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American Literature  
11/15/12

LL#13: Danforth and Hale

With two people of very strong conscience and morality, disputes and disagreements are bound to happen. In Arthur Miller’s “The Crucible”, Danforth and Hale, both seeking to empower the theocracy of Salem and reduce witchcraft, meet head to head on their methodology.

Initially, Hale and Danforth work together in the courts of Salem. As a judge, Danforth holds the power in the courtroom while Hale is the religious authority. “Here is all the invisible world, caught, definite, and… crush him utterly if he has shown his face!” –Hale (p39) He is calculated and confident in his research; he knows that he can defeat the Devil with his knowledge. Likewise, Danforth believes in his perception of those who are witches. They both believe they have flawless arguments for the witchcraft trials. “But you must understand, sir… there be no road between.” –Danforth (94)

As the story develops, Danforth’s flaws become increasingly clear. His fatal flaw, hubris, affects how the witchcraft trials are played out; meanwhile, Hale is humble and is able to admit his shortcomings and wrongdoings. “I will not receive a single plea for pardon or postponement... crack its voice with whimpering.” –Danforth (129) At this point, Abigail, who was the only one Danforth could not be stern towards, had already left the town. He remained rigid and would not cast any doubt toward her accusations even though the circumstance demanded that he do so. He is easily offended when anyone questions his decisions on whether he is right or not, and once decided, cannot be dissuaded from his original plan of action. This is clearly shown when Abigail has left town and those she accused of witchcraft were innocent, yet he still obstinately demanded their hanging unless they confessed. On the other hand, Hale is quick to change sides once he knows he’s on the wrong one. He is morally upright and not afraid to stand up for those who are innocent. “I denounce these proceedings, I quit this court!” –Hale (120) At the end of Act 3, finally fed up with Danforth’s stubborn selfish acts, Hale leaves in order to do good by himself. He sentenced 72 people to death (99), and had a guilty conscience. He felt so guilty that he begged the convicted to plead guilty in order to save themselves; he could have no more deaths remotely related to him. Juxtaposed, these two characters show very different personalities and motivations. Danforth is influenced by his fatal flaw, hubris, while Hale is motivated by religious morality. While one is constantly influenced by what others think of him, the other is searching for truth.

While these two are searching for the same thing, they have different influences and personalities. Hale and Danforth, upon closer inspection, are complete opposites; Danforth is extrinsically motivated through what others think of him while Hale is intrinsically motivated to do the right thing no matter what the cost.