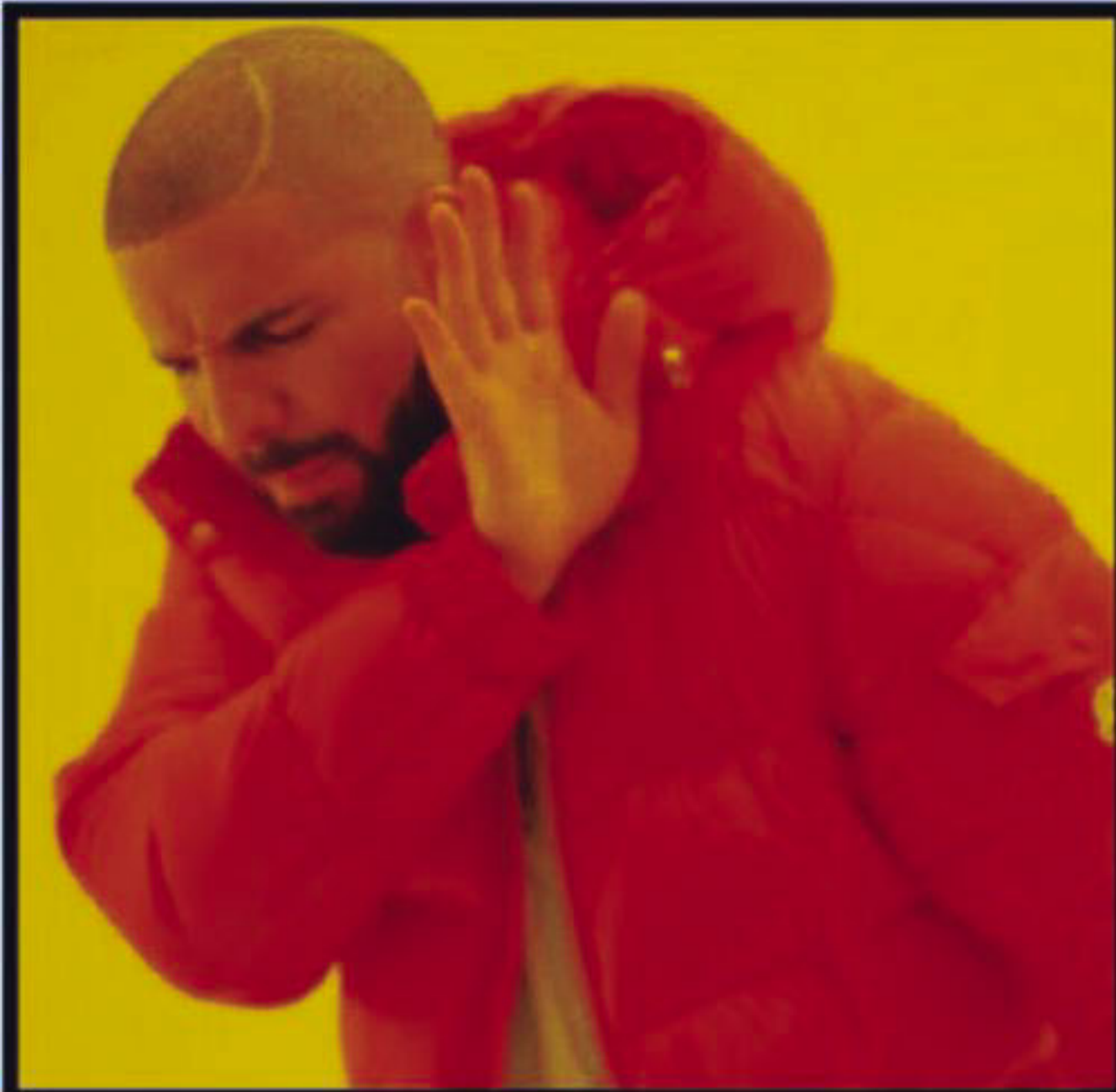


CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AS POLITICAL COMMENTARY



Reading historical accounts of fascism and imperialism to better understand the current political situation



Rereading the animal book from high school where the bad pig makes all the other animals his slaves

Newspapers reported a rise in sales of Orwell's 1984 and Animal Farm, as well as Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale. Harry Potter references were rife. These choices in literature were lambasted on social media by the sort of people who do that sort of thing. The scenarios in 1984 and The Handmaid's Tale were far too removed from the realities of Trump's America to be at all a fair comparison. Anyone who thought otherwise was a liberal and a snowflake.

Still, even those who thought the books were being misapplied in the current context couldn't easily deny the books' essential merit – 1984 is a revered classic and even people who haven't read it know it by its reputation. And while The Handmaid's Tale can be more easily dismissed (because sexism), it too has good cultural armour.

Harry Potter and Animal Farm, being associated with younger audiences, are much easier game. I have seen multiple memes on Facebook mocking millennials who can't think beyond Harry Potter references. Animal Farm was also described as "the animal book from high school where the bad pig makes all the others his slaves".

Leaving aside the issues of intellectual self-superiority and a dearth of critical political literature for younger audiences – what the hell was that crack at Animal Farm? Meme-man, were you dropped on your head as a child? I am assuming you read the book because to criticise what you haven't read is an act of dishonest stupidity that I'll charitably believe is beneath you. Even someone who dealt with Animal Farm purely at face value can leave with a greater insight than "bad pig makes other animals do things *sad emoji*".

Animal Farm is one of the most apt things to read in the current political climate because it details Snowball as a master gaslighter. "Gaslighting" is the process of making someone doubt their own experience of reality, and Snowball regularly eases along Napoleon's tyrannical actions by planting falsehoods in the minds of the animals. Snowball makes the animals forget events that delegitimise Napoleon's current actions – even former statements and actions from Napoleon himself. This is not only relevant to the falsehoods and policy turnarounds of Trump and his administration but to an entire body of global politics. We have leaders denying genocides both in the recent past and actively happening right now; we have in India a school of political and religious thought that denies the contributions and history of groups they label "foreigners"; the insidious idea that the Irish were also sent as slaves to America is making its rounds on the internet, with the aim of threatening the narrative of oppression of African-Americans. Debates on our own histories and schools of thought are rife with this sort of intentional reality-editing.

These are important issues – some of more immediacy and wider scope than others. To understand them in their broader contexts we need our reference points, and if Harry Potter or "funny animal stories" can prepare us in any way, we should celebrate that.

(As an aside, a political movement that has embraced a green frog as a mascot has no business casting stones at someone who speaks in pig metaphors.)

Zoheb Mashiur is a prematurely balding man with bad facial hair and so does his best to avoid people. Ruin his efforts by writing to zoheb.mashiur@gmail.com

ZOHEB MASHIUR

There's this funny thing people do where they attempt to put themselves forward as intellectually superior but instead come off as silly and sad.

In the wake of the Trump inauguration, a lot of people – myself included – were a bit at a loss. Things were happening both remarkably quickly and badly, and many of us on the internet were on the lookout for some insight or frame of reference that would make sense of all of it.



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