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Danton (FRENCH-POLISH-COLOR)

Paris, Dec. 16.

Gaumont release of a Margaret Menego-Films du Losange - Gaumont - TFI Films Production - SFPC - TM coproduction, with the participation of the French Ministry of Culture and Films Polski, and the collaboration of X Production Group of Warsaw/Barbara Pec-Slesicka. Produced by Margaret Menegoz. Delegate to the production, Emmanuel Schlumberger. Associate producer, Films Moliere. Stars Gerard Depardieu, Wojciech Pszoniak. Directed by Andrzej Wajda. Screenplay, Jean-Claude Carriere, based on the play, "The Danton Affair," by Stanislaw Przybyszewska; script collaborators, Wajda, Agnieszka Holland, Boleslaw Michalek, Jacek Gasiowski; historical advisors, Jan Baszkiewicz, Stefan Meller; camera (color), Igor Luther; art director, Allan Starski, Gilles Vaster (collaborator); costumes, Yvonne Sassinot de Nesle; music, Jean Prooromides; music performed by the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Jan Prusak, and the Warsaw Music Society Choir; sound, Jean-Pierre Ruh, Dominique Hennequin, Piotr Zawadzki; editor, Halina Prugar-Ketling; reviewed at the Ponthieu screening room, Paris, Dec. 16, 1982. Running time: 136 MINS.

Danton	Gerard Depardieu
Robespierre	Wojciech Pszoniak
Camille Desmoulins	Patrice Chereau
Lucile Desmoulins	Angela Winkler
Saint-Just	Boguslaw Linda
Lacroix	Roland Blanche
Eleonore Duplay	Anne Alvaro
Fouquier Tinville	Roger Planchon
Philippeaux	Serge Merlin
Fabre d'Eglantine	Lucien Melki
Bourdon	Andrzej Seweryn
David	Franciszek Starowieyski
Louison Danton	Emmanuelle Debever
Billaud-Varenne	Jerzy Trela
Couthon	Tadeusz Huk
Westermann	Jacques Villeret

"Danton" is the first French-language film by Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda, and provides a saddening illustration of how a director of proven abilities can flounder when working in a language and culture not his own.

Wajda, whose French is reportedly poor, has already worked in France — a few years ago he staged, in French, a play by his great compatriot, Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, with a mixed French and Polish cast. The results were hardly encouraging.

But here he is again, directing, in the wake of recent tragic events in his homeland, a historical film about the French Revolution. (Decidedly, French producers now want only foreigners to treat their history — consider "The Night of Varennes," directed by Italian Ettore Scola.)

No doubt that the curious confluence of grim current events and chosen artistic subject matter will provoke much media commentary and analysis, enough to guarantee the film commercial pickup in foreign markets.

But "Danton" is a dull, plodding affair, resembling more a windy, biased history lecture than a dramatic motion picture. Too often it has the characteristic gloss of French costume television drama, in which roles and outfits are filled but not lived in, and in which real historical sites and landmarks provide facile but artless solutions to the art director's chores.

Wajda and his producers apparently thought he could handle the project because the script is based, ironically, on a Polish play of the 1930's, which Wajda (who commutes back and forth from cinema to theatre) has staged several times. Though the screenplay is due to Frenchman Jean-Claude Carriere, Wajda's historical advisors, technicians and much of his cast are Poles, with whom he's worked before. Despite these safeguards, or maybe because of them, Wajda has directed academically, without inspiration.

Like the play, the film limits itself to the climactic death struggle between the two titans of the Revolution, Georges Danton and Maximilian Robespierre, and attempts

to dramatize their emotional, intellectual and political differences.

Action opens in November, 1793, with Danton returning to Paris from his country retreat upon learning that the insidious Committee of Public Safety, under Robespierre's incitement, has begun a massive series of executions, The Terror. Confident in the people's support, Danton locks horns with his former ally, but the calculating Robespierre soon rounds up Danton and his followers, tries them before a revolutionary tribunal and dispatches them to the guillotine. (Apparently film side-steps murder of Danton by Charlotte Corday, not listed among the characters — Ed.)

Out of this potentially riveting material, Wajda has drawn a film without dynamism, rhythm or profound human interest. Part of the problem is that the original piece was a philosophical drama of ideas, which the helmer has retrenched in the most pedestrian kind of film realism. Neither discourse nor emotion find momentum, despite all the agitation and emoting.

It's especially odd that Wajda, who has just lived through (and made two films about) one of the most momentous instances in contemporary European history, should be utterly unable to recreate or even suggest the feeling of oceanic tumult that characterized the French Revolution and the period of the Terror. Even the finale — The Dantonists' tumbril ride to the guillotine and their execution — looks scrappy and unconvincing.

The acting barely improves matters and Wajda has sometimes cast poorly. Gerard Depardieu is Danton; huff and puff as he may, he still looks uneasy in period costume and powdered wig, and his gestures and mannerisms are resolutely 20th century.

Wojciech Pszoniak, a fine Polish actor of commanding presence, looks right as the cold, conniving Robespierre, but the dubbed voice that issues from his mouth saps his performance. The other Poles, mostly cast as Robespierrists, also suffer from indifferent dubbing. Wajda is only one of many directors who suffers from a tin ear when working in other languages (even those they speak).

The supporting roles vary from fair to poor, with German actress Angela Winkler (also dubbed) miscast as Lucile Desmoulins, the wife (Continued on page 24)

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of the Dantonist journalist, Camille Desmoulins (played competently by wunderkind stage director Patrice Chereau).

Among the others, it's worth noting a good performance by another leading stage director, Roger Planchon, who seems to specialize in judge parts (he played one in the recent period film, "The Return of Martin Guerre").

Wajda doesn't seem cut out for an international career helming expensive hybrid coproductions. But can he really go home again?

—Len.