с трагедията.“ (Каменова, 2).

³Larousedictionary

looks ridiculous with her narrow wit, her incoherent conversation and her inadequate attitude as a hyper-protective mother and obsessive wife:

- Mais qu'est-ce que tu fabriques, Markie ? Tu vas aller défendre ce criminel barbare ? [...] Quand auras-tu une petite amie ? J'ai repensé à cette Natalia [...] Et pourquoi n'écris-tu plus de livres ? Tout le monde t'aimait quand tu étais un grand écrivain. [...] Rentre à la maison. Je te ferai des bons hot-dogs et de la tarte aux pommes chaude avec une boule de glace vanille que tu pourras laisser fondre dessus. [...] Ton père n'a plus droit aux hot-dogs, figure-toi. C'est le docteur qui l'a dit. (J'entendis mon père gémir en arrière-fond qu'il y avait quand même droit de temps en temps, et ma mère qui lui répétait : « C'est fini les hot-dogs et toutes ces cochonneries. Le docteur dit que ça te bouche tout ! »).⁴

She reappears, always on the line, as a counterweight to the turmoil in which Marcus Goldman gets lost during the evolution of the investigation. It should be noted that his questions, however annoying and naive they may be, however shabby they stand out against the background of the concerns that haunt the main character (and the reader) at this moment, are also carriers of common sense:

- [...] Au nom du Ciel, Markie, vas-tu mourir pour la cause de ce Diable criminel ? [...] Dans le quartier les gens se posent des questions... Ils demandent pourquoi tu t'entêtes à rester avec ce Harry. [...] Tu as trente ans, et tu n'as marié personne encore ! Tu veux qu'on meure sans t'avoir vu marié ? [...] Pourquoi ne t'occupes-tu pas de nous ramener une belle jeune femme ? [...] Markie chéri, écoute, je dois te demander : es-tu amoureux de ce Harry ? Fais-tu de l'homosexualité avec lui ? - Non ! Pas du tout ! / Je l'entendis dire à mon père : « Il dit que non. Ça veut dire que c'est oui. » [...] Comment ça, les femmes ? Contentée-toi d'en aimer une seule et de l'épouser, veux-tu !⁵

About fifty pages ahead, Marcus' mother calls him again to, this time, play the curious role of heralding the sign of destiny: unbeknownst to her, all prey to her preoccupations as a good woman, her mind creates a meaning from a coincidence: she saw a documentary about Solzhenitsyn who married his secretary and the next day she met the secretary of her son Marcus, Denise, whom she would like to see become her daughter-in-law. The conclusion that the mother draws from this is laughable:

- J'ai eu une idée, Markie. - Quoi ? - Connais-tu le grand Soljenitsyne ? - L'écrivain ? Oui. Quel rapport ? - J'ai vu un documentaire sur lui, hier soir. Quel hasard du ciel d'avoir vu cette émission ! Figure-toi qu'il s'est marié avec sa secrétaire. Sa secrétaire ! Et sur qui je tombe aujourd'hui ? Ta secrétaire ! [...] - C'est hors de question. Elle ne me plaît pas [...] Et puis, on ne se marie pas avec sa secrétaire. - Mais si le grand Soljenitsyne l'a fait, ça veut dire que c'est autorisé !⁶

Trying to see past the laughable, it's safe to say that these mindless chatter is shaping up to be a partial precursor to the final situation of the plot's outcome, including what really happened with Nola Kellergan. In this perspective, they prove to be the beginnings of the framework that will be the subject of the last point of this study, irony. Especially since the telephone conversation in question is immediately preceded by the business communication with Barnaski, one of the characters embodying the cynicism we are studying here, and followed by an interior monologue which can be read as a warning sign of the other aspect of the final outcome - that, more existential, of the values of real life, quite simply.

J'avais passé la première partie de mon existence à assouvir mes ambitions, j'entamai la suivante en essayant de maintenir ces ambitions à flot et à bien y réfléchir, je me demandais à quel moment je déciderais de vivre, tout simplement. [...] Je voulais un groupe de bons copains avec qui suivre le championnat de hockey et partir faire du camping le week-end; je voulais une fiancée, gentille et douce, qui me fasse rire et un peu rêver. Je ne voulais plus être seul.⁷

This is how the first aspect of humour, namely the ridiculous, under its appearance of an attitude which only deserves contempt and derision, is revealed as the first bearer-concealer of the message which weaves its way into depth throughout Joël Dicker's novel. However, before continuing our reflection on the aspect of cynicism, let us note that, in the novel in question, the framework of the Quebert affair appears as a school of values, with its "internal" and "external" values. It is within the evolution of the internal characters, who, objectively speaking, are, just like the external ones, characters as rich as they are ordinary and very real, that the dramatic intrigue of the probing of truth is played out. A parallel between the mother Tamara Quinn and the mother of Marcus Goldman is to be sketched. Both present a profile of stubborn pesky mothers who harbor fantasies about the social establishment of their offspring. Up to this limit, both remain simply ridiculous. The cynicism is only displayed beyond that, in Mother Quinn, who is heavily involved in the affair, and it is only through her character, inside her frame, that the moral motive manifests itself.

CYNISM

Let us recall the two meanings of "cynic" (noun and adjective) given by the Larousse dictionary: 1. who insolently admits, and considering it as natural, a behavior contrary to social conventions, to moral rules; who manifests cynicism; 2. which belongs to the Greek philosophical school of Antisthenes and Diogenes. (The Cynics [5th-4th c. BC] despised social conventions and displayed their independence of mind.)⁸

We will study as embodying cynicism two characters of the novel: Tamara Quinn, internal character and strongly linked

⁴Dicker, p. 26.

⁵*ibid.*, p. 118-119.

⁶*ibid.*, p. 177.

⁷*ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸Larousse dictionary.

to the case investigated, and Roy Barnaski, external character who sees only a big opportunity for gain.

Tamara Quinn, also called mother Quinn, is the owner of the Clark's bistro where, in 1975, her daughter Jenny and Nola Kellergan had worked as waitresses, both in love with the famous Harry Quebert who was a regular at the restaurant. In this female character we can observe a passage from ridiculous to cynicism. As a mother, her attitude and her speech are on several occasions comparable to those of Goldman's mother, with this important difference that in mother Quinn ridicule quickly turns into cynicism and even goes so far as to acquire the dimensions of a moral crime. So as soon as she becomes aware of her daughter Jenny's feelings for Harry Quebert, Boss Quinn's narrow-minded, mercantile mind is suddenly inspired by the unexpected hope of satisfying her daughter's two greatest passions: life: tidy up her daughter and outrank all Aurora families in terms of prestige. In his remarks, apparently worthy of disgusted condescension on the part of the reader, already hints of cynicism:

- Tu es magnifique, ma chérie. Le Quebert va tomber raide dingue lorsqu'il va te voir ! [...] - Et peut-être que Harry a réservé dans un très grand restaurant de Concord pour sa fiancée. - Maman, nous ne sommes pas encore fiancés. - Oh, chérie, bientôt, j'en suis sûre. Vous êtes-vous embrassés ? - Pas encore. - En tout cas, s'il te tripote, pour l'amour de Dieu, laisse-toi faire !⁹

Tamara basks in the prospect of marrying her daughter to Quebert and begins to organize the garden party which, provincial rites and customs oblige, would legitimize her pride and her enviable social ascent. However, it is from this event that the absence of the writer makes fall into the water and which, consequently, becomes a real tragedy for the mother Quinn, that she changes her attitude towards Harry Quebert. Until then, she sees the possible affair between Jenny and Harry as the starting point for a whole other life

[...] bientôt, à New York, tout le monde parlerait du Clark's et de Jenny. Il y aurait sans doute un film aussi. Quelle merveilleuse perspective ! Ce Quebert était l'exaucement de toutes ses prières : comme ils avaient bien fait d'être des bons chrétiens, les voilà récompensés.¹⁰

and, consequently, shows itself servile at will:

- Dans les grands restaurants, les clients importants n'ont pas besoin de commander : leurs habitudes sont connues du personnel. Est-on un grand restaurant ?¹¹

Nevertheless, his frenetic projects quite naturally germinate in his mind fears where political and racist motives are intertwined:

Elle s'était fait tellement de souci pour sa fille : elle aurait pu finir au bras d'un routier de passage. Pire : d'un socialiste. Pire : d'un nègre ! Elle frémit à cette pensée : sa Jenny et un

affreux nègre. Soudain, une angoisse la saisit : beaucoup de grands écrivains étaient des Juifs. Et si Quebert était un Juif ? Quelle horreur ! Peut-être même un Juif socialiste ! Elle regretta que les Juifs puissent être blancs de peau parce que cela les rendait invisibles. Au moins, les Noirs avaient l'honnêteté d'être noirs, pour qu'on puisse les identifier clairement. Mais les Juifs étaient surnois. [...] ?¹²

It is only in the face of the suicide attempt that Nola Kellergan commits in response to Harry Quebert's reluctance, that the monstrous face of Tamara Quinn's small-mindedness appears:

En début de matinée, [Tamara] avait appris la nouvelle, comme tout le monde, et elle avait eu peur pour sa garden-party : Nola avait essayé de se tuer. Mais grâce à Dieu, la petite avait lamentablement raté son suicide, et elle s'était sentie doublement chanceuse : d'abord parce que si Nola était morte, il aurait fallu annuler la fête; ce n'aurait pas été correct de célébrer un événement en pareilles circonstances. Ensuite, c'était une bénédiction que l'on fût dimanche et non samedi, parce que si Nola avait essayé de se tuer un samedi, il aurait fallu la faire remplacer au Clark's et cela aurait été très compliqué. Nola était décidément une brave petite d'avoir fait son affaire un dimanche matin et d'avoir échoué de surcroît.¹³

Thirty-three years later, when she meets Marcus Goldman, Tamara is already vulgarly cynical and violently hostile. Following the dramatic events that took place in the summer of 1975, she ended up categorizing all writers as "idle", "good for nothing" and "liars". She uses foul language to Goldman: "Get the hell out of here", "Name of God, are you that little son of a bitch who was hanging out in Quebert's skirts? [...] You have grown a lot since the time... You have even become not bad. »¹⁴

Moreover, the political aspect of humor in Dickier's novel is only slightly present. If The Truth About the Harry Quebert Affair can be called a novel of criticism, it occurs most noticeably at the level of the individual, while the general political level is only mentioned in passing - as by example the lull during the summer of 2008, just before the presidential elections, which the publisher of Goldman considers very conducive to the success of the book on Harry Quebert. Indeed, this plan serves above all as a backdrop to the moral duel between the writer Marcus Goldman and his editor Roy Barnaski:

Livraison du manuscrit pour fin août. Les jaquettes publicitaires seront déjà prêtes. Relecture et mise en forme en deux semaines, impression dans le courant du mois de septembre. Sortie prévue pour la dernière semaine de septembre. Au plus tard. Quel timing parfait ! Juste avant l'élection présidentielle et plus ou moins au moment de la tenue du procès de Quebert ! Coup de marketing phénoménal, mon cher Goldman ! Hip hip hip hourra !¹⁵

¹²*ibid.*, p. 145.

¹³*ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁴*ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁵*ibid.*, p. 235.

⁹*ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁰*ibid.*, p. 144.

¹¹*ibid.*, p. 83.

Barnaski does enjoy the right of citizenship that the publishing market assures him. As a businessman, he embodies common sense. From the start of the investigation undertaken by Goldman, who was sent anonymous threats pushing him to return to New York, the attitude of the publisher shocked and made people laugh at the same time:

Barnaski ne m'écoutait plus. Il en était resté aux menaces. - Des menaces ? dit-il. Mais c'est formidable ! Ça va faire une publicité d'enfer. Imaginez même que vous soyez victime d'une tentative d'assassinat, vous pouvez directement rajouter un zéro au chiffre des ventes. Et carrément deux si vous mourez ! - À condition que je meure après avoir fini le livre. - Ça va de soi.¹⁶

As a character external to the Quebert affair, he is the one who strikes the blow that triggered the outcome to the very end of the story. He seizes the leaves of the still unfinished manuscript of Goldman's novel on the Harry Quebert affair and publishes extracts from it to provoke public interest. This results in Nola Kellergan and her relationship with Harry Quebert finding themselves violently compromised in the eyes of society, something Harry refuses to forgive Marcus. At the same time, the publication of the pages of the manuscript triggers the last stage of the private police investigation, following which the real culprits are finally found, while a revelation concerning Nola's mother comes to compromise the writings of Marcus. Thus, the cynical greed of the publisher turns out – admittedly, unbeknownst to him – conducive to the quest for truth. Nevertheless, the character of Barnaski provokes indignation, disgust and anger, especially when his mercantile reasonings stand out against the background of the chivalrous feelings that animate Marcus - flabbergasted by his master's love affair, trying to save his friend, giving himself body and soul in his investigation-writing which is almost akin to the quest for the Grail:

- Et si l'enquête n'est pas bouclée ? demandai-je. Comment dois-je terminer le livre ? Barnaski avait une réponse déjà toute prête et validée par son service juridique : - Si l'enquête est terminée, c'est un récit authentique. Si elle ne l'est pas, on laisse le sujet ouvert ou alors vous suggérez la fin et c'est un roman. Juridiquement, c'est intouchable et pour les lecteurs, ça ne fait aucune différence. Et puis tant mieux si l'enquête n'est pas terminée : on pourra toujours faire un second tome. Quelle aubaine !¹⁷

Barnaski's cynicism, much like that of mother Quinn, boils down to the fact that her attitude towards Goldman's business is entirely subjugated to the prism of gain. Both act driven by a value system that collides with Marcus's. Yet it is well worth returning to the previously cited meanings of "cynic" to realize that in Dicker's novel cynicism manifests an antithetical function: if the character of Mother Quinn and that of Roy Barnaski manifest a cheeky way an attitude colliding with conventions, it is not really about social conventions. Because both characters embody the system of values in force in their respective worlds – that of the small provincial town for mother Quinn and that of the publishing

business. However, if, through these two characters, these two worlds appear repugnant, it is up to the society constituting them to take up the challenge. Because this is indeed a critique of society that Dicker achieves through the very truthful close-up of the characters. However, this is not a criticism that calls for revolt. Here, it would be fair to refer to cynicism in the sense also of an attitude allowing freedom from constraints. Thus, it turns out, in the context of the novel, doubly justified: first, by functioning as the revealing sign of social defects, then, by emerging as the voice of salutary common sense. Let us recall that in one of the many flashbacks of which the novel is woven, Joël Dicker recounts the beginning of the personal relationship between Harry Quebert and Marcus Goldman: their meeting takes place under the sign of the admiration that the professor feels for the student, especially seeing him brave enough to challenge the audience while trying to profit from it. In this scene revealing a much more pleasant face of cynicism, the young Goldman reacts like a true colleague of his future publisher Barnaski and tries to sell his student short stories.¹⁸ Later, already fighting for his noble cause as a friend and writer, Goldman will have internally overcome the voice of reason, without this becoming less realistic:

Vous savez, l'information est un flux illimité dans un espace limité. La masse d'informations est exponentielle, mais le temps que chacun lui accorde est restreint et inextensible. Le commun des mortels y consacre quoi, une heure par jour ? [...] Et pour remplir cet espace temporel, il y a de la matière infinie ! Il se passe des tas de choses dégueulasses dans le monde, mais on n'en parle pas parce qu'on n'a pas le temps. On ne peut pas parler de Nola Kellergan et du Soudan, on n'a pas le temps, vous comprenez. Durée de l'attention : quinze minutes de CNN le soir. Après, les gens veulent voir leur série télé. La vie est une question de priorités. - Vous êtes cynique, Roy, lui répondis-je. - Non, bon Dieu, non ! Arrêtez de m'accuser de tous les maux ! Je suis simplement dans la réalité. Vous, vous êtes un doux chasseur de papillons, un rêveur qui parcourt la steppe à la recherche d'inspiration. Mais vous pourriez m'écrire un chef-d'œuvre sur le Soudan, que je ne le publierais pas. Parce que les gens s'en foutent ! Ils-s'en-foutent ! Alors oui, vous pouvez considérer que je suis un salaud, mais je ne fais que répondre à la demande. [...] Aujourd'hui, on parle de Harry Quebert et de Nola Kellergan partout, et il faut en profiter : dans deux mois, on parlera du nouveau Président, et votre livre n'existera plus. Mais on en aura vendu tellement que vous serez en train de vous la couler douce dans votre nouvelle maison des Bahamas.¹⁹

In her study of the American-style thriller in three contemporary novels, Marie Panter affirms that it appears in Dicker's novel as a narrative model, that of an effective narrative capable of selling itself.²⁰ Here, we have contented ourselves with demonstrating the antithetical function of cynicism in its double meaning.

If ridicule and cynicism play an ambiguous role in the novel, displaying themselves as both revealing and concealing,

¹⁸Dicker, p.24.

¹⁹Dicker, p. 345.

²⁰Panter, p. 108.

¹⁶*ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁷*ibid.*, p. 235.

irony comes to crown the moving set of characters and events described by the sign of clarity which suddenly makes everything rhyme with everything.

Irony

“Irony” according to the Larousse dictionary: 1. way of mocking, of mocking by not giving words their real or complete value, or by making the opposite of what is said be heard; 2. opposition, contrast between a cruel, disappointing reality and what could be expected.²¹

The irony in the novel lies in the distancing and questioning. It is the very sign of the investigation as a search for truth. From the start, the narrator has questioned his own character: he describes his success as a writer in a tone bordering on self-irony, showing himself to be much more sure of his failure than of his success, keeping a distance tacit with the nonchalant and irresponsible character of Marcus Goldman before the investigation. Subsequently, this self-irony is maintained through the words addressed to Marcus by Sergeant Gahalowood, who has gradually become his most faithful partner in the investigation. The irony continues as the voice of pure conscience that is heard throughout the novel and proves to be the engine of the evolution of the plot. It can be compared to a sixth sense, that of truth, which Joël Dicker entrusts to the reader and which also makes possible the game of *mise en abyme*. Marie Panter affirms that the narrative device of *The Truth About the Harry Quebert Affair* is based on a confrontation between a story set in *abyme* and the exposure of its processes.²² Does the truth always remain next to what the narrator explicitly focuses his attention on and that of the reader, while tacitly suggesting that he look elsewhere, on his own. It is this secretly entrusted role, this decisive share of responsibility that keeps the reader spellbound.

Insofar as the irony comes down to a shift, here are three crucial moments in the novel: first, when Marcus Goldman, driven by the greed to find some secret of success or at least of inspiration, delves into Harry Quebert's business, while asking himself the question of which he himself is not aware at this precise moment of the key position it will acquire:

Malgré les conseils qu'essayait de me prodiguer Harry, je restai obnubilé par cette idée : comment lui-même, à mon âge, avait-il eu le déclic, ce moment de génie qui lui avait permis d'écrire *Les Origines du mal* ?²³

Indeed, this is the initiation of true research. A few moments later, the character of the narrator moves away from it to plunge into the role as attractive as misleading: that of the close friend of Harry Quebert to whom the latter, after a first movement of anger, entrusts the secret of his great love. Thus, from the start, research bifurcates into a true and a false one, and the discrepancy sets in in depth. Subsequently, does the novel evolve towards the first denouement, revealed to be false – and this is the second crucial moment that we would like to cite. Namely, the one where the first

version of the events that occurred in 1975, contained in the book "The Harry Quebert Affair" that Goldman published in September 2008, is denounced as false. The character of Goldman, writer and narrator, comes out duped. He finds himself forced to continue the investigation – which he does with the help of Sergeant Gahalowood, to finally arrive at the truth about the death of Nola Kellergan and the three other victims. It is at this stage that he also arrives at the answer to the initial question, that is to say the truth about Harry Quebert, which lies in the fact that he is not the real author of the book "The Origins of Evil", and more: he had preferred to be accused of Nola's murder than to let his secret of plagiarism be discovered - a detail which also casts doubt on the truth of his loving devotion for the murdered young girl.

It is necessary to conclude that the questioning, the basic element of irony, persists, all revelations accomplished, and is thrown to the reader as a challenge. It can be said that the irony is summed up in the structural and eventual coherence of Dicker's novel. It appears as the serious dimension of laughter and the reaction it provokes no longer has anything to do with derision or rejection: it is acceptance, leniency, a call for wisdom, a catharsis. Remember, as Anna Kaménova has noted, that the wisdom of the humorist is much more easily accepted than that of the philosopher or the priest.²⁴

Conclusion

Insofar as *The Truth About the Harry Quebert Affair* is a novel that makes readers aware of the dynamism of values, as well as their dual functioning, it is based, on the one hand, on the *mise en abyme* as structural process, and on the other hand, on laughter - not as an effect, but as a conceptual ingredient. Humor, "true to life",²⁵ is discreetly present only to raise the questioning - and the quest - to a spiritual level such that it has a hold on matter.

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²⁴ „Мъдростта на хумориста се възприема много по-охотно, отколкото мъдростта на философа или проповедника.“ (Каменова, 1).

²⁵ „Humor is true to life. That is why we do not have to watch for its manifestations in literature alone, and more especially in comedy. Humor is found in our attitude towards others, towards people, things and life itself. Such a person who would never have written a single humorous line, would have the sense of humor that would be reflected in his vision of the world. Unlike wit, humor does not need an audience. Humor can only be a personal satisfaction.“ [„Хуморът е верен на живота. Затова хумор не трябва непременно да търсим проявен само в литературата или още по-специално в комедията. Може да имаме хумор в отношенията си към хората, събитията, към живота. Може някой никога да не е написал нито един хумористичен ред и пак да притежава чувство за хумор, което ще се изрази в неговия мироглед. Хуморът не се нуждае като остроумието от публика. Хуморът може да бъде само едно лично задоволство.“] (Каменова, 6).

²¹ Laroussedictionary.

²² Panter, p. 108.

²³ Dicker, p. 18.

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