

Dantons Tod. Study Guide

Dantons Tod. by Georg Büchner

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Plot Summary

Danton's Death by Georg Buchner is the story of the last days of George Danton who is a leader of one of the sects of revolutionaries during the French Revolution. Another leader of the Revolution, Robespierre, is Danton's rival. Although the two men are ostensibly on the same side - that is, against the monarchy - they are rivals.

Danton is a libertarian who hopes to bring liberty to the French people and allow them to enjoy their lives. Danton has led his followers in battles and established the Revolutionary Tribune which is a panel that sends enemies of the Revolution to their deaths. However, Danton has guilt about the brutality of the tribune and wants to achieve victory with as little bloodshed as possible. Robespierre has a completely different approach and feels adamant that his political enemies and anyone who stands in his way need to be executed. He has come to use the guillotine on a daily basis to eradicate those who he considers enemies of the Revolution and those he judges to be without virtue.

The two revolutionaries are on a collision course of ideology and methodology. Danton is growing weary of the fighting and his guilt over his part in the violence is weighing upon him. As he grapples with the protracted war and an elusive victory, Danton begins to cede his position especially when rumors begin to swirl that he will be arrested. Robespierre, who sees himself as the preeminent revolutionary leader and may aspire to even higher office, sees Danton as a threat and turns many of his followers against him. He convinces them that Danton is an elitist who has betrayed the Republic. The decision is made that Danton and his close associates must be arrested and tried for treason.

The long war has caused the decline of French society. The common people were promised that by joining the Revolution and fighting for liberty their lives would be made better. However, the people are starving and freezing on the streets and their lives are far from improved. They are bitter when they see that the aristocrats are still living lives of opulence and ease. The morals of the people have declined as well with alcoholism and prostitution on the rise.

When it is obvious that Danton is going to be arrested and tried for treason, he sees the writing on the wall. He is fatalistic about his impending end - everyone has to die. Dying young and leaving behind the chaos that life in France has become would be a better option than staying in the fight. Danton feels betrayed and suspects that it was Robespierre who turned the revolutionaries against him and his men.

Danton sees the irony and pathos in that he is being tried by the very tribunal that he established. While imprisoned, Danton and the others discuss the existence of God. Danton, who claims to be an atheist, feels the need to reach out for something bigger than himself. He tries to comfort the others in their final days but the men struggle with their impending executions. Although Danton, who was an inspirational leader and



speaker, impresses the tribunal with his words and passion, in the end he and the others are found guilty and sentenced to death.

Danton's wife, Julie, sends a lock of hair to her husband so that he will not be alone when he dies. But she cannot go on without him and drinks poison to end her life. Camille's wife, Lucile, goes mad over the execution of her husband and purposely sentences herself to death by publicly shouting, "Long live the King!"



Act One

Act One Summary

Scene One

Herauld-Sechelles is with a group of women at a card table. Georges and Julie Danton are sitting a distance away from them. Danton admires a beautiful women playing cards. He hears that the woman, who is married, is quite a flirt. He tells Julie that women can trick me into loving them with a lie. Julie wants to know if Danton trusts her but Danton doesn't know. They really don't know much about each other. She is upset when Danton says he loves her like a grave. But he equates "grave" with "peace." Danton speaks of relationships between men and women as a game of cards - something he wouldn't let his daughter partake in. Danton had created the Revolutionary Tribunal the year before and was having misgivings about its harsh treatment of enemies of the Revolution.

Camille and Philippeau enter. Herauld asks why Philippeau has such a sad face. Camille answers that he's parodying Socrates who found Alcibiades sulking over losing a battle. Philippeau responds that they lost twenty more victims that day. Danton responds that the Decemvirs want them to crawl on all fours so Robespierre can control them. Philippeau laments about how long the fight may go on. How many innocents must die. But Danton feels that the Revolution has reached a stage of transformation. The revolution must end and the Republic must begin. Every man must be free to his enjoy his life. He has plans to launch an attack in the Convention. Danton becomes frustrated with the talk of war and storms off.

Scene Two

Simon and his wife are in the streets. Simon, apparently drunk, beats his wife and calls her names. Several citizens pull them apart. Simon falls to the ground, drunk. His wife claims he's a decent man but can't hold his liquor. The wife complains that he is not a good father to their daughter. Simon demands that someone give him a knife but no one provides one for him because it's obvious he wants to kill his wife. The knife should be used against the rich. They were told to kill the aristocrats yet they are still starving and freezing.

Robespierre enters accompanied by women and Sans Culottes. The people tell Robespierre that they are starving. He responds that the law is the will of the people. Robespierre tells them that they are doing their duty by their sacrifices. He tells them not to wound themselves. Come with them to the Jacobin Club, he tells them. Their brothers open their arms to them. Everyone leaves except Simon and his wife. She helps him up and they go off to look for their daughter.

Scene Three



The scene is set in the Jacobin Club. A member speaks of Lyons. The City of Lyons is a stain on France that must be eradicated by the corpses of monarchists and traitors. Cowards die for the Republic, Jacobins kill for it. Legendre speaks to the group. The aristocrats still have their heads and have therefore regained their confidence that the Jacobins have failed and are no longer a threat. Collot D'Herbois tells Legendre that the Committee of Public Safety knows how to run a revolution better than Legendre does.

Robespierre demands to speak. He and his forces had waited for this cry of outrage. They flushed the enemies out and now they stand in daylight. The enemies of the Republic had consisted of two factions. One faction has been destroyed because of their arrogance. The other faction is still to be defeated. It disguises itself with weakness and its battle cry is "Mercy." Their first goal is to disarm the people. The weapon of the Republic is terror. Someone shouted out to have mercy on the royalists. Robespierre responded that there should be no mercy for criminals. Mercy should be reserved only for the innocent and weak. Robespierre continued by stating emphatically that the oppressors of mankind must be punished.

There are those who are seeking to sap the Republic's strength with vice. The "tribunes of the people" are parading the vice and luxury of the old court. The former counts of the Revolution are marrying rich wives and flaunting their opulent lifestyle. There is no treaty for the men who robbed the people. They are trying to put out the flame of revolution. Robespierre vows to give the brothers of Lyons a great new example. The voices join together and chant, "Long live the Republic, long live Robespierre!" (13)

Scene Four

The setting is on a street. Lacroix and Legendre are present. Lacroix tells Legendre that the atheists and ultras have gone to the scaffold but the people of the streets still suffer, starving and without shoes. Robespierre cannot allow the guillotine to cool. Lacroix tells Legendre that he has made the counter-revolution public and it is now time for the Decemvirs to act. They both wonder where Danton is.

Scene Five

The setting is a room. Danton and Marion are present.

Marion tells Danton to leave her alone. She had been isolated from the world by her overly-protective mother. She met a young man who became her lover. She was so enthralled by sex that making love with any man became an obsession. Her lover became aware of her infidelities and drowned himself. It was a scandal. People blamed her. Her mother died from grief over her daughter's sins. But Marion thinks that people must do what makes them happy. The more pleasure one gets in life the more he must say his prayers of thanks. Danton feels frustrated that he cannot feel closer to her. He has a longing to make her part of him.

Lacroix, Adelaide and Rosalie enter. Danton compliments Rosalie on her maturing figure and Adelaide on her chastity. The two young women work at hospitals. They take their leave. Lacroix tells Danton that he has just come from the Jacobins. The Lyons, led



by Legendre, are ready to fight. Robespierre told the crowd that "virtue must rule by terror." Danton responds that new planks are planed daily for the guillotine. Lacroix tells Danton that Collot had demanded that the people tear off their masks. If that happened, their faces would come with them, Danton responded. Robespierre vowed to Lacroix that he would sacrifice everything for liberty. But Danton doesn't trust Robespierre - he'd soon be holding the basket to catch the heads of his friends.

Lacroix says that the Hebertists aren't dead but the deprivation among the people is devastating. Lacroix asserts that he, Danton and Camille, Philippeau and Herault are all moderates but some feel that moderation is a weakness. But they are also libertines who enjoy living a free life. Danton agrees that it's time to meet with Robespierre. He'll provoke him out of his silence.

Scene Six

Robespierre, Danton and Paris meet in a room. Robespierre asserts that he will not be stopped in defending himself and his followers. But Danton pleads with him that the slaughter must stop - there is a fine line between self-defense and murder. But Robespierre reminds Danton that the social revolution is not over yet. The old ruling class is not yet defeated. The people must replace that class and vice must be punished.

Danton lauds Robespierre for being virtuous - he takes no bribes and runs up no debts and has no vices. But with all the killing can his conscience be clear? Does he have the right to turn the guillotine into a tub in which to wash the people's dirty laundry because he must have clean clothes? Does he have the right to kill all those he finds less than virtuous by his own standards? But to Robespierre, vice is high treason. Robespierre denies that one innocent man has died. Danton is appalled by his words and he and Paris leave.

Alone now, Robespierre is as resolved as ever. The Revolution must go on. Anyone who tries to stop him must be destroyed. For just a moment, he feels a wave of guilt within. Is something deep inside telling lies to the rest of him?

St. Just enters. Robespierre tells him that Danton just left. St. Just saw Danton in the Palais Royal - wearing his revolutionary face. The crowd was whispering to him to take action or they would proceed without him. St. Just plans to summon the government back to full session. Herault-Sechelles is an outright criminal and will make a find head. Robespierre reads a letter written by Camille in which he mocks him. He must be stopped as well. St. Just leaves Robespierre alone again. He is tormented that he has become the executioner of sinners, comparing himself to Christ who sacrificed himself for sinners.

Act One Analysis

In the midst of the French Revolution, there are several sects who are fighting against those in power. However, the leaders of the sects are fighting among themselves.



Danton is the leader of one of the sects, the Deputies of the National Convention. He is concerned with the bloodshed and the suffering in the streets. Danton is against the wholesale murder of political enemies while the leader of a rival group, the Committee of Public Safety, Robespierre, has proclaimed himself to be the leader of the virtuous and the executioner of the sinful. The opening scene between Danton and his wife, Julie, symbolizes the deterioration of French society and foreshadows Danton's own death. Another scene with Simon, one of the street people whose life has been turned upside down by the strife and conflict, also symbolizes the decline in morals. He has become an alcoholic and is searching the streets for his daughter who has been forced into prostitution.

Philippeau and Danton lament about how long the fighting will continue and how many more innocents will die. Danton feels that Robespierre will keep up the pressure until they literally are begging to join his side. But the death and mayhem is intolerable. Robespierre is using the guillotine to eliminate all those he perceives to be his political enemies. How is he superior to those he fights to replace?

The people of the streets are another faction that has joined in the revolution. However, despite their efforts and loss of lives, they are still poor, starving and freezing in the streets while they see the aristocratic class still enjoying all the pleasures and comfort of an elite existence. What has the Revolution actually done for the people who are suffering the most and are in need of the most help?

Robespierre's only response to the degradation of the people is to tell them that they must fight on. Despite the fact that they are suffering and their lives are no better or perhaps even worse, Robespierre urges them on for the cause. If Robespierre were to lose them, his own leadership position would be threatened if they turned, en masse, against him. He vows not to let anyone stop him. Robespierre is more concerned about his own power than in the welfare of the people.

Robespierre is bloodthirsty for the heads of the royalists. There should be no mercy for them because showing mercy is a sign of weakness. Robespierre claims to fear that the country is being taken over by criminals and is being corrupted by various forms of vice. But in the end, Robespierre envisions himself as the eventual leader of the country. These dreams are certainly bolstered when the royalists' chant of "Long live France, long live the King" is replaced by the people's chant of "Long live the Republic, long live Robespierre!"

The differences between the two main leaders against the Republic - Danton and Robespierre - are stark. These differences place the men on a collision course fueled by ideology and methodology. Danton wants man to live free and enjoy life but he is unable to embrace Robespierre's belief that all who disagree with his politics must die. After a meeting between Danton and Robespierre, it is obvious that the two men will never come to terms. In fact, Robespierre is beginning to believe that Danton must die because he may stand in the way of his success. When Robespierre is alone, there is a nagging guilt within him about the murder and mayhem that he has left in his wake but he pushes it aside. He compares himself to Christ who died for man's sin while he

himself has become the executioner of the sinful. It is Robespierre's Christian upbringing that is causing flashes of guilt over his actions.



Act Two

Act Two Summary

Scene One

The setting is a room. Danton, Lacroix, Philippeau, Paris and Camille are present.

Danton speaks about his potential death. Lacroix tells him that he must inspire the people. If he hesitates, he will drag all his friends down with him. But Danton feels that his fate is set - he is like a martyred saint, a dead relic. He has grown tired of all the effort he has expended without seeing results. It is Robespierre who has emerged as the leader of the Revolution. But Danton would rather be guillotined than guillotine. Danton has tried but has failed. They have proven to be pitiful alchemists.

Camille pleads with him. How long can the people continue the fight and kill each other? Philippeau asks whether France will be left with just executioners. But Danton responds that everyone must die - what does it matter how. The people are no better off but at least they are not bored. Life is not worth the sweat and effort to preserve it. In a sense, it's too long anyway.

Since Danton feels that he will soon be executed the others urge him to run and hide. Lacroix thinks that Danton is just lazy. He'd rather be guillotined than make a speech! Lacroix tells the others that they must all prepare to die.

Scene Two

The setting is a promenade.

Simon encounters a citizen who tells him that Cornelia has blessed him with a baby. But Simon responds that Cornelia has blessed the Republic with a baby. They discuss what the baby should be named. The citizen thinks his son's middle name should be Robespierre. A beggar encounters two gentlemen. The beggar asks one of them how he got his fine coat. Through work, the gentleman responds. The beggar argues that he worked for pleasure - the coat is a form of pleasure but a rag would serve the same purpose. The gentleman reminds him that the system works that way. But the beggar is warmed by the sun and the streets is where real life takes place.

Rosalie and Adelaide enter and encounter a soldier who asks them how old they are but the girls are evasive. They want a warm meal. Danton and Camille enter the scene and feel that sin is taking over the streets. Eugenie and her mother meet a young gentleman. The young man tells them that a young woman they see with an old man was impregnated by her hair stylist. The old man thinks the child is his.

Scene Three



The setting is a room. Danton, Camille, and Lucile are present. Camille is complaining about how people are drawn to puppets who are controlled by other people. They admire false gods that, like Pygmalion's statue, turn to stone. Lucile is captivated by Camille's impassioned words. Danton is called outside and when he returns he announces that the Committee of Public Safety had decided to arrest him. An ally warned him and is offering him a place to hide. But Danton is tired of it all. If they want his head, let them have it. He will die with courage. But he never thought that the Committee would take such a step. Danton startles Camille by telling him he's going for a walk out in the open where he could be apprehended.

Lucile is upset. She begs Camille to go see Robespierre to plead for Danton's life. Camille thinks back to their school days - he and Robespierre had been students together. He always liked him. They have been a little estranged lately but he will go see him immediately. Lucile has a terrible premonition about how this will all turn out.

Scene Four

Open country is the setting. Danton is alone.

After a long walk, Danton sits down to rest. Danton hopes that death will make all his memories disappear. He would gladly turn his cheek like a good Christian but that is not an option. The only safety that is in his future is in a grave. Danton then thinks that they are probably just trying to frighten him. They will not dare try to execute him.

Scene Five

The setting is in a room at night.

Danton is alone longing for the morning when he hears the word "September" and then Julie calling to him. Julie is concerned about him. He is frightened and troubled. She asks him if he knows who she is. He responds that she is his wife. Julie tries to calm him. He is only dreaming. Why that word? It was September when the monarchs were only forty hours from the city and the fortress had fallen and the Republic was lost. He remembered when he killed his enemies. But it was "them or us." It wasn't murder. It was civil war. Julie reminded him that he saved his country. The man on the cross took the easy way out. Danton says they are puppets of unknown forces. They are nothing. After venting his fears, Danton feels better and tells Julie to come to bed.

Scene Six

The setting is on the street in front of Danton's house.

Simon and Citizen Soldiers are present.

Simon declares that he will lead the way to take Danton. He cautions them to be careful because Danton is a powerful brute. Simon, leading a group of other citizens, forces his way into Danton's house.



Scene Seven

A group of deputies are gathered. Legendre fears no one will be safe if Danton falls. One of the deputies points out that he would be tried by the Convention. They will not drown out Danton's voice. Success is still in their grasp. But there is a decree another deputy points out. Legendre tells him to repeal it.

Three other members of the National Convention had been arrested the night before with Danton. Legendre doesn't know the names of the others. Legendre vouches for Danton. The man has devoted his energy and passion to save France. Legendre is careful to say that he holds no member of the Committees of Public Safety or General Security responsible. Legendre suspects that it is a personal grudge that has put him in prison. He proclaims that Danton and the others should be tried by the Assembly. A few deputies raise their voices in support.

One of the deputies speaks up and says that the law is for everyone. They must be fair. They cannot withhold the law from their legislators and send them to the guillotine. Another deputy says that crime has no sanctuary except for the criminals who wear crowns and sit on thrones.

Robespierre speaks up and tells those gathered not to betray their principles for a few men. He tells the others that Lacroix was also arrested. But he is sure that Legendre knows that. He only mentions Danton's name because he thinks that Danton's name is associated with privilege. The people applaud. Robespierre's words are impacting them. What has Danton done to deserve special privileges above those of the ordinary citizen, Robespierre asks. Perhaps there is just a plot by a few to try to exploit Danton's name and seek power. Special treatment is only available to true patriots. There is more applause.

Robespierre tells the crowd that he was warned that he was surrounded by Danton's men and was in danger. They tried to temper his fervor for liberty. He vows that nothing will shake his resolve. He demands that Legendre's motion be rejected. The deputies have unanimous agreement with Robespierre.

St. Just feels that there are those who think that Robespierre and his followers are bloodthirsty. But they hadn't realized what the revolutionary forces were being faced with. Why shouldn't a cause that transforms mankind advance through blood? History will not judge their actions for centuries to come. A few more corpses cannot stop them now. "Like Pelia's daughters, the Revolution cuts up mankind to rejuvenate it" (p. 41).

Act Two Analysis

Danton is having a premonition about his own end. He frightens the others because he is their follower. But Danton seems to have given up. For one reason, Robespierre has emerged as the leader of the Revolution. Perhaps Danton does not like having Robespierre as his superior since they were peers and they bitterly disagree on how to conduct the Revolution. By saying that "he would rather be guillotined than guillotine" he



is telling his colleagues that he will not follow Robespierre's murderous ways. He tells the others that they gave it a good try. They were pitiful alchemists, he says, meaning that he and his followers did not have the right blending of strengths to be victorious. Danton is trying to analyze, to understand why they had failed.

Danton has a fatalistic attitude as evidenced by his comment that everyone must die. And that dying young might be better than growing old. Danton feels defeated when he says that the sweat and effort that life takes is not worth it. Danton is in a downward spiral psychologically. If he hasn't been physically defeated by Robespierre, he certainly has been defeated by him psychologically.

After Danton leaves, Lacroix shows his disappointment in Danton. He calls him lazy because he has given up. He chooses to ignore that the tide has turned against them. Danton is facing reality. Lacroix is trying to blame Danton for things that are beyond his control. Lacroix thinks if Danton would just give a speech, he would inspire his followers and, perhaps, reinvigorate himself again and re-emerge as leading revolutionaries.

The scene between the street beggar and the gentlemen illustrates the disparity between the classes. The gentlemen have the attitude that they have worked hard for what they have. They view the beggar as lazy. But the beggar is warmed by the sun and his needs are almost non-existent. It all comes down to what priorities man has in life. One gentleman tells the beggar that working hard and having nice things is how the system works. But the system means nothing to the beggar because he has either been pushed out of the system or has taken himself out of it. There is an old adage that says that there is no fool like an old fool. The young girl is pregnant by her lover while her old husband thinks that it is his child - an example of another way the system works and of the deterioration of French society.

When Danton is told he is going to be arrested, he flees to the country for a short while. He talks himself into thinking that he has over-reacted. He has been an important part of the revolution so surely they would not dare to execute him. In a last desperate attempt to hold onto life, Danton is ignoring the reality and trying to convince himself that he is safe and that nothing has changed on a drastic scale.

Things have progressed too far. Danton's ally, Legendre, cannot rouse enough support for Danton and Robespierre exploits the situation to drive the stake all the way into Danton's heart. Danton has been his rival and one of the main threats to his ultimate power-grab. He plans to remove his competitor in a permanent way. Robespierre feels more confident than ever that he, and he alone, will be the leader of the Revolution. Robespierre is the only one who realized what the enemy really was. He had to be willing to kill just as they did. Danton was too caught up in himself. Robespierre convinces the others that Danton felt he was a privileged character and that he needs to be shown, in a very dramatic way, that he is not.



Act Three

Act Three Summary

Scene One

The scene is set at the Luxembourg in a room containing prisoners. Chaumette, Paine, Herault de Sechelles, Mercier and other prisoners are present. Paine says there is no God. The others join in the discussion about creation and about the existence of God. Paine thinks that if God does not create anything that is perfect, then he should not create anything at all. One can only prove the existence of God, Paine says, if he denies that the world is imperfect.

Danton, Lacroix, Camille and Philippeau are led into the cell. Herault rushes to Danton. Danton tries to calm Herault who is very upset with their predicament. Lacroix cannot believe how quickly they were arrested. Herault says that at least they won't have old leathery skin. Philippeau compares himself to a priest who prayed with the dying then caught their disease. Camille can face the guillotine because his eyes are filled with the pain of unhappy men.

Scene Two

The scene is set in a room. Fouquier-Tinville and Herman are present.

Fouquier says that Danton must go first. Herman is afraid that he'll frighten the jury. Fouquier says that Danton must be found guilty. In fact, he's stacked the jury pool with criminals and low-class people. Herman points out that Leroi, a deaf man, will also be on the jury. Danton can shout his defense but it will fall on deaf ears. Another is a drunk and another falls asleep all the time.

Scene Three

The scene is set in a corridor in the Conciergerie. Lacroix, Danton, Mercier and other prisoners are pacing up and down the hall.

Lacroix wonders how so many men are in these same wretched circumstances. Mercier tells Danton to look around - the wretches, the executioners are all the result of his speeches. Danton admits his guilt. He had created the Revolutionary Tribunal. He wanted to prevent massacres and save the innocent. He had hoped to free them all. Mercier says that they will soon all be free but not in the way they had hoped. Danton does not know how this will all end.

Scene Four

The scene is set in the Revolutionary Tribunal. Herman is questioning Danton. He is accused of conspiring with Mirabeau, Dumouriez, Orleans, Girondins, foreigners and



supporters of Louis XVII. Danton refutes the slanders. Let them come here in person, he tells Herman, and he will heap shame on them. Danton tells Herman to take him. Life is a burden. Herman responds that Danton's arrogance points to his guilt. Danton responds that the bravado of defiance with which he fought for liberty is the greatest of all virtues. He reminds Herman that he is a revolutionary. The gallery breaks out in applause. He calls out St. Just and tells him that he will answer for his lies. Danton says that he has merely been destiny's instrument. He provides a litany of the victories he achieved for the Revolution.

Danton picks up the indictment that was filed against him. He wants to know who his hidden accusers are. Last September the march began. He armed the revolutionaries and led them into battle. Now he is ready to die in the arms of glory.

Scene Five

The scene is set in the Luxembourg in a dungeon. Dillon, Laflotte and a gaoler are present.

Dillon finds a light and reads the newspaper aloud. The article states that Danton had frightened the tribunal and the jury was divided which made the assembly unhappy. The Palais de Justice was surrounded by crowds of people.

Dillon wonders if anyone can be safe now with Danton arrested. Fear will unite his enemies. Dillon talks about escaping and forming a new army and freeing all the prisoners to join their cause. Laflotte is ready to denounce Danton. He can't bear waiting for the guillotine every day. Dillon tells Laflotte to join him in his plans. They will get out. He will write to Danton's wife for help. Laflotte says to himself that he will get out into the world and Dillon will land in a grave.

Scene Six

The scene is set in the Committee of Public Safety. Barere, St. Just, Collot, d'Herbois and Billaud-Varennés are present.

St. Just tells the others that the second hearing is over. The prisoners had demanded members of both the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety to be present. Danton roared. The accused contended that witnesses who would testify on their behalf were being withheld. St. Just says that the jury must state that they have all the evidence they need and adjourn. But Barere thinks that is asking for the impossible. The accused men must be destroyed. He fears that Danton would sacrifice liberty itself to stay alive.

St. Just departs. A warden enters and tells Billaud that there are some sick prisoners who are dying. They are asking for a doctor. Billaud responds that if the prisoners die it will be less work for the executioner. St. Just returns. A young prisoner named Laflotte is in the same cell as Dillon. Dillon had gotten drunk and revealed his plot. The wives of Danton and Camille will throw money to the people and Dillon will escape, free the



prisoners, form an army and attack the Convention. Barere is not impressed - it's just talk.

St. Just tells Barere that the Tribunal must continue their hearings without interruption. Any of the accused who causes a disturbance will be excluded from the proceeding. He fears that others are regaining their courage and will protest the proceedings. Robespierre is turning the fight for liberty into a fight for morality. "He uses the guillotine as a pulpit" (p. 54). Barere asks that if it is moral to kill one to defend yourself, what about killing two or three? More?

Scene Seven

The scene is set in the Conciergerie. Lacroix, Danton, Philippeau and Camille are present.

Lacroix taunts Danton. He roared in court and had he done that before, they would not be close to death. Danton longs for a fight not a tribunal hearing where he has no weapons. The men contemplate what will happen to their bodies once they are placed in their graves. Danton cannot bear the thought of dying without Julie.

Scene Eight

The scene is a room. Fouquier, Amar and Volland are present.

Fouquier tells the others that they are demanding a commission inquiry. Amar says that they must end it now - for everyone.

Scene Nine

The scene is set in the Revolutionary Tribunal.

Danton exclaims that the Republic is in danger. They must appeal to the people. His voice is still strong and will demand an inquiry by the commission. They have much information that they can reveal to the commission.

Fouquier, Amar and Volland enter.

Fouquier demands silence! He tells the men that they considered rumors of mutiny in the prison; the wives of Danton and Camille throwing money to the people; General Dillon's conspiracy; and, the disturbances that the accused have created. They have reached the decision that the hearing will continue and any accused man who causes a disturbance will be banned from the proceeding.

Danton accuses Robespierre, St. Just and their executioners of high treason. Some day the truth will be known. They want to destroy the Republic with blood. Many voices chant, "Long live Danton, down with the Decemvirs." The prisoners are removed from the tribunal.



Scene Ten

The scene is set in the street.

Voices are still chanting in favor of Danton and against the Decemvirs. One citizen reminds the crowd that it was Danton who was with them. Another says that Robespierre claims Danton is a traitor. But the other man says that Danton says that it is Robespierre who is the traitor. The other citizen claims that Danton lives like an aristocrat and Robespierre lives a virtuous life. By the end of the discussion, the crowd is chanting, "Long live Robespierre! Down with Danton! Down with the traitor!" (p. 60).

Act Three Analysis

Although Danton tries to be brave for the other rebels who have been arrested, his angst at contemplating his impending death finally gets to him. His mood is up and down. He claims that his voice is still strong. He had used his voice to inspire a revolution. He can do it again. But, they are all in prison and ready to be tried, ironically, in the tribunal that he had created just the year before. Danton waivers between a fatalistic attitude about his end to a surge of hope that they will all escape.

In the deepest part of Danton, he feels betrayed. He was the leader of the revolution. He was the leader who wanted the least violence and death and now he faces a cruel death at the hands of the man who he feels is a traitor not only to him and his close associates but to the Republic and the Revolution. Danton struggles with God. He claims to be an atheist but in this dark hour, he reaches out for something larger than himself. But life is a burden, he says. He will have peace in his grave. Some of the men try to cheer themselves by saying at least they won't grow old - but it is obvious that they would much rather grow old and wrinkled.

The officers of the tribunal fear Danton. He has been such a powerful and persuasive leader that they worry that he will convince the jurors to release him and the others. But Fouquier and Herman conspire to stack the jury with drunks and criminals who will find Danton and the others guilty. Fate and man are both conspiring against Danton and his colleagues. It seems there is no hope for them. But will they be martyrs for the cause or be considered criminals and traitors?

Danton regains his strength and begins to sway the spectators at the tribunal just as Herman had feared. Herman accuses him of bravado which he says is a sign of guilt. But Danton is a revolutionary - how would he expect him to act! Danton is reliving the glories of his past. He finds comfort with thoughts of past glories because the future is so dark and hopeless. He does not defend his actions only that he was an instrument of fate.

Although Danton at first does not accuse his rival, Robespierre, of betraying him, he finally comes to the conclusion that it is Robespierre who is his accuser. He sees Robespierre as the downfall of the entire Revolution. Robespierre will do anything to

gain power and glory. He has betrayed Danton and the others but worse, he has been a traitor to the cause and to France.



Act Four

Act Four Summary

Scene One

The scene is set in a room. Julie and a boy are present.

Julie gives a young boy a lock of her hair to bring to Danton. She tells the boy that the tribunal trembled before him and now will kill him. The lock of hair will keep him from going alone. Come back right away, she tells the boy. I want to see his expression in your eyes.

Scene Two

Dumas and a citizen talk. The citizen asks how the tribunal can condemn so many to death. The men of the Revolution are a different breed, Dumas responds. Dumas had denounced his own wife. The revolutionary tribunal will announce their divorce and the guillotine will grant it. The citizen becomes enraged and calls Dumas a monster.

Scene Three

The scene is set in the Conciergerie. Lacroix, Herault, Danton and Camille are present.

The men discuss their disgusting existence - the lice and filth and worms with which they must deal. After tomorrow, they will no longer have these worries. Danton tries to calm Camille who wants to live. He longs for his beloved Lucile. Danton tells the others that death is like birth. They will enter it naked and alone. Danton tells the others to sleep and dream. The boy comes by and gives Danton the lock of hair. He thinks of Julie and knows he won't be going alone.

Camille has drifted off but wakes up hysterical, shivering and sweating. He dreamed that the roof had disappeared and that he was being swallowed up by the sky.

Scene Four

The scene is set in the square in front of the Conciergerie. A prison warden, two carters with tumbrils and women are present. The two tumbril carters are arguing over who will take the prisoners to the guillotine. Several women of the night are nearby. Lucile comes and calls for Camille. She is distraught over Camille's impending execution. Camille doesn't hear her and she runs off. After she leaves, Camille comes to the window and calls to her.

Scene Five



The scene is set in the Conciergerie. Danton is at the window. Camille, Philippeau, Lacroix and Herault are all present.

Camille tells the others that Lucile had been outside. The world is going mad. It is better that they wash their hands of it. Danton worries about the government. He is leaving a mess behind. Who will be able to run it? Robespierre may take control but he will follow me in six months, Danton says. Lacroix recalls how friendly Robespierre was right before he had him arrested. Camille says that it's time to take off all their masks - they know each other well. Danton comments that the world is in chaos and their deaths will give birth to a god called "Nothingness." A warden enters and tells the men that the carts that will take them to the guillotine in the morning are waiting outside.

Scene Six

The scene is in a room. Julie is alone.

Julie contemplates Danton's death. She takes a drink. She becomes faint. Nothing will wake her.

Scene Seven

The scene is set in the Place de la Revolution. The tumbrils arrive and stop in front of the guillotine. Men and women dance and celebrate. People shout cruel words to the prisoners. Camille bids Danton farewell as Danton ascends the steps of the scaffold first. The others follow him. Philippeau shouts to the crowd that he forgives them all.

Scene Eight

Lucile is present. She is trying to cope with Camille's death. Everything has a right to live - a gnat, a bird - why not Camille. Desolate, she asks where will she be able to find him again.

Scene Nine

Lucile comes to the guillotine and sits on the steps. The patrol officer asks who she is. She shouts "Long live the King!" and is immediately surrounded and led away.

Act Four Analysis

Danton and the others struggle with their impending deaths. They find resolution in that the world is in such chaos that they are fortunate to be able to leave it. But the women in their lives suffer. Lucile goes mad and assures her own execution when she shouts, "Long live the King!" Julie, distraught, drinks poison and commits suicide. Danton takes some comfort in predicting that the traitor Robespierre will soon follow him to the guillotine - which does in fact happen.



There is a scene between Dumas and an unnamed citizen in which Dumas describes how he denounced his own wife to clear his name. His reaction to her death at the guillotine is cold and cruel. This exchange shows the state of French society at the time of Danton's death. A man would rather turn in his own wife in order to put himself in a better light with those in control whether he agrees with them or not.

Danton and the other revolutionaries who died with him were just part of the of the French Revolution that endured for decades. Danton made progress and left his mark but he was up against a lust for power that proved to be more impossible to defeat than the soldiers with swords and mace.



Characters

Georges Danton

Georges Danton is one of the leaders of the French Revolution. As the play, "Danton's Death," opens, the last days of Danton are the focal point of the four-act play. Much of the story focuses on the rivalry between Danton and Robespierre, another leader of the Revolution. Danton is a libertarian and only wants to win liberty for France and for its people. Although he has led his followers in many bloody conflicts, he does not want to leave the corpses of innocents and political enemies behind him. Danton begins to sense that Robespierre is emerging as the leader of the Revolution but Danton cannot ascribe to Robespierre's tactics. Robespierre advocates the murder of anyone who does not agree with his politics or anyone whom he deems to be not virtuous. Danton tells his associates that he would rather be guillotined than guillotine.

As rumors swirl that the tide is turning on Danton, he decides to meet with Robespierre in an attempt to find common ground. But it is obvious after their brief meeting that the two men are too far apart in ideology and methodology and there could be no meeting in the middle. Soon after, Robespierre convinces other revolutionaries that Danton is an elitist and a traitor to the cause. Danton and his small circle of confidants are arrested and tried for treason at the very Tribunal that Danton had established the year before that is used to sentence traitors to their deaths.

Although Danton impresses the Tribunal because of his way with words and his passion, in the end Robespierre's forces win and Danton is condemned to death by guillotine. Danton knows that he has been betrayed. He tries to find comfort in the knowledge that he had given his best for his country and for the cause. His wife, Julie, sends him a lock of her hair so he won't die alone. After his execution, his wife drinks poison and kills herself. Danton predicts that despite the fact that Robespierre seems all powerful, that he would soon follow him to the guillotine. Danton is accurate in that prediction.

Robespierre

Robespierre is one of the prominent leaders of the French Revolutionary War. Robespierre has designs on higher office and wants to emerge as the definitive leader of the rebels. Georges Danton is another leader and is much admired for his inspirational speeches and impassioned words. But Robespierre sees Danton as a rival and a threat to his plans for achieving power. Robespierre is brutal and unrelenting in punishing his enemies and those whom he deems to be less than virtuous - which represents quite a large number of people. The punishment that Robespierre metes out is death by guillotine.



Danton is aware that the two men do not share the same tactics about how to proceed with the conduct of the war and arrange to have a meeting to see if the two rebel leaders can find common ground. But after a brief time, Danton realizes that their ideology is too far apart and that compromise is not possible.

Robespierre is determined to emerge as the sole leader of the Revolution and convinces Danton's followers that their leader is growing weak and that he is an elitist and even a traitor. As a result, Robespierre has Danton and his close associates arrested. They are tried and when Danton speaks before the Tribunal, he is able to impress the members with his passionate words of defense. However, Robespierre does not want to see his power grab fail and speaks before the Tribunal eventually swaying them to view Danton as a threat to the Revolution and to the liberation of France.

Just before Danton's execution, he foretells Robespierre's end. He feels that Robespierre will soon follow him to the guillotine. And, that is exactly what happens - Robespierre meets his death at the executioner's guillotine soon after Danton's death.

Julie Danton

Julie Danton sends a lock of her hair to her husband in jail so he does not die alone. She commits suicide after he is executed.

Lucile Desmoulins

Lucile Desmoulins is driven mad by the execution of her husband, Camille. She shouts "Long live the King" to the rebels aware that it will ensure her own execution.

Simon

Simon is an alcoholic who is abusive to his wife and has abandoned his daughter. He leads the group of men who arrest Danton and his followers.

Philippeau

Philippeau is one of Danton's followers who is arrested and executed with him. Philippeau is a very devout Christian and forgives all his enemies as he is marched to the guillotine.

Saint Just

Saint Just is an associate of Robespierre. Danton accuses Saint Just of lying about him and betraying him.



Herman Dumas

Herman Dumas denounces his own wife as a traitor of the Revolution. By doing so, he deflects suspicious eyes off of himself.

Legendre

Legendre is a revolutionary who fears that if Danton falls, none of the rebels will be safe. Legendre tells a deputy to repeal the decree that calls for the arrest of Danton.

Lacroix

Lacroix is an associate of rebel leader, Georges Danton. Lacroix tells Danton that he must inspire the people. If he fails to do so, he will drag all his friends down with him.



Objects/Places

France

"Danton's Death" takes place in a large city in France, probably Paris.

The French Revolution

"Danton's Death" is the story of rebel leader Georges Danton during the French Revolution.

Guillotine

Prisoners convicted of crimes are sentenced to execution by guillotine. The prisoner is positioned on his knees with his head extended on a block. The executioner releases a large blade from above that severs the prisoner's head. The head falls into a basket.

Tumbril

Tumbrils are used to cart prisoners to the guillotine.

The Revolutionary Tribunal

Georges Danton establishes the Revolutionary Tribunal that decides the fate of enemies of the Revolution. Ironically, he is tried before that same tribunal and sentenced to death.

Luxembourg

There are scenes in Luxembourg Prison in cells and in the dungeon. The prisoners have to put up with lice, worms and filth.

The Jacobins Club

The Jacobins Club is a meeting place for the rebels during the French Revolution.

The Place de la Revolution

The Place de la Revolution is the town square where the guillotine is located. The townspeople gather around the guillotine with their children and watch the executions.



Lock of Hair

Julie Danton sends a lock of hair to the prison where her husband, Georges, is incarcerated and awaiting his execution. She sends the lock of her hair so he won't have to die alone.

The Conciergerie

Danton and the other doomed men await their execution at the Conciergerie. The carters with their tumbrils await them outside the building.



Themes

Principles

The French Revolution was ostensibly sparked by the conditions under which the French people suffered for many years. The monarchy and the aristocrats were living grand lives of opulence and comfort while the average Frenchman was poor and needy and miserable. And underscoring these reasons for the Revolution were the principles by which its leaders were compelled to take their fellow citizens. The overarching ideology that was an underlying factor during the revolution gave the rebellion strength and consistency. Without the high-minded ideas of man, a revolution like that which took place in France could have never been victorious or even taken place.

The point of conflict between the two main leaders of the French Revolution as depicted in "Danton's Death" - Georges Danton and Robespierre - is that their principles are so vastly different that it leads to a schism that is too wide and deep to be resolved. Both of these men are obviously influential and strong leaders and undoubtedly feel that their tactics in conducting the war are right and proper. Georges Danton is a libertarian and wants only to lead his people to the freedom necessary to live a peaceful and safe existence. He is against too much violence and the wholesale murder of innocent bystanders and political enemies. In fact, even though he has led his men to battle, he feels guilty for the deaths for which he has been responsible.

Robespierre, on the other hand, feels fully justified for the murders for which he has been responsible. Political enemies or anyone who does not agree with his political views deserves to die in Robespierre's opinion. Robespierre is also a very judgmental individual and feels that those whom he considers less virtuous than the high standards he has set should also meet the executioner. It is Robespierre's judgment that Georges Danton is a traitor and a coward that sends the former rebel leader to the guillotine.

Every great cause or movement has the underpinnings of grand principles. However, these principles are not always those that result in equity and fairness and that improve conditions.

The Scourge of War

Although the French Revolution ultimately liberated France and rid the country of a cruel monarchy, the war took its toll on multitudes of people and on French society in general. The scourge of war inflicted long-lasting damage and cruelty upon the French people. Many revolutionary leaders fell from grace and were executed as traitors.

In the play, Georges Danton and Robespierre are admired leaders who both meet their end at the executioner's guillotine. The close associates and followers of Danton are arrested, tried and executed at the same time as Danton. The wives of Danton and his close associate, Camille Desmoulins, are destroyed by the executions. Julie Danton



drinks poison and commits suicide. Lucile Desmoulins confronts the Revolutionary leaders and shouts, "Long live the King," which she knows will guarantee her own execution.

Before his death, Danton is having second thoughts about the trail of corpses of the innocents and political enemies that are being left in the wake of the conflict. Although he has led some of his men into battle and they certainly have killed their opponents, Danton cannot ascribe to the wholesale murder for which his rival, Robespierre, is responsible. He also feels enormous guilt because he had established the Revolutionary Tribunal which is responsible for sending many Frenchmen to their deaths.

Danton's doubts lead him to retreat somewhat but others, including Robespierre, see his change of heart as weakness and even betrayal. These suspicions lead to Danton's arrest and eventual execution. Danton's close circle of associates are also executed at the same time as Danton - more victims of the war that seems to be without end. Just before he is to face the executioner, Danton has a premonition that Robespierre, who has emerged as the leader of the Republic, would soon follow him to the guillotine. Danton is accurate in his prediction.

The common man in France was promised that the Revolution would bring them a better way of life. However, as the war dragged on, the populace was facing worse conditions than ever before - they were starving and freezing on the streets. The morals and virtues of French society also deteriorated during the war. Prostitution and alcoholism increased, friends and family members betrayed each other and distrust and suspicion had replaced a sense of nation and community.

The French Revolution brought about liberty but it also caused the death of many and the degradation of French society. While it can be stated that there are causes for war, those who wage it must remember that pain and tragedy will be inflicted upon both the conqueror and the conquered alike.

Betrayal

A sense of betrayal runs through the story of the final days of Georges Danton in "Danton's Death" by Georg Buchner. Danton is a leader of the French Revolution. He is a much admired Frenchman who has inspired his followers with his passion and words. Danton suffers from guilt and a sense that he has betrayed his fellow revolutionaries by establishing the Revolutionary Tribunal which is a panel that sentences enemies of the Revolution to death without trial. He suffers angst over his part in the bloody war, a protracted conflict in which victory has been elusive. Where has all the bloodshed led the revolutionaries and French society in general, he laments.

The common man feels a sense of betrayal. The people of the streets have been convinced to join the Revolution that seeks to destroy the monarchy. They have been told that their lives will be made better. However, as Danton is having doubts and going



through his own personal drama, the life of the common man has not improved. If anything, it has deteriorated. The people are starving and freezing - many don't have shoes. The morals of society have deteriorated as well with prostitution and alcoholism on the rise. People have become promiscuous and disloyal to their own families. One man even denounces his wife as a traitor to put himself in a better light. On a person-to-person level, betrayal is in abundance on the streets of Paris at the height of the Revolution.

Without question, the most egregious betrayal and the one that is the focal point of the story is Robespierre's betrayal of his colleague and fellow revolutionary, Georges Danton. Robespierre had his own agenda which was beyond merely France's liberation. Robespierre aspired to attaining personal power upon the ultimate victory of the revolutionaries. Danton, who was admired for his brilliant leadership and inspirational speeches, was Robespierre's main rival. Robespierre viewed Danton as a threat to his emergence as the leader of the Republic.

In order to turn Danton's followers against him, Robespierre convinced them that it was Danton who was a traitor to their cause and to France. He portrayed Danton as a selfish elitist who was only taking part in the Revolution for his own advancement. Of course, Robespierre was more accurately describing his own goals but the tide turned against Danton. Robespierre got his way and Danton was arrested, tried and sent to the guillotine. But it was destiny that betrayed Robespierre. In his final days, Danton who felt he was a tool of fate, predicted that it would not be long before Robespierre himself would follow him to the guillotine. Danton's prediction was right. Robespierre had a date with the executioner a few months after Danton's death.



Style

Point of View

"Danton's Death" by Georg Buchner is a four-act play and the story is told in the lines of the many characters. Buchner was a German who first studied the sciences at the University of Giessen.

That Buchner was interested in the French Revolution could not have come as a surprise to anyone who knew him. He collaborated with Pastor Weidig, a liberal activist, on a pamphlet entitled, "The Hessian Courier." The pamphlet urged the peasants to revolt against heavy taxation. Although an associate was arrested, there was not enough evidence against Buchner to arrest him.

After his scrape with the law, he was sent home from the university and in secret wrote "Danton's Death" or "Danton's Tod" (in German). Buchner fled to Strasbourg, France, when he learned that he was going to be arrested. He never returned to Germany after that. After escaping arrest twice, Buchner never again engaged in political activism again. "Danton's Tod" was the only work by Buchner to be published during his lifetime. After his death in 1837, several other plays by Buchner were published. The stage premier of "Danton's Tod" took place in Berlin in 1902.

Setting

"Danton's Death" by Georg Buchner is set in France during the French Revolution. Although the city is not mentioned, it is large and crowded and is most probably Paris. Many of the scenes of the four-act play take place in private homes and on the streets of the city. Robespierre holds a meeting of the rebels at a location that is referred to as the "Jacobins Club." One of the scenes takes place on a busy "promenade," and another in "open country."

In the second act, Georges Danton and his associates are arrested. Those who plan to apprehend him gather in front of his house and then force their way into his residence and arrest the men. After their arrest, the prisoners are taken to a room at the Luxembourg Prison.

After being arrested, Danton and his associates are tried at the Revolutionary Tribunal. Ironically, the Tribunal had been established by Danton himself a year before. The tribunal is responsible for meting out punishment for political prisoners and traitors. Several scenes take place in prison cells and in a dungeon at the Luxembourg Prison. Those who plot against Danton gather at the Committee of Public Safety which is headed by Robespierre and his close circle of revolutionaries. Several scenes take place at the Conciergerie where the prisoners await their execution. In the final scene, Danton and the others are taken to the Place de la Revolution where the guillotine is located.



Language and Meaning

"Danton's Death" by Georg Buchner was originally written in German and translated into English by Howard Brenton. The original work by Buchner was written in 1835. With those two elements in mind, it is understandable that some passages are difficult to understand due to either the translation process or the fact that the book was written well over a century ago - or perhaps both.

The scenes are presented with very few descriptions and therefore much is left to the imagination as to place and time. There are awkward passages that are left to the interpretation of the reader. For example, in Act One, Scene One, Danton tells his wife that he loves her like the grave. Of course, those words probably cannot be taken literally. Danton explains to his wife who is upset by his words that he equates the "grave" with "peace." Perhaps the lines in original German would have been more understandable.

The author uses a lot of metaphors in the words he wrote for the characters. Camille says that the "state must be a transparent robe, clear as water, that clings close to the body of the people." These words seem to mean that the government must be close to the people and protective yet conduct its business in an open and transparent manner. The author also uses poetry in more than several occasions which also calls for interpretation by the reader. In Act One, Scene two there is an example:

"Old Virginius, cover your face

Your women told you lies

Now raven shame perches on your head

Pecking out your eyes."

In Act Two, Scene Three, Camille speaks of marionettes being moved by visible strings. He is speaking of how the aristocrats are controlled by the monarchy which they do not even try to disguise. In Act Three, Scene Nine, Danton speaks of the the Republic choking in blood. He is referencing Robespierre's needless murder of innocents and political enemies. By these actions, Robespierre is weakening France and making it vulnerable to attack from outside.

The many metaphors throughout the book make for slow reading and re-reading at times but are entertaining in their cleverness.

Structure

"Danton's Death" is a four-act play by Georg Buchner as interpreted by Howard Brenton. It is the story of the rivalry between two leaders of the French Revolution,



Georges Danton and Robespierre. Preceding the first act is a list of characters and a biography of Georg Buchner.

Act One has six scenes and rolls out the premise of the play. Danton is a revolutionary leader who has inspired his followers with word and deed. He is a libertarian who wants his people to be able to live free. Although he has led battles, he wants bloodshed to be held at the minimum. His rival, Robespierre, on the other hand, feels that anyone who does not share his politics must be executed. He has come to use the guillotine to eradicate his political enemies on a daily basis.

Act Two is comprised of seven scenes and illustrates the deterioration of French society and the growing schism between Danton and Robespierre. Danton begins to have premonitions about his end and rumors begin to swirl that his enemies are closing in on him and that he will be arrested. Robespierre is able to sway support away from Danton and portray him as an elitist and a threat to the Revolution.

Act Three has nine scenes and covers the arrest and trial of Danton and his close associates. Danton is fatalistic about his end but feels betrayed. Although Robespierre has emerged as the leader of the Revolution, Danton feels that his bloodthirsty ways will damage the Revolution and France. Act Four which has eight scenes covers Danton's final day and his execution and the impact of his death.



Quotes

"We are lumbering, thick-skinned animals, we reach out our hands to touch but the straining is pointless, we blunder about rubbing our coarse skins up against each other. We are very much alone" (Act One, page 1).

"The people's cheeks are still white. The drops of blood from August and September aren't enough. The guillotine's too slow. We need a downpour" (Act One, page 8).

"Every breath an aristocrat draws is the death rattle of liberty" (Act One, page 10).

"I became a sea, devouring everything, moved by tremendous tides, even in its depths. All men's bodies merged into one" (Act One, page 15).

"Danton, you are a dead saint of the Revolution. But the Revolution allows no relics, it has thrown the bones of all the kings into the street and all the statues out of the churches. Do you think they'll let you be a monument?" (Act One, page 18)

"I would rather be guillotined than guillotine" (Act Two, page 25).

"The Greeks warned us about literature with the story of Pygmalion's statue, the stone come to life but unable to bear children" (Act Two, page 32).

"Mankind advances slowly. Its steps can only be counted centuries later" (Act Two, page 41).

"Bravado is the mark of guilt, composure a sign of innocence" (Act Three, page 48).

"But I am an atheist. I have to believe atheism's cursed argument: nothing that exists can cease to exist, something cannot become nothing. And I am something" (Act Three, page 57).

"I will withdraw into the fortress of reason. I will unleash the cannons of truth and crush my enemies" (Act Three, page 58).

"She gives him a lock of hair. 'There. Take him that and tell him he won't go alone. He'll understand. Then come back quickly, I want to read his look in your eyes'" (Act Four, page 61).

Topics for Discussion

How do Danton and Robespierre, two leaders of the French Revolution, differ in the ways they want to lead the revolutionary forces?

What is Robespierre's real motivation in convincing the people that Danton is a traitor? Why does Robespierre consider Danton a threat? To what does Robespierre aspire?

What are signs that French society is in decline? How are morals impacted by the chaos?

How does Robespierre justify the execution of his political enemies? What does Danton mean when he says he would rather be guillotined than guillotine?

How do the wives of Camille and Danton react to the executions of their husbands? What does Julie send to Danton before his death and what meaning does it have?

How does religion factor into the story of Danton and Robespierre? What comparison does Robespierre make between himself and Jesus Christ?

What do the leaders of the Revolutionary Tribunal fear about the trial of Danton? What steps do they take to make sure they will get a guilty verdict?