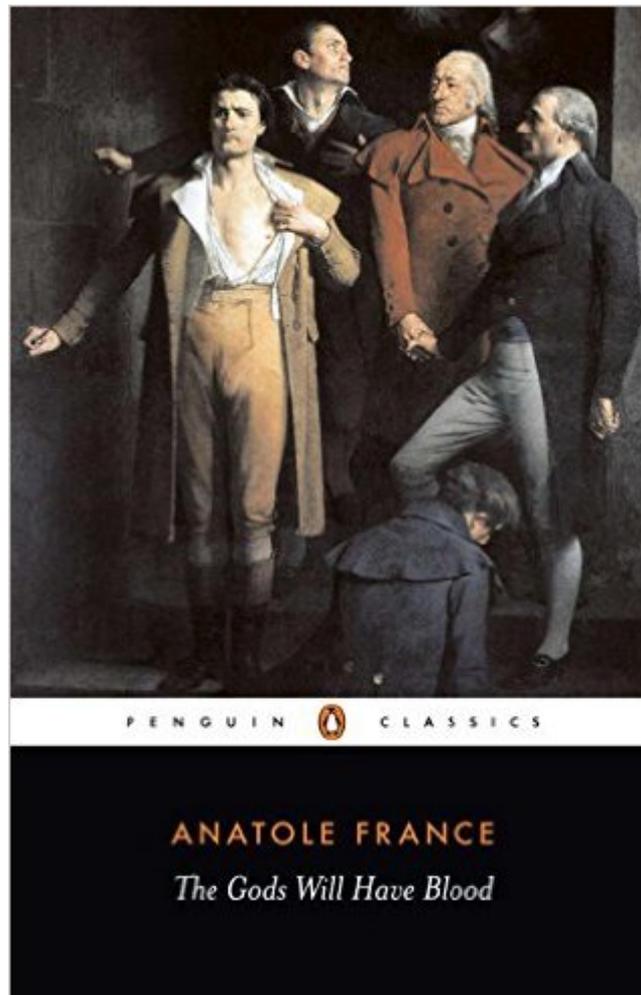


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The Gods Will Have Blood (Penguin Twentieth Century Classics)



Synopsis

It is April 1793 and the final power struggle of the French Revolution is taking hold: the aristocrats are dead and the poor are fighting for bread in the streets. In a Paris swept by fear and hunger lives Gamelin, a revolutionary young artist appointed magistrate, and given the power of life and death over the citizens of France. But his intense idealism and unbridled single-mindedness drive him inexorably towards catastrophe. Published in 1912, *The Gods Will Have Blood* is a breathtaking story of the dangers of fanaticism, while its depiction of the violence and devastation of the Reign of Terror is strangely prophetic of the sweeping political changes in Russia and across Europe. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Chilling tale of one Evariste Gamelin, a poor artist in revolutionary Paris. On the one hand he shows humanity: caring for his old mother, willing to give up his bread allowance to a starving woman, and jealously devoted to the lovely Elodie. But his blind following of the Republic soon becomes apparent: 'We must put our trust in Robespierre; he is incorruptible. Above all we must trust in Marat.

He is the one who really loves the people...he's not only incorruptible; he is without fear. He alone is capable of saving the Republic in its peril.' Against this dangerously naive youth, we meet his older neighbour, Brotteaux, a former aristocrat, now living in a garret and making puppets - but, despite his atheism, a good natured man, willing to risk his life for others. As Evariste rises up the ladder he becomes a magistrate, with power over the lives of many, even people well known to him... Although written a hundred years ago, and set 250 years back, this is very much a relevant work; Gamelin made me think of Nazis who were reportedly kind fathers; of radicalized Muslim youths who had once been loving sons. As he tells Elodie: 'Scoundrels who betray their fatherland are multiplying unceasingly... And when we have sacrificed them on the altar of the fatherland, more of them appear, and more and more... So you must see there is no other course for me but to renounce love, joy, all the sweetness of life, even life itself.' The crazy world where months are re-named and dancing dolls declared anti-revolutionary (putting their seller's life at risk) is very similar to what we see in some extremist lands today.

What happens when we let an idea, an ideal of what humanity ought to be, perhaps even a good one of what it could be, consume us? What happens when the idea becomes more important than the people it is meant to represent? What happens when this idea becomes a god to be worshipped blindly and that god thirsts for human blood in the name of necessity and perfection? Well, the answer is pretty self-evident I guess. Anatole France's *The Gods will Have Blood* aka *The Gods are Athirst* shows just such a crisis, when the Revolution in France, meant to topple the unjust regime of monarchy and aristocracy in the name of the downtrodden people, became transmuted into a literal Terror, where madam Guillotine reigned supreme and all were suspect. Even those in authority were not safe from the accusing glances and denunciations of all and sundry, and the heroes and champions of liberty of today were all too soon the martyrs and victims of tomorrow. At this time of turmoil we are introduced to the young painter Évariste Gamelin, living in poverty with his widowed mother in a garret in Paris, dreaming of possible fame as an artist and ardently committed to the revolutionary cause. His neighbour, the ci-devant nobleman and secular philosopher Maurice Brotteaux, now makes children's puppets and reads his Lucretius, giving aid to his neighbours when he can and grumbling of the deceitful nature of the revolution and its adherents. Finally there is Élodie Blaise, the voluptuous daughter of a clever printseller who has thus far proven able to navigate the tempestuous seas of the revolution and still manage to make a profit amidst the poverty that surrounds him, who pursues the handsome young Gamelin with a desire that is almost bestial in its hunger.

The Gods Are Athirst, a novel by Nobel Prize winner Anatole France, was originally published in 1912 under the French title of Les dieux ont soif. The story takes place from 1793 to 1794, during the period of the French Revolution known as The Terror. Variste Gamelin is a young painter actively involved in the local political activities of his neighborhood. His enthusiasm for the Republican cause is duly noted, and he is appointed to the office of juror on the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Jacobins are rounding up former aristocrats and anyone else who might sympathize with the former king. These offenders are corralled into the courtroom for cursory show trials, wherein Gamelin and his fellow jurors pass judgment upon them, the usual sentence being death by guillotine. Gamelin is fiercely devoted to the Republican doctrine and practically worships the Jacobin leaders Marat and Robespierre. As his judicial office slowly transforms him from an earnest, likeable young man to a cold, merciless executioner, his family and friends begin to fear him, wary they might be next on the chopping block. I usually think of France as a satirist, but in this historical novel he's deadly serious. He does, however, contrast Gamelin with the character of Maurice Brotteaux, a former aristocrat who looks askance at the Republican rhetoric with an irreverent viewpoint and humorous sense of the ironic that one might expect from the author. France wrote this book for an audience of his fellow Frenchman, so the reader is expected to come armed with a prior knowledge of the Revolution. For the American reader, it can be tough going at times.

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