

Carleton Noyes wrote, “The human heart has ever dreamed of a fairer world than the one it knows.” Since the dawn of time, people have hoped for and dreamed about making the world a better place, whether for themselves as individuals or for all mankind. It is in our nature to want that which we do not have, to imagine how things might be or how things might have been. Human history is filled with journeys of discovery and miracles of invention, which often give people the idea that nothing is beyond our reach. Yet dreaming of a better world, and actually taking steps to bring it into existence, are two very different things. Sometimes these dreams lead to achievement and advancement, but sometimes the actions we take in pursuit of our dreams lead to disappointment, despair, or even disaster. Those who actually try to improve their world or their individual lot in life often find the task substantially more daunting than they first thought. The novel Animal Farm by George Orwell and William Shakespeare’s play The Tragedy of Macbeth both reveal that it is substantially more difficult to actually create a fairer world than it is to dream of one.

Animal Farm is subtitled “A Fairy Story,” but it is actually a parable about the Russian Revolution and the rise of Soviet communism. The novel presents a population of farm animals who expel their despotic farmer-owner in order to establish their own ideal, egalitarian society. Despite some initial success, they find themselves gradually falling back into totalitarian rule under a prize boar named Napoleon and a ruling class of pigs. Orwell uses farm animals as characters, endowing them with the ability to think, speak and communicate as if they were human. However, this use of anthropomorphism is limited to language and thought. Each species of animal retains the physical characteristics and limitations of that species. The distinctions between species make it simpler for Orwell to draw socioeconomic lines between different groups. They also provide a clear and unambiguous expression of the Marxist credo “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” The stronger animals, such as horses, perform much of the manual labor, the birds act as airborne lookouts, the dogs as guards, while the more intelligent pigs make administrative and tactical decisions. As the pigs gradually establish themselves as the ruling class, they begin to take on human physical characteristics. They live in the farmhouse, sleep in the beds, eat at the tables, wear clothing, and eventually walk on their hind legs. They also conduct business with the human owners of the neighboring farms (which represent England and Germany; their owners evoke Chamberlain and Hitler,

respectively), and design rules and laws for the farm which they claim will benefit everyone, but in fact only benefit themselves. The novel is written in a limited third-person voice, from the point of view of the common animals on the farm. The pigs' machinations, particularly after they move into the farmhouse, are conducted in secret and behind closed doors. Neither the reader nor any of the other animals are made privy to any of their meetings, conversations, or decisions. Their propaganda is communicated via a perfidious pig called Squealer, who acts as Napoleon's spokesman. Both the reader and the animals are left to infer the pigs' intentions from Squealer's words and what little other evidence they see. A naïve reader could easily be fooled into believing what Squealer tells the other animals, and that this is truly a mere "fairy story." Orwell's idea is that people can easily be fooled into believing that their leaders have their best interests at heart. Orwell was a political philosopher and socialist who despised Soviet communism as a system founded on noble egalitarian principles but that had instead become a brutal dictatorship under Stalin. The dream of a better life articulated by Old Major in the first chapter, and carried out by the other animals in the second, gradually became a life substantially more grim and oppressive than anything the animals had suffered under Farmer Jones. It is one thing to dream of a fairer world, and as the animals on Animal Farm found out, quite another to actually make it happen.

The Tragedy of Macbeth was one of Shakespeare's later plays, written during the reign of James I in the early years of the 17th Century. Based on the 12th-century Chronicles of Holinshed, the play relates the story of a highly-regarded Scottish general overcome by ambition, driven to murder his king in order to seize the throne for himself. When his ambition grows beyond his capacity to control it, he finds himself done in by his more pure of heart rival Macduff. Macbeth's character is established in Act I as that of an honorable, virtuous, skilled military leader, fiercely loyal to his king, Duncan. Both the king and Macbeth's fellow officers speak highly of him at the end of a battle in the play's first scene. However, Macbeth is also highly susceptible to suggestion, which reveals an inherent weakness in his constitution and brings forth his ambition. He encounters three witches, or "wyrd sisters," who prophesize that he will eventually become king. When his shrewd and manipulative wife, Lady Macbeth, catches wind of this, she determines to make it happen by any means necessary. Her determination is even stronger than his, to the point where she ridicules and shames him into plotting Duncan's murder. This allows his ambition to overwhelm his conscience, and despite his loyalty to

Duncan, and his grave misgivings about the crime, he commits the murder. However, he remains conflicted between his conscience and his ambition. Becoming king, as it turned out, was not enough for him. The three witches had also prophesied that the progeny of his friend, Banquo, and not his own, would eventually rule Scotland. In a pivotal Act III scene i, Macbeth decides to have Banquo and his son murdered. Macbeth still knows that it is wrong, and he wrestles with his conscience, but he chooses to cast aside conscience and is thereafter motivated purely by ambition. Macbeth gradually becomes paranoid and isolated, plotting to kill anyone and everyone who stands in his way in his futile quest for immortality. Indeed, Macbeth felt immortal because he had been told by the three witches that he was invulnerable to anyone “of woman born.” However the thane Macduff, whose family Macbeth had had slaughtered, had unbeknownst to Macbeth been born by surgical section. Therefore Macduff is able to kill Macbeth and put an end to his tyranny. Since Macbeth was not satisfied with being king, the only thing left for him to attain was immortality. Knowing that his royal line would end with his death drove him to desire the one thing that no man can have. In his misguided effort to attain this impossible dream, Macbeth destroyed himself, and left a trail of death and destruction in his wake.

The dream of a fairer world has been with us since the dawn of time, and it will remain with us into the future. History and experience teach us that an ideal world is probably unattainable, and that when we reach beyond our capabilities we sometimes stumble and fall. When men of good faith and conscience endeavor to bring about positive change, many times it can be achieved. Yet there will always be those whose selfish desires and corrupt motivations thwart the efforts of the pure-hearted. This is our eternal struggle, but it cannot stop us from dreaming of something better.