

The
Rude Mechanicals

PRESENT

DANTON'S DEATH

BY
GEORG BÜCHNER



A crew of patches, rude mechanicals
That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,
Were met together to rehearse a play
Intended for great 'Theseus' nuptial-day.

William Shakespeare.



Danton's Death

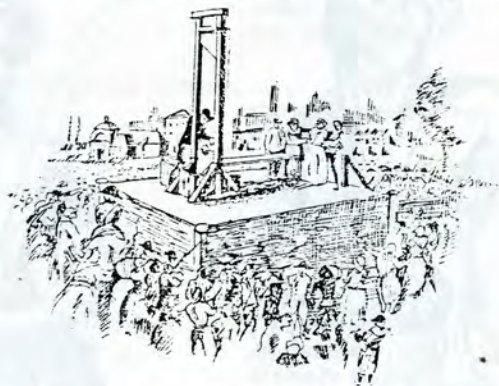
by Georg Büchner

in a new translation by Peter Christian

adapted for this production by

Margarethe and Julian Forsyth and Peter Christian

Produced and directed by Margarethe Forsyth



The Rude Mechanicals

Patrons Edwin H Cox JP, Joan Forsyth, Susan Jenkinson, Hannelore Sagebiel

Artistic Director Margarethe Forsyth

Administrator Denise Mellion

Publicity Director Peter Christian

Production Manager Sam Featherston

It was through companies like Shakespeare's 'crew of patches, rude mechanicals' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* — Bottom the Weaver, Snug the Joiner, Quince the Carpenter, etc — that the English theatre first came to Germany. One of the earliest successful German comedies, *Peter Squenz* (Peter Quince), was based on Shakespeare's rough-and-ready crew. The **Rude Mechanicals** of 1987 owe their existence to patrons, similar in their generosity to Shakespeare's Athenian Duke — the German Embassy, the Goethe Institute, and many private individuals — and are committed over the coming years to presenting established classics of the German theatre in a form accessible to English audiences, using, where necessary, specially commissioned translations.

Danton's Death is the second of these productions, following Goethe's *Faust* Part 1 which was first presented at the Young Vic Studio in March 1986 and revived in January 1987.

Cast

Deputies of the National Convention

Georges Danton
Camille Desmoulins
Lacroix
Herault-Sechelles
Legendre
Thomas Paine,
author of *The Rights of Man*,
veteran of the American Revolution

Steven Dykes
Andrew Barrow
Iain Armstrong
Andy Wincott
Max Burrows
Julian Forsyth

Members of the Committee of Public Safety (also Deputies)

Robespierre
St Just
Barere
Billaud

Des McAleer
Nofel Nawras
Julian Forsyth
Max Burrows

Officials of the Revolutionary Tribunal

Herman, President
Fouquier, Public Prosecutor

Clive Simpson
Tim Goodwin

Julie, Danton's wife
Lucile, Camille's wife
First Citizen
Simon, a theatrical prompter
His wife, a launderess
Dillon, an Irish general, imprisoned
Laflotte, a prisoner
Marion, a prostitute
Adelaide, a prostitute
Maid servant

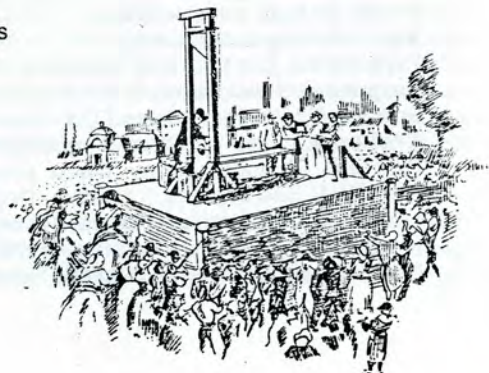
Julia Josephs
Patricia Martinelli
Sean Gilder
Tim Goodwin
Mikki Magorian
Des McAleer
Sean Gilder
Danielle Allan
Helen Mackenzie
Meriel Beale, Nicola Collett,
Silke Froese
Thomas Gruber

Soldier

Citizens, Warders, Prisoners, Prostitutes,
Jacobins, Deputies, Jurors, etc.

The Company

There will be an interval of 15 minutes





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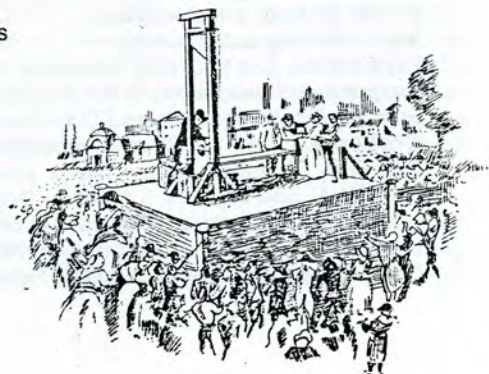
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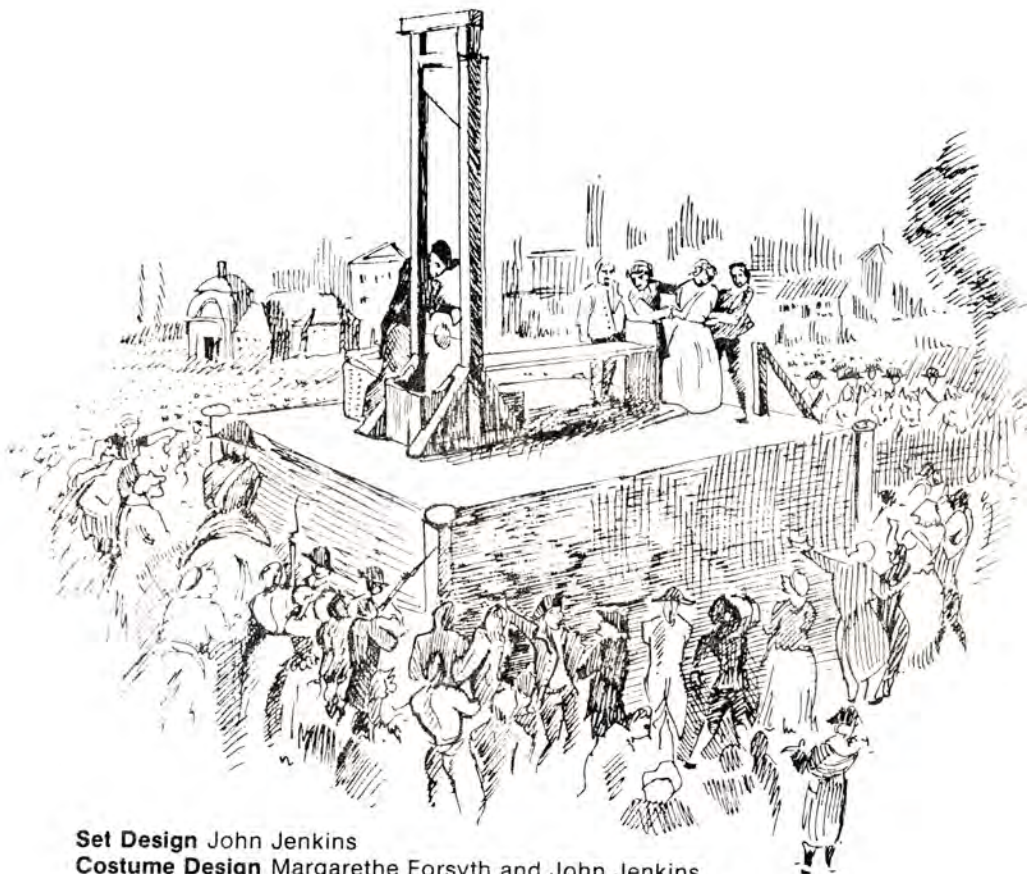
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Set Design John Jenkins

Costume Design Margarethe Forsyth and John Jenkins

Lighting Design Sebastian Hall

Assistant to the Director Julian Forsyth

Set Construction Barry Lawrence, Sam Featherston, Thomas Gruber, Jeff Hudson

Stage Manager Thomas Gruber

assisted by Louise Harrop

Lighting operated by Sam Featherston

Music and Songs chosen and arranged by Julian Forsyth and Max Burrows

Poster Design John Jenkins

Sign Painting Julian Lesage

Programme Ted Cox and Christine Keeler

Programme Illustrations Matthew Brown

Printing David Samuels and Co, Clerkenwell Road

Costumes made by Carol Aggett (Robespierre, Danton), Annette Wagner (Lacroix, St Just), Jenny Wood (Herault, Herman), Christiane Vierthaler (Camille), Sue Jenkins (Laflotte), Denise Mellion and Dagmar Kraus (Julie, Lucile), Louise Harrop (Thomas Paine), Anna Mellion (Legendre), Permi Gill (Fouquier), Rachel Stuchbury (simon's wife), Amanda Wolzak (Marion), Katharina Friedmann (Adelaide), Ruth Froese (servant maid)

Biographies

Danielle Allan (Marion) did several Youth Theatre productions at the Old Vic (including Polly in 'The Beggar's Opera'), and the Cockpit (including Maisie in 'The Boy Friend'), and three years training at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Her work has included 6 months rep at the Newcastle Playhouse (including Susan in 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'), 3 months national tour with Major Road Theatre Company, Gila in 'Not Quite Jerusalem' at the Torch Theatre, Milford Haven; and in London Rose Trelawny in 'Trelawny of the Wells' and Belisa in 'The Love of Don Perlimplin and Belisa' (Lorca).

Iain Armstrong (Lacroix) has a wide range of theatre experience including the West End, Chichester, rep at Northampton, Chester, St Andrew's and Peterborough, and with the Temba Theatre Company. Recent work includes Vladimir in 'Waiting for Godot' at the Edinburgh Festival, 'Traps' by Caryl Churchill at the Rosemary Branch Islington, and God in 'Faust' for *The Rude Mechanicals* at the Young Vic Studio. His television work includes Jonathan Miller's BBC 'King Lear', Don Taylor's 'A Last Visitor for Mr Hugh Peter', 'Robin of Sherwood' and 'Doctor Who', and his films 'Dracula', 'Hawk the Slayer', 'The Swordsman', 'Spy Story', 'A Country Doctor' and 'Number One of the Secret Service'.

Andrew Barrow (Camille, Desmoulins) trained at the Webber Douglas Academy where roles included Peter Quince in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and Leslie Williams in 'The Hostage'. His theatre work includes Valentin in Goethe's 'Faust' for *The Rude Mechanicals*, Cacambo in Voltaire's 'Candide' at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and a national tour of 'King Lear' with Nigel Davenport. In 1985-86 he was Director of the Young Vic Youth Workshop.

Max Burrows (Legendre, Billaud) read Drama at Bristol University and has worked consistently on the London and Edinburgh Fringe, playing lead roles in 'The Revenger's Tragedy' and 'Tis Pity she's a Whore'. His work for the English Touring Company includes Karenin in 'Anna Karenina', Tybalt in 'Romeo and Juliet', Mr Tumnus in 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' and Owl in 'Winnie the Pooh'. He played Frosch in 'Faust' for *The Rude Mechanicals* and recently appeared again in the Young Vic Studio in Wedekind's 'Spring Awakening'.

Steven Dykes (Danton) studied Drama at Goldsmiths' College and since graduating last year has appeared in 'Mr Munby' by Leonard Hill on the Edinburgh Fringe and with the New Cross Theatre Company as Bernie in 'Sexual Perversity in Chicago' and Nick in 'The Woods' (both David Mamet), as Richard in Shakespeare's 'Richard III' and in 'Lunch' by Steven Berkoff. He has just played Brander and a Gargoyle in Goethe's 'Faust' for *The Rude Mechanicals*.

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Sam Featherston (Lighting), by day a teacher of English to foreign students, is Production Manager and founder member of *The Rude Mechanicals*, and has previously built sets and props for several productions at Goldsmiths' College, New Cross.



Barry Lawrence (Set Construction) is a teacher of Craft, Design and Technology and a graduate of Goldsmiths' College, New Cross. He built much of the sets and props for *The Rude Mechanicals'* production of 'Faust'.

Helen Mackenzie (Adelaide) trained at the Webber Douglas Academy. In addition to appearing in 'Faust' she has played Juliet in 'Romeo and Juliet' at the Pendley Open Air Shakespeare Festival, directed by the late Dorian Williams OBE. She also directed and tutored at the Young Vic Youth Theatre for 6 months, and worked at the 1985 Edinburgh Festival with the English Touring Company's successful production of Voltaire's 'Candide'.

Des McAleer (Robespierre, Dillon) began acting with the Lyric Theatre, Belfast in 1975. His many roles with that company include the Shakespearean heroes Brutus, Caliban, Hotspur and Bottom. He played Teiresias in the Field Day Company's adaptation of 'Antigone', and has worked with the Druid Theatre Company. He came to England in 1985 and has worked with the Cambridge Touring Company. Film work includes Mike Leigh's '4 Days in July' and Pat Murphy's 'Anne Devlin.' TV work includes Graham Reid's 'Out of Tune' (BBC2) and the recently banned BBC serial 'Crossfire'.

Julian Forsyth (Thomas Paine, Barere) has played both Faust and more recently Mephistopheles in *The Rude Mechanicals'* production of 'Faust'. He taught at Erlangen University in West Germany before training at the Webber Douglas Academy and has since acted and sung in leading regional reps (Birmingham, Edinburgh, York and many others) in a wide variety of roles including Algernon in 'The Importance of Being Earnest', Chapuys in 'A Man for all Seasons', and Finch McComas in 'You Never Can Tell'. He has toured with his one man show on the German poet Heinrich Heine, which includes songs by Schubert and Schumann.

Margarethe Forsyth (Director) was born in Nuremberg and brought up in Germany, the US and Ethiopia, where she experienced the death-throes of Haile Selassie's regime before the 1974 Revolution. She graduated with an MA in English and German at the University of Erlangen, and then taught for 4 years at the University of London, Goldsmiths' College. Her productions include 'The Life of Galileo', 'Spring Awakening', 'The Visit', 'As You Like It' and Goethe's 'Faust' Part I in the Young Vic Studio. She is currently writing her PhD on post-war German productions of Goethe, Schiller and Lessing.

Sean Gilder (First Citizen, Laflotte) studied Modern History at London University before training at the Webber Douglas Academy. Roles have included Bottom, Romeo and Edmond, and Aston in 'The Caretaker'. He has worked as a children's entertainer and Commedia dell'Arte performer for a mini opera festival at St Martin-in-the-Fields'. After 'Danton's Death' he will appear at Derby Playhouse in a new play entitled 'My Dad's a Nero'. He also enjoys directing and writing and is currently finishing his first full length play.

Tim Goodwin (Simon, Fouquier) has worked variously as a salesman, oil rig engineer, local government officer and photographer. His stage experience comes from variety, music hall, comedy and community theatre in the East End. Tim works as a clown and is a founder member of the National Street Theatre. Most recently he appeared as Puck in Complete Works' 'Midsummer Night's Soap Opera'.

Thomas Gruber (Stage Manager) has lit or stage managed several productions ('As You Like It', 'Faust', 'Arms and the Man', 'The Real Inspector Hound'), at the University of Erlangen, West Germany, Goldsmiths' College London, and for *The Rude Mechanicals* at the Young Vic.

John Jenkins (Designer) is a graduate of the University of Wales at Aberystwyth Visual Art Department, where he now teaches. He has designed a number of productions for Fringe companies including 'Dracula', 'The Dumb Waiter', 'Candide', 'Three Brothers', 'Medea' and 'Philoctetes'. Most recently he did the lighting design for 'Faust'.

Julia Josephs (Julie Danton) played Gretchen in Goethe's 'Faust' for *The Rude Mechanicals*. She is a graduate of Durham University and trained at the Drama Studio, London. Her theatre credits include seasons at Bristol Old Vic, Exeter, the Young Vic, Southwold, St George's and the Gate, Latchmere. She played the lead girl in 'Mr Cinders' and Maria in 'School for Scandal' at the Duke of York's, and recently finished a national tour with the New Vic Company, playing Cora in 'The Last of the Mohicans'. TV includes Daphne Jordan in 'Strangers and Brothers' (BBC2) and the film 'Real Life'.

Georg Büchner and Danton's Death

Georg Büchner wrote *Danton's Death* in five weeks in January and February 1835 at the age of 21. His personal circumstances at the time were far from comfortable: he was in imminent danger of arrest for his political writings and wrote the play to raise money for his flight into exile. But though written in haste, the play is the result of a much longer preoccupation with the French Revolution, and with revolutionary politics in general. He was born in 1813 into a medical family in Goddelau in the Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt, and as a child heard about the Revolution from his father's army stories and reading aloud to the family. As he grew up he developed a passion for literature and an equal passion for liberty. Leaving school at 18 to study medicine in Strasbourg, he found a liberal city influenced by the republican ideals of the French Revolution. While he was a keen and gifted student, devoting much time to his studies, he also began to take an active and energetic part in political debate. In Strasbourg, too, he met his future fiancée, Minna Jaegle, the daughter of the pastor in whose house he lodged.

Returning to Germany in 1833, to complete his studies at the University of Giessen in order to qualify, he seems to have been horrified and depressed by the political backwardness of Hesse-Darmstadt, where a repressive constitution allowed few civil rights. He threw himself into political activity, founding the underground 'Society for Human Rights', dedicated to the political enlightenment of the people. He also wrote a revolutionary pamphlet, *Der Hessische Landbote* (The Hessian Courier) which, prefaced by instructions on how to avoid being punished for reading it, called on the Hessian peasantry to acknowledge their lack of rights and their economic servitude to the nobility, and to be prepared to rise up when a leader appeared. The pamphlet was printed in July 1834 and distributed through various liberal organizations, but was handed into the police by peasants afraid of being found in possession of such inflammatory material. After a tip-off the police arrested one of Büchner's friends with 150 copies, which led to a search of Büchner's lodgings. Fortunately, nothing was found to incriminate him, and when the university term was over he returned to his parents' house in Darmstadt, where he devoted himself anew to the 'Society for Human Rights'. On his return he began researching the French Revolution in earnest, and in January 1835, writing secretly in his father's laboratory with his brother as look-out, he began work on *Danton's Death*.

While he was writing it, he was twice summoned to appear as a witness for friends who had been arrested, and his own arrest seemed only a matter of time. On February 21st he sent the completed manuscript to the critic Karl Gutzkow, who arranged for its publication, and on March 9th he fled to Strasbourg. The expected warrant for his arrest was issued on June 13th. In exile, he gave up his political activity. Instead, he devoted himself energetically to anatomical research, which led to a lectureship at the University of Zürich in 1836, and to literature.

In Strasbourg he wrote two further plays, the comedy 'Leonce und Lena' and 'Woyzeck', and the narrative 'Lenz'. But the brilliant academic and literary careers which seemed to lie before him were soon cut short. On February 9th 1837, probably weakened by overwork and leaving 'Woyzeck' and 'Lenz' unfinished, Büchner died of typhus.

Peter Christian

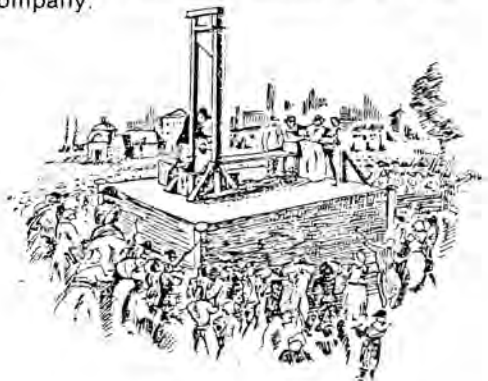
Mikki Magorian (Simon's Wife) trained at Rose Bruford and studied mime with Marcel Marceau in Paris. She has appeared in regional rep (eg Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle, Colchester, Scarborough) in a variety of plays and musicals including Cole Porter's 'Anything Goes', 'Cowardy Custard', 'Salad Days', 'The Boyfriend' and six Alan Ayckbourn plays. Recent appearances include The Witch and Martha Schwerdtlein in 'Faust' and three Feydeau farces at the Canterbury Festival. As the writer Michelle Magorian she won the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize for the first of her three novels 'Goodnight, Mr Tom', which she is currently reworking as a musical.

Patricia Martinelli (Lucile Desmoulins) studied Fine Art before training at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts. She has been in numerous fringe productions, playing Lieschen in 'Faust', Smeraldina in 'The Servant of Two Maids', toured England as the lead in 'Cinderella' and 'Sleeping Beauty', and played Zerbenetta in 'Scapino' at Theatr y Werin, Aberystwyth. Last year she gave many performances of her one woman comedy show and was in the film 'The Little Shop of Horrors'.

Nofel Nawras (St Just) trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. His theatre work includes seasons with the Glasgow Citizens ('Chinchilla', Goldoni's 'The Good-Humoured Ladies'), and the Horseshoe Theatre Company. He has appeared in various fringe productions (previously at the Young Vic Studio in 'Trapping the Antelope') and has toured Norway with the New British Shakespeare Company as Malcolm in 'Macbeth'.

Clive Simpson (Herman) graduated in English and Drama at Kent University. Since then he has mainly worked on the London Fringe with companies like the Nervous Kitchens, PLC and The Troop at venues ranging from the Shaw and the Bloomsbury theatres to the Oval, the Cockpit, the Upstream and Heaven in plays including 'The Risk' (a two-hander) and title roles in 'Macbeth' and Middleton's 'The Tyrant'. In rep he was in 'A Patriot for Me' at Leeds Playhouse.

Andy Wincott (Herauld) read English at Christ Church Oxford, and trained at Webber Douglas Academy. He recently played the 4th Knight/Templar in 'Murder in the Cathedral' with Performance Exchange; and the Devil in 'King Over Kings', a selection of 15th century Miracle Plays. Past roles include Vindice in 'The Revenger's Tragedy', Giovanni in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore' and Angelo in 'Measure for Measure'. He was recently involved in theatre workshops with Context Theatre Company.



Danton's Death and the French Revolution

The Fall of the Monarchy

When the French Revolution began with the storming of the Bastille on July 14th 1789, it was the response of the populace to the failure of Louis XVI and his ministers to solve France's economic problems and heed the grievances of the people. By 1791, Louis had been forced to renounce absolute power in favour of a Constitutional Monarchy under a newly formed Legislative Assembly, which put power firmly in the hands of the middle classes. However, continued failure to solve the problems facing the country gave rise to a second revolution on 10th August 1792, when the Paris mob deposed the King in the storming of the Tuileries. In the following months, elections were held for a new assembly, the National Convention, whose first act, on September 22nd 1792, was to abolish the monarchy and proclaim the republic.

The Republic

The new Republic was far from unified and harmonious. The upheaval and heady idealism of revolution had given almost every group in French society the hope that the Revolution would be the vehicle for its aspirations, whereas there was very little hope of reforms which would satisfy both urban and rural interests, both the devout and the rationalists, both those who lamented the fall of the monarchy and those who demanded the King's execution. In the Convention these splits were expressed in the opposition and indeed animosity between the moderate Girondists and the more radical Jacobins. The first nine months of the Republic were marked by factional disputes in the Convention, with groups trying to discredit, outmanoeuvre or take advantage of the others, and a consequent failure to solve any of the economic and social problems that had given rise to the Revolution.

To start with, the Girondists (though not a ruling party in the modern sense — they had no majority in the Convention or monopoly of government posts) held the upper hand, occupying the main ministries, as they had done under the Constitutional Monarchy. However, their first defeat at the hands of the Jacobins was not long in coming, when the Jacobins succeeded in getting the Convention to vote for the King's execution, which most Girondists opposed. The Girondists were quite unable to solve the economic crisis, and their moderate policies seemed to many to mean tolerating the enemies of the revolution, whether they were the royalists and counter-revolutionaries or merchants taking advantage of food shortages. Instead, they tried to retain popular support by declaring war on neighbouring states, hoping that the French people would forget their hardship in a wave of patriotic enthusiasm. By March 1793, France was at war, at least in principle, with Austria, Britain, Holland, Prussia and Spain, not to mention the war against the counter-revolutionaries on its own soil.

The Rise of the Jacobins

An important extra-Parliamentary group were the radical *sans-culottes*, a highly politicized upper working class, who had been at the forefront of every insurrection in the capital. Although no political groups in the Convention could take their support for granted, no group could expect to survive without it. This support turned out to be crucial to the success of the Jacobins.

By May 1793, seeing the need for a unified government to take tough measures to deal with the failure of French armies and the hardship of the people in the face of food shortages and rising prices, the Jacobins decided to eliminate the Girondists from the Convention. The Jacobin *coup d'Etat* took place between May 31st and June 2nd 1793, when the sans-culottes, incited by the Jacobins, forced a large number of the Girondist deputies from the National Convention. In effect this was a third revolution, now against an elected but moderate government, and it marks the beginning of the Jacobin dictatorship.

The Terror

The success of the Jacobin dictatorship depended on its ability to get control of policy out of the hands of the National Convention, and the means of doing so was the Committee of Public Safety. This had been set up before the Jacobin coup, as an executive body subject to the Convention, and at first was not under exclusive Jacobin control. However, as 1793 wore on, its 12 seats were increasingly taken up by Jacobins such as Couthon, St Just and Robespierre, the unofficial leader of the Jacobins. Gradually the Convention was persuaded to vote the Committee more and more powers, increasing its independence. Although the Committee of Public Safety was originally re-elected monthly by the Convention, from September 1793 it had full legal autonomy, appointing its own members, and in October it declared an emergency Revolutionary Government which suspended the Constitution 'until peace'. Given the severe problems of food shortage, war and sporadic civil war, there was something to be said for such drastic measures. But with absolutely no legal or constitutional checks on the revolutionary zeal of the Committee, this is usually regarded as the start of the most repressive stage of the Revolution, the Terror.

By December 1793 the Convention was forced to pass laws giving the Committee of Public Safety absolute control over all other administrative bodies and public officials in France, through a system of agents who reported to the Committee every 10 days. The Law of Suspects, passed in September 1793, allowed the Committee and its appointees to arrest and try anyone on mere suspicion. The Revolutionary Tribunal, set up by Danton in March 1793 to try the enemies of the Revolution, conducted trials which soon lost all semblance of legality, as the Committee of Public Safety nominated judges and jury, and the verdicts were reduced to acquittal or death. Inevitably the number of those executed or imprisoned, often entirely arbitrarily, rose to unprecedented heights.

However, by the end of 1793, the Jacobins were again under threat. The anarchistic Hébertist Party, Jacobin extremists, succeeded in arousing popular support by attacking the Jacobins as too moderate in their economic measures. And the Jacobins were in fact forced to pass new economic laws to pacify the sans-culottes after an insurrection in September. Since the sans-culottes were the only group who could pose a real threat to Jacobin dictatorship — the Terror could do little against mass insurrection of its own major supporters, particularly if supported by a strong sans-culottes army — in December the main Hébertists were arrested. It is their execution on March 24th 1794, reported by Camille and Lacroix in the second scene of Büchner's play, which marks the political starting point of *Danton's Death*.

Georges Danton

Danton, one of the great figures of the Revolution, started out in politics in the revolutionary Cordelier Club, and stands out from his contemporaries as being radical in his ideals but quite prepared to settle for something more moderate if it was workable.

Danton the Radical

He first came to power as a representative of radical revolution, in the period of Constitutional Monarchy, when he was appointed Minister of Justice in August 1792 to appease the sans-culottes after the storming of the Tuileries. He was a founder member both of the National Convention and of the Committee of Public Safety. That he could be quite as ruthless as any other Jacobin when the occasion arose, is shown by his role in the September Massacres of 1792, when the sans-culottes invaded the prisons and slaughtered Royalist prisoners. Danton, as Minister of Justice, either allowed this to take place (while saving some of his friends), or actually organized it. Büchner takes the latter view and has Danton haunted by the memory of those killed at his instigation.

Nonetheless Danton was a good deal more human than many of his fellow Jacobins, and consistently favoured compromise, only resorting to radical measures when they were political necessities, or when his own political survival depended on it. He also seems to have been something of an opportunist and was involved in a number of shady financial deals while in office. He undoubtedly took bribes, yet remained uncompromised. As one historian put it, those who bribed him did not get value for money.

Danton the Moderate

During the latter part of 1793 Danton seems to have become increasingly disillusioned with the repressive measures of the Terror, and at the same time more concerned with his own private affairs. Returning to Paris towards the end of 1793, after a period of convalescence at his country home, he found the growing moderate opposition of similarly disillusioned Jacobins, notably Camille-Desmoulins, Héault-Séchelles and Lacroix, looking to him for a lead. As a man of great charisma, a powerful orator, popular with the sans-culottes, and the sort of politician who might get the moderate deputies to support him against Robespierre, his new position, however reluctant, at the head of moderate opposition posed a new and pressing threat to Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety.

The Trial and Execution of Danton and his followers

Danton's Death recounts the story of the last 11 days of Danton's life fairly accurately. Danton seems to have been unwilling to take any action, counting on compromise, believing that his contribution to the Revolution made him invulnerable, and that his popularity with the people made him dangerous to attack. However, persuaded by his followers to meet Robespierre, he was unable to save the situation. After his failure to do so, the Committee of Public Safety and the other Committees decided to have him arrested. He was warned by friends and offered a place of refuge, and spent much of Sunday March 30th wandering around Paris trying to decide whether to flee or remain. He remained, knowing that he risked almost certain death, and was arrested that night, as were three of his followers, and all were taken to the Luxembourg

prison. The notification of his arrest caused uproar in the Convention next day. Between 2nd and 5th April, there were three hearings in the Revolutionary Tribunal for Danton and his followers. In spite of the fact that he was tried along with forgers and speculators, that his accusers never appeared and he was denied witnesses, Danton's oratory and personality almost turned the tide. However, a young prisoner named Laflotte revealed a counter-revolutionary plot by General Dillon in which Danton, certainly without his knowledge, was implicated. This sealed his fate. The third hearing began at 8.30 on the morning of April 5th 1794, and by dusk that afternoon Camille, Héault, Lacroix and Danton had been guillotined.

Danton's Death and 'Danton's Death'

Not only are the events of Büchner's play historically accurate, but many of the political speeches, aphorisms and slogans were taken by Büchner from historical sources. In particular, Danton's resignation to his fate and even eagerness for death, which might seem a poet's invention, are historically attested, as are a number of Danton's key statements. In fact most of the characters in the play are historical personages — the exceptions are Simon, his wife and the three whores — and act at least consistently with their known characters, though of course almost all the personal material in the speeches is Büchner's invention. However Büchner, though generally very accurate in his picture of events, did make some conscious changes of historical detail for dramatic purposes. Héault-Séchelles, for example, who went to the scaffold with Danton, was in fact arrested at the same time as the Hébertists and not, as in the play, just before Danton. In the play, Büchner gives Danton and his followers a final night and the following day in prison to ponder on their fate after they have been condemned, whereas they were in fact sentenced and guillotined on the same day, according to usual practice. Büchner has also changed the fates of the two wives. Although Lucille's cry of 'Long Live the King' is attested, it was the prison plot which was actually the reason for her arrest; and, unromantically, Danton's wife (in reality called Louise), did not commit suicide but survived the Revolution to marry an aristocrat. In fact she was still alive when Büchner wrote her death scene.

After Danton's Death

Louise Danton and Thomas Paine were the only characters in Büchner's play to come out of the Revolution relatively unscathed. Within the next year, all the other historical characters alive at the end of the play have either been exiled to the colonies or, in most cases, guillotined. The public prosecutor, Fouquet-Tinville, was the last man condemned to the guillotine by the Revolutionary Tribunal before it was dissolved in May 1795. In particular, Danton's prediction that Robespierre would share his fate within 6 months was to come true within three. Robespierre's execution on 28th July 1794 marked the end of Jacobin rule and the end of the Terror.

Peter Christian

Peter Christian (Translator) studied Modern and Medieval Languages at Cambridge and more medieval languages at the University of Marburg, before undertaking postgraduate research on the 'Tristan' of Gottfried von Strassburg. Having taught medieval German literature and German Philology at Cambridge and a number of London colleges, he is currently Lecturer in German at Goldsmiths' College in the University of London. He is co-inventor of the board game 'Doublethink' and a partner in *Cambridge Silent Artists*, a very small and very inefficient publishing company.

Notes on the Translation and Adaptation

The central problem in offering a new translation of 'Danton's Death' is to make the historical references of the play clear without turning it into a lecture on French history. Büchner's characters speak to each other naturalistically, as to people who know as much about the French Revolution as they do. This is partly the great strength of the play. It is about a real revolution, and these references give one a sense of a rich and real world beyond the stage, a multiplicity of ideas, factions and events never shown, but which motivate the characters and elucidate their situation. But for non-historians, who know perhaps only Louis XVI, the Storming of the Bastille and Robespierre, this is a substantial barrier to understanding.

In tackling this problem, while trying to reproduce what Büchner says as accurately as possible, I have striven to avoid cluttering the text with passages of explanation or writing additional speeches in which the characters helpfully explain to each other what is going on. That is, I have preferred to adapt what Büchner has actually written, rather than write new material in imitation of his style. In one or two cases, it has been necessary to add an extra sentence, but mostly the adaptation has involved making references less allusive and more explicit.

Büchner never saw *Danton's Death* performed, and so was never able to appreciate the staging problems it presents. The number and variety of scene changes required, often for only a brief scene, tend to slow the play down, a particular problem in the second half when events should be gathering momentum. With no practical experience of theatre, this is something a young man of 21 writing his first play might understandably fail to appreciate, and a few of the minor scenes have been incorporated into an adjacent major scene, where this makes dramatic sense.

A particular problem is presented by Büchner's accurate reproduction of historical events. Historical actions and statements are generally assigned in the play to the characters they belonged to in reality, which means a host of minor characters who appear, without explanation, for only one or two scenes to act out their historical roles before disappearing. We had to choose between leaving the audience baffled, including a lot of explanatory material, cutting the characters entirely, or reassigning their roles to others. We have chosen the last of these alternatives, but in doing so have striven to preserve consistency of characterisation and historical accuracy as far as possible.

Of course it has always been the habit of translators and producers to be free with the works of dead dramatists, who cannot argue or sue or write to the papers. But the problems presented by the text of *Danton's Death* are ones which must confront any modern production of the play, and which almost certainly have prevented it from being performed more often. In presenting our adaptation, we have tried to show both that it is a great play, which has always been clear to readers if not to audiences, and that with relatively little alteration it is stageable and dramatically effective.

Büchner was a dramatic genius whose life was not long enough for him to develop complete technical mastery of his craft, or to give the play the revision it needed. However, it has not been our intention to do what Büchner did not get round to. Rather we have simply tried to deal with the obstacles to the enjoyment and appreciation of the play, which face a modern audience.

Peter Christian

Extracts from Büchner's Letters

I have been studying the history of the Revolution. I have felt almost crushed by the cruel fatalism of history. I find in human nature a disgusting sameness, and in human relations an inexorable force, granted to all and yet to none. The individual is only foam on the wave, greatness mere chance, the achievements of genius a mere puppet play, a ridiculous struggle against an iron law. To recognize it is the best one can do, to master it impossible. I'm no longer prepared to pay attention to history's bystanders. I have accustomed myself to the sight of blood. But I am no guillotine blade. 'Necessity' is one of the words of damnation with which Man is baptized. The verse 'For it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh' is terrifying. What is it in us that lies, murders, steals? I don't wish to pursue this thought any further. If only I could lay this cold and tortured heart against your breast.
(to his fiancée, Minna Jaegle, 1833)

Outwardly I was calm, but I had fallen into a deep melancholy; I felt trapped by the political situation, I was ashamed to be a serf amongst serfs for the pleasure of a decaying dynasty and a crawling aristocracy of civil servants. I was greeted in Giessen by the most adverse circumstances. Worry and disgust made me ill.

(to his Family, April 1834)

About the work itself I can tell you nothing except that unfortunate circumstances forced me to write in under five weeks.

I'm telling you this to form your opinion of the writer, not of the drama itself. What I am to make of it, I myself have no idea, I only know that I have every reason to blush in the face of History. But I console myself with the thought that, apart from Shakespeare, all writers stand before History and before Nature like schoolboys.

(to the critic Karl Gustow, February 1835)

The aristocracy is the most disgraceful contempt of the Holy Spirit in Man; I turn its own weapons against it: pride against pride, mockery against mockery.
(to his Family, February 1834)

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Historical Background to *Danton's Death*:

The Main Political Groups

There were no political 'parties' as such in the French Revolution, but rather a number of loose groupings, not to mention a large number not even committed to any particular group. In the National Convention, for example, voting patterns of the deputies, even of committed Jacobins or Girondists, varied considerably from issue to issue, certainly far more than in modern European parliaments, and there were many independent deputies. Though universal suffrage was proposed from time to time, voting remained the prerogative of men paying more than a certain level of tax, leaving all women and much of the working class disenfranchised.

Royalists

Sought restoration of the monarchy. Never a serious threat to the Revolution in Paris, but the basis of counter-revolutionary movements in the Provinces, and often in alliance with other European powers, none of which could afford to condone the Revolution. The real threat posed by the Royalists was not great (they were not very well organized and had little money), but fear of Royalist plots was a constant factor in Revolutionary politics, and a useful weapon for stirring up anxiety among the people. Also, a convenient slur for anyone less keen on the revolution than those in power.

Girondins

Moderate revolutionaries, with power-base in the provinces. First revolutionary group to hold office, with ministerial positions under the Constitutional Monarchy. One of two main groups in the National Convention. Many voted against execution of Louis XVI. Their ministers seem not to have been specially competent and their failure to deal adequately with the economic and military problems of France not only sealed their own political fate, but made it appear that any moderation was a threat to the Revolution. They were also unfortunate that their influence in Paris, the seat of the National Convention was rather slight, which meant that it was not difficult for the Jacobins to persuade the Paris sans-culottes to expelled from National Convention in Jacobin coup of June 2nd 1793, though still strong in Provinces.

Jacobins

Committed revolutionaries with Paris power-base in the Jacobin Club. Mostly middle-class (many were lawyers) but saw their interests as identical to the working-classes, that is, threatened by monarchy, nobility and the concentration of the nation's wealth in the hands of a minority. Most extreme group apart from the Hébertists, voted for execution of Louis XVI. Though at first they could not be sure to outvote more moderate deputies in the National Convention, they managed to

control the Committee of Public Safety from its inception in April 1793. By the end of 1793, they had not only brought about the expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention, but also managed to have laws passed giving practically all executive power to the Committee, leading to a Jacobin dictatorship. This was effectively destroyed in the coup of July 1794.

Hébertists

A fanatical offshoot of the Jacobins, led by Jacques Hébert, extreme radicals, very populist, more fanatical than the Jacobins. Never serious contenders for power, but had strong support among the sans-culottes, which made them a threat to the Jacobins. Basically anarchists: anti-Church, anti-property. Nicknamed 'les Enragés'. Their execution on March 24th 1794 marks the political starting point of the play.

Dantonists

This is what they are called by historians, but at the time they were called 'les Indulgents'. Nor was Danton really their leader, but rather a figurehead with the requisite revolutionary credentials and personal charisma to carry through their aims. All were originally committed Jacobins — Danton, Hébert and Lacroix having been on the Committee of Public Safety — but as the crises of 1792/3 became less urgent they saw less necessity for repressive measures and proposed moderation. The last political group to be destroyed by the Jacobins before their own demise.

Sans-Culottes

So-called because they wore long trousers rather than the knee-breeches ('culottes') of the wealthier classes. The grass-roots radicals of Paris and the provincial towns, politically aware and active. Often thought of as solidly working class, but included a large proportion of artisans and small shopkeepers (i.e. employers and self-employed rather than employees) Many were literate and, though not wealthy by any means, they could obviously afford to devote much of their time to political activity at a time when most of France was having trouble getting enough to eat. In fact, they were not very much more radical than the Jacobins, but had a different view of the political organization of the Republic: whereas the Jacobins thought power should be exercised by the people through representative elected assemblies, the sans-culottes favoured the referendum and popular insurrection as the expression of the people's will. Also, the Jacobins were more moderate in their actual policies than in their rhetoric from the sheer necessity of trying to run a country, much of which did not favour the very urban ideals of the sans-culottes.

In spite of these differences, the support of the sans-culottes was essential for any group trying to hold on to power. The Girondins never had this and were deposed by a coup d'état. The Hébertists were executed because the Jacobins saw them starting to gain more and more sans-culotte support, which would have meant the end of Jacobin ascendancy. In turn, however, the sans-culottes were often manipulated by

those seeking power, because of their very readiness for insurrection. Organized in 48 local Sections making up the Commune of Paris.

Revolutionary Clubs

The main revolutionary clubs were political debating societies, often with a collective view of important issue. Many laws passed in the Convention originated in motions from the clubs. The most important was the Jacobin club, with a network of affiliated clubs throughout France. Danton and Camille started their revolutionary careers in the Cordelier club. There were some women's clubs. There was little scope for the lower working class, who could not afford the time off work to attend meetings.

The French Revolution: Timeline

1789	May	5	Meeting of Estates General to solve economic crisis
	Jun	17	Commoners in Estates-General proclaim themselves the National Assembly, the nation's representative body.
	Jul	14	Storming of the Bastille. Start of the Revolution.
	Aug	26	Declaration of Rights.
1790	Jun	19	Abolition of Nobility.
1791	Sep	14	Constitutional Monarchy established under Legislative Assembly.
1792	Aug	10	Storming of the Tuileries by Commune of Paris. King's Swiss Guard massacred. Effective overthrow of Monarchy.
	Sep	2	Verdun falls to Prussians. Panic in Paris.
	Sep	2–6	September massacres: suspected Royalist prisoners massacred as potential 'fifth columnists' by volunteers organized by Danton.
	Sep	10	Danton elected to Convention, resigns from Ministry.
	Sep	21	First meeting of the National Convention.
	Sep	22	Abolition of Monarchy. Republic begins.
1793	Jan	21	Execution of Louis XVI.
	Feb	7	Royalist and Girondin uprising against Jacobins in Lyons and other cities.
	Mar	10	Revolutionary Tribunal set up by Danton.
	Apr	6	Robespierre founds Committee of Public Safety. Original members include Danton, Lacroix, Barère, later joined by St. Just, Couthon, Héroult-Séchelles, Collot, Robespierre.
	Apr	15	22 Girondins expelled from the Convention.
	May	31	Jacobins urge anti-Girondin rising in Paris which leads to:.
	Jun	2	Jacobin coup: Expulsion of remaining Girondin deputies from Convention by sans culottes.
	Jun	24	Convention accepts the so called Constitution of 1793, mainly drawn up by Héroult Sécnelles. (Never in fact operative).
	Jul	13	Marat assassinated by Charlotte Corday. Sans culotte uprising, instigated by Hébertists, to force Convention to take economic measures.
	Sep	6	Henceforth Committee of Public Safety nominates own members and thus no longer subject to Convention.

	Oct	9	Republican forces under General Ronsin recapture Lyons.
	Oct	10	Revolutionary Government decreed by Convention.
	Oct	16	Marie Antoinette executed.
	Oct	31	22 Girondins executed.
	Dec	4	All authorities subordinated by law to Committee of Public Safety, which thereby legally takes over from Convention as highest authority.
	Dec	5	Camille Desmoulins publishes first edition of <i>Le Vieux Cordelier</i> .
1794	Mar	14–16	Hébert and Hérault arrested.
	Mar	24	Execution of Hébert and followers.
	Mar	29	Last meeting of Danton and Robespierre. [Act 1]
	Mar	30	The combined Committees agree to Danton's arrest.
	Mar	30	Danton hears of intended arrest but decides not to flee. [Act 2]
	Mar	30/31	Arrest of Danton and followers during night. [Act 2]
	Mar	31	Convention notified of Danton's arrest. [Act 2]
	Mar	31	Danton taken to Luxembourg prison. [Act 3]
	Apr	2	First Hearing in Revolutionary Tribunal. [Act 3]
	Apr	2	Danton transferred to Conciergerie prison. [Act 3]
	Apr	3	Second Hearing.
	Apr	4	Prison plot uncovered. [Act 3]
	Apr	5	Third Hearing (early morning). [Act 4]
	Apr	5	Danton and followers guillotined (dusk). [Act 4]
	Apr	13	Executions of Lucile Desmoulins, General Dillon, and Hébert's widow, all convicted of conspiracy.
	Jul	27	Anti-Jacobin coup. Robespierre arrested.
	Jul	28	Robespierre guillotined, along with St. Just, Couthon and others.
	Jul	29	71 Robespierrists executed (largest mass execution). End of Terror.
	Nov	12	Jacobin Club closed.
1795	Apr		Deportation of Barère, Billaud & Collot ordered.
	May	7	Fouquier and Herman executed.
	May	31	Revolutionary Tribunal abolished.
	Oct	7	Rule of Directory begins.
1799	Nov	10	Bonaparte deposes Directory in <i>coup d'état</i> .