

CAPONEU - The Cartography of the Political Novel in Europe

Tibor Déry

Mr. G. A. in X

G. A. úr X-ben

Presented by: Richárd Vincze

In *G. A. úr X-ben*, Déry Tibor writes about a society organized around radical freedom and the dissolution of clear, stable social structures. In the “mysterious” city of X, traditional forms of authority, morality, hierarchy and institutional control seem to have disappeared, replaced by a fluid and constantly shifting social “order”. Yet the novel gradually reveals the paradox at the center of this seemingly “liberated” world. When all limitations are gone, freedom itself may become totalizing, depersonalizing, and ultimately a destructive order in itself. Rather than presenting a classical dictatorship or an oppressive regime, Déry explores how unrestricted freedom and the erosion of stable forms can, in turn, produce existential disorientation and the collapse of individuality.

The protagonist, G. A., arrives in the city of X as an outsider attempting to understand the strange logic governing this unfamiliar society (yet it is unknown why he travels here, and exactly where this “here” is). At first glance, X appears almost a utopian “city”(?). Social conventions are so weak, rigid hierarchies seem absent, and everyday life has an unusual flexibility and overt spontaneity. The city – as he learns step by step – does not function through visible coercion or strict regulation. Instead, its inhabitants appear liberated from the moral, institutional, and psychological constraints associated with traditional “bourgeois” society or liberal democracies of the 20th century.

However, the longer G. A. remains in X, the more problematic this freedom appears. The visible absence of repression, eventually, does not lead to genuine autonomy or some kind of a “fulfilled” individuality. On the contrary, the dissolution of stable norms, roles, and structures begins to erode coherent (if there is any, at all) identity itself. As it is becoming more and more apparent, human relationships become unstable and interchangeable, emotional attachments lose their permanence, and individuals drift within a social world lacking clear orientation or continuity.

Importantly, the novel does not simply criticize political authoritarianism. Déry’s central target is also the crisis (or the possible crisis) of modern individualism. The society preceding X – implicitly associated with competitive, atomized, and alienated modern existence – appears equally unsatisfactory. X emerges partly as a reaction against this world: against repression, rigid morality, institutional hierarchy, and the limitations imposed only on desire and personal freedom.

The novel’s political and philosophical “power” lies in this ambivalence. X as it is visible in many cases, promises liberation from domination, yet this liberation gradually transforms into another form of totality. Without stable structures, limits, or durable forms of identity, individuals become incapable of sustaining meaningful autonomy. Freedom loses its oppositional meaning because nothing remains against which it could define itself. In this sense, the novel poses a disturbing

question: can unlimited freedom itself become oppressive?

Although maybe this can be taken as a criticism of this novel, the city of X functions less as a realistic social environment than as an allegorical and philosophical space. Déry constructs a world in which social relations are characterized by fluidity, instability, and constant transformation. Institutions appear super-weak (if there are any), authority becomes difficult to identify (sometimes it is just the opposite, as the reader would anticipate it), and collective life operates through shifting interactions rather than pre-fixed structures. Yet this anti-structural condition does not produce emancipation in any straightforward sense. Instead, it generates uncertainty, disorientation, and the gradual dissolution of individuality.

Unlike classical dystopian fiction, *G. A. úr X-ben* does not rely on visible terror, surveillance, or bureaucratic control as such. The danger represented by X is more elusive. There is no clearly identifiable dictator, no omnipresent ideology, and no openly repressive apparatus. The novel's unsettling atmosphere emerges precisely from this absence of stable boundaries and limitations. Individuals of the "city" appear totally absorbed into a social environment where permanence, continuity, and resistance become increasingly impossible (that can be the reason, why they cannot imagine leaving this place, ever...).

In literary terms, the novel occupies a unique position somehow between dystopian fiction, existential philosophy, and modernist experimentation. It can be connected to the anti-utopian tradition represented by George Orwell or Aldous Huxley, yet its central problem differs significantly from classical totalitarian dystopias. X is not a society of excessive order but of excessive fluidity of freedom. The novel, therefore, anticipates later critiques of modernity/postmodernity focused on instability, identity dissolution, and the disappearance of stable symbolic structures.

The novel's language and narrative form is parallel with this philosophical uncertainty. Déry's prose frequently combines irony, abstraction, and estrangement/alienation. The narrative perspective remains unstable, often refusing clear interpretation or moral certainty. Everyday situations get an uncanny and disorienting quality, reflecting G. A.'s inability to fully understand the world surrounding him. This uncertainty is not merely stylistic but deeply political, since the novel suggests that modern individuals increasingly possess realities in which traditional categories and certainties no longer function.

The figure of G. A. is therefore crucial as well. As an outsider, he initially attempts to interpret X in terms of his conventional assumptions about society, morality, and individuality. Yet the longer he remains within this environment, the more unstable these categories become for him. His experience may reflect the broader existential problem at the center of the novel: how can the self remain coherent (and function...alive...) in a world where all stable forms dissolve?

Importantly, Déry does not offer than a nostalgic return to traditional authority or any kind of rigid social order (or maybe just implicitly). Instead, it stages a tension between two crises: the repression and alienation of structured modern society on the one hand, and the disintegration produced by limitless freedom on the other. Neither model provides genuine resolution according to this novel.

Ultimately, *G. A. úr X-ben* presents a super ambivalent vision of freedom and of modernity. By portraying a society in which the disappearance of limits gradually undermines individuality itself, Déry tries to reveal how liberation can become self-destructive when detached from stable forms of meaning, continuity, and resistance. Or anything which can curb the abstract idea of liberty. The novel thus stands as one of the most philosophically complex political works of twentieth-century

Hungarian literature.

LANGUAGE: Hungarian/Magyar nyelv

CENSORSHIP STATUS: