



Mark Wilson / Getty Images

# Republicans' War on Science Just Got Frighteningly Real

Two terrible bills that Obama would have vetoed are back in play, and they stand a very good chance of becoming law under Trump.

**BY EMILY ATKIN**

March 9, 2017

As many conservatives see it, environmental science is an enabler of dreaded government regulation. When enough studies show that there is no safe level of lead in water, then we have to regulate lead pollution. When scientists agree that mercury pollution can effect developmental health, then we have to regulate mercury. And when scientists agree that excessive carbon emissions threaten public health and welfare—well, you get the point.

An obvious solution, for those seeking to avoid such regulation, would be to prevent that science from seeing the light of day. That's exactly what Lamar Smith, a Republican congressman from Texas, is trying to do. On Thursday, the House Science Committee passed two of Smith's bills: The Honest and Open New EPA Science Treatment Act (HONEST Act) and the Science Advisory Board (SAB) Reform Act. Combined, they would significantly change how the Environmental Protection Agency uses science to create rules that protect human health.

The HONEST Act is essentially a re-brand of Smith's notorious Secret Science Reform Act, a bill that would have required the EPA to only use scientific studies for which all data is publicly available and the results are easily reproducible. The SAB Reform Act would change the makeup of the board that reviews the "quality and relevance" of the science that EPA uses: Scientists who receive EPA grants would be forbidden from serving, while allowing the appointment of industry-sponsored experts who have a direct interest in being regulated—so long as they disclose that interest.

In a press release, Smith said these bills would help promote "an open and honest scientific process" at the EPA. He says past regulations have been "based on hidden science" and that the SAB needs "a more balanced group of scientists to assist EPA in fulfilling its core mission."

But several scientists, science advocates, and former EPA officials told me this week that these bills are a solution in search of a problem. The bills, while couched in good intention, will add significant expense and delay to the scientific process, effectively preventing the EPA from using the best available science to protect the public from pollution. Worse, they said, the bills would embolden polluters and discourage good scientists from working in government.

**"I've always had a hard time understanding why members of Congress like** to tell scientists how to conduct their research," said Democratic Representative Bill Foster, one of only two scientists in Congress. "Scientists should set the standards for research. Not politicians."

According to The Intercept, "The small group of lawyers and PR strategists orchestrating the secret science effort are closely tied to those attacking the EPA from within. All have connections to either big tobacco, oil, or both." And those industries would, of course, benefit financially by killing or delaying regulation. "I'm sure you've heard of the 'Delay Game,' where clearly it's in the best interests of certain major stakeholders to delay science so they can in effect delay regulations that may have an impact on their business or industry," said Thomas Burke, who served as the EPA's chief science advisor under President Obama. "So one has to be a little skeptical of an intent to a bill like this that might lead to an endless loop of reanalysis of data."

Burke and others said the HONEST Act would delay or stymie the approval of scientific data at EPA because it requires that the disclosure of private data and that study results be “reproducible,” meaning an outside source must be able to replicate the entire study on their own and get the same results. Scientists say that’s just not possible for many public health studies. Consider a 10-year study of lead exposure in pregnant women and children: How would scientists swiftly replicate the results? Or a study on the BP oil spill’s impact on public health in coastal Gulf communities: How can one reproduce that event?

“It’s really hard to reproduce long term studies because variables change, people grow up,” said Yogin Kothari, a scientific integrity advocate at the Union of Concerned Scientists. “If they can’t use these studies, the EPA’s policy decisions won’t be based on the best available science.”

The HONEST Act’s requirement that all raw data be available is also problematic, scientists say, because many public health studies use private medical data, while other studies—like oil well emission research, for instance—can contain trade secrets and industry data. The HONEST Act does say that type of information must be redacted, but then it says that it can be disclosed to anybody who signs a confidentiality agreement. Kothari said that requiring raw data also fundamentally misunderstands how the scientific process works. “You don’t need to see raw data to actually understand a scientific analysis,” he said. “When a peer reviewer at a journal is looking at a study, a paper that they’re reviewing, they don’t ask for the data. They look at the methodologies and how it connects to the research results.”

Besides, Burke said, there is no reason for reviewers to essentially re-do the entire research process when reviewing the validity of a study. That is what the peer-review process is for—a process that has served science well for nearly 300 years. “This bill really does not honor the scientific process that has been the basis for decision-making in the U.S. and around the world,” he said. “It sets up so many potential road blocks. I am very concerned about the public health implications.”

Opponents of the Scientific Advisory Board bill, which bars scientists who have received money from the EPA in the last three years from serving on the board, say it’s insulting to allege that scientists who receive EPA grants are inherently biased in favor environmental regulation. Most scientific research in the U.S. is funded by government grants. Does that mean every scientist is biased toward government regulation?

“They’re basically saying that people who are experts in environmental science, who have spent their careers working on this and may have received EPA grants to do their work, are inherently conflicted, whereas people who are working in the industry, who would be impacted by the board’s advice, are not conflicted,” Kothari said. “I mean, that’s bananas, right?”

**There’s no shortage of outrageous bills in Congress that few people take seriously.** Republican Representative Matt Gaetz’s bill to abolish the EPA, for instance, caused widespread internet outrage and inspired hundreds of protesters to show up at a town hall Gaetz hosted. But the bill has absolutely no chance of becoming law.

Quite the opposite is true of the HONEST and SAB Reform acts. Both bills passed the GOP-controlled House in 2014 and 2015, back when the HONEST Act was called the Secret Science Reform Act. In 2015, after Democrats lost the Senate, the secret science bill passed the chamber’s Committee on Environment and Public Works. The Obama White House issued veto threats on both bills, both years.

“I would say it’s more real now than ever before because of the current political situation,” said Kothari. “A lot of people paying attention to this always understood that President Obama would veto this legislation. We don’t have that veto promise anymore.”

President Donald Trump has not commented on these bills, but he’s expressed an extreme distrust of science in general, and the EPA specifically. He doesn’t believe in climate change, for instance, and has appointed several climate deniers to cabinet positions. Some of the very people behind these two bills are now serving on Trump’s EPA transition team.

“We now have a president who has attacked mainstream scientific views repeatedly,” Democratic Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson said at Thursday’s House Science Committee hearing. “The threats to the scientific enterprise in America right now are profound.”



Alex Wong/Getty Images

# We're on the Brink of an Authoritarian Crisis

If Trump fires Robert Mueller or pardons himself, Republicans won't do a thing about it—and our democracy will be changed forever.

**BY BRIAN BEUTLER**

July 20, 2017

There were many reasons to be alarmed by the transcript of President Donald Trump's Wednesday interview with *The New York Times*, but if you drew back the lenses of time and context far enough, it foretold a deeper crisis than the text suggested—one that may be unfolding already.

The scope of that crisis is much clearer now that the *Washington Post* is reporting that Trump is discussing the possibility of pardoning himself, his family, and his closest aides to short-circuit the sprawling investigation of his campaign's complicity in Russia's subversion of the 2016 election. Trump's team is also, according to the *Post* and another Times story, digging up dirt on the special counsel investigators in an attempt to discredit them.

In light of this dizzying news, it's worth returning to the *Times* interview. Trump's juiciest



comments pertained to his attorney general, uber-loyalist Jeff Sessions, whom he resents for recusing from that investigation. But these grievances were already known, as was the fact that Trump has considered terminating Robert Mueller, the man leading the inquiry. What made the *Times* interview explosive was Trump's suggestion that he would fire Mueller for delving too deeply into his finances.

SCHMIDT: Last thing, if Mueller was looking at your finances and your family finances, unrelated to Russia—is that a red line?

HABERMAN: Would that be a breach of what his actual charge is?

TRUMP: I would say yeah. I would say yes.

And what lit the fuse was contemporaneous reporting, first from the *Times* and then from *Bloomberg*, that Mueller is indeed investigating Trump's business entanglements, as it was widely expected he would. "FBI investigators and others," Bloomberg reported, "are looking at Russian purchases of apartments in Trump buildings, Trump's involvement in a controversial SoHo development in New York with Russian associates, the 2013 Miss Universe pageant in Moscow and Trump's sale of a Florida mansion to a Russian oligarch in 2008."

The confluence of these two developments confronts Trump with a choice between backing down from his threat and making good on it, perhaps while issuing pardons promiscuously and to catastrophic effect.

The loud hum of chaos and spectacle engulfing the Trump administration is drowning out a creeping reality: We are on the brink of an authoritarian crisis that will make the firing of FBI Director James Comey seem quaint in hindsight.

**In a more rule-bound environment, Mueller's interest in opening Trump's** books would probably be checkmate for the president. Quite apart from the question of whether his campaign conspired with Russian intelligence to sabotage Hillary Clinton's campaign, it is widely suspected that a peek under the hood of the Trump organization will reveal serious financial crimes. Assuming that informed speculation is correct, and assuming

our system of checks hasn't broken down, Mueller would uncover the wrongdoing and bring down a president, or Trump would fire Mueller and Congress would step in to edge Trump out.

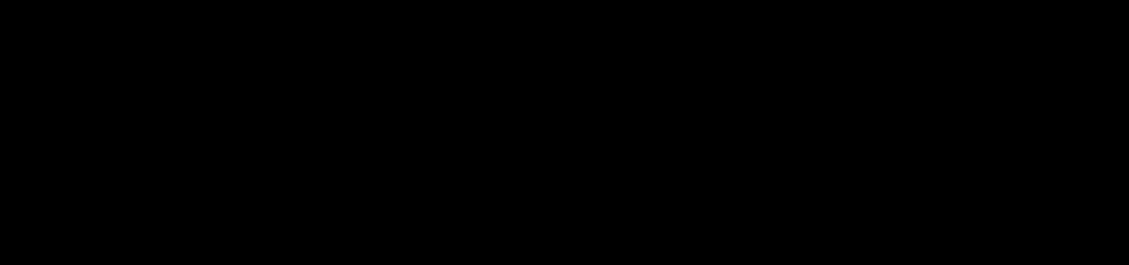
But at the moment there are no reliable sources of accountability. None.

Republicans have given every indication over the course of the past several months that no malfeasance, no matter how naked and severe, will impel them to rein in Trump or impeach him. Outside of Congress, the hope would be that firing Mueller—let alone pardoning the targets of his investigation—would essentially cost Trump control of the Justice Department. George W. Bush nearly lost his DOJ when his senior aides attempted to subvert department protocols to renew an unlawful spying program. Nixon, in the Saturday Night Massacre, had to fire DOJ leaders one after one until he found an appointee—Solicitor General Robert Bork—who would dismiss the Watergate counsel.

We unfortunately cannot count on any similar blowback here. By unmanning the attorney general to the newspaper of record, Trump raised speculation that Sessions would resign, but Sessions is living his best life destroying minority communities at the moment, so resigning is the farthest thing from his mind. “I have the honor of serving as attorney general,” he said on Thursday. “It’s something that goes beyond any thought I would have ever had for myself. We love this job. We love this department.”

Sessions’s deputy, Rod Rosenstein, isn’t as obviously invested in the Trump presidency as his boss is. But Rosenstein was complicit in Comey’s firing. He resisted pressure to appoint a special counsel for more than a week after Trump fired Comey, and only relented after Comey seemingly forced his hand. More recently, Rosenstein appeared on Fox News and issued a less-than-full-throated defense of the special counsel investigation that he oversees. “At the Department of Justice, we judge by results,” he said, “and so my view about that is, we’ll see if they do the right thing.”





Trump's nominee to lead the FBI, Chris Wray, lacks the obvious baggage that Sessions and, to a lesser extent, Rosenstein carry. But he is Trump's handpicked Comey replacement. And, as Trump made clear to the *Times*, he sees no meaningful impediment to coopting federal law enforcement agencies and their leaders. "I could have ended that whole [investigation] just by saying—they say it can't be obstruction because you can say: 'It's ended. It's over. Period,'" Trump said, adding, "The F.B.I. person really reports directly to the president of the United States."

Should Trump fire Mueller, with the tacit assent of Republicans in Congress and the DOJ leadership, there will be little recourse. It is feasible (though difficult) to imagine a GOP House and Senate passing an independent counsel statute to restore Mueller to his job; it is nearly impossible to imagine them doing so by veto-proof margins. And should Trump pardon himself and his inner circle, it is dispiritingly easy to imagine Republicans reprising their familiar refrain: The president's power to pardon is beyond question.

If this crisis unfolds as depicted here, the country's final hope for avoiding a terminal slide into authoritarianism would be the midterm election, contesting control of a historically gerrymandered House of Representatives. That election is 16 months away. Between now and then, Trump's DOJ and his sham election-integrity commission will seek to disenfranchise as many Democratic voters as possible, while the president himself beseeches further foreign interference aimed at Democratic candidates. Absent the necessary sweep, everything Trump will have done to degrade our system for his own enrichment and protection will have been ratified, and a point of no return will have been crossed.

Brian Beutler is a senior editor at *The New Republic*. He hosts Primary Concerns, a podcast about politics.  [@brianbeutler](https://twitter.com/brianbeutler)



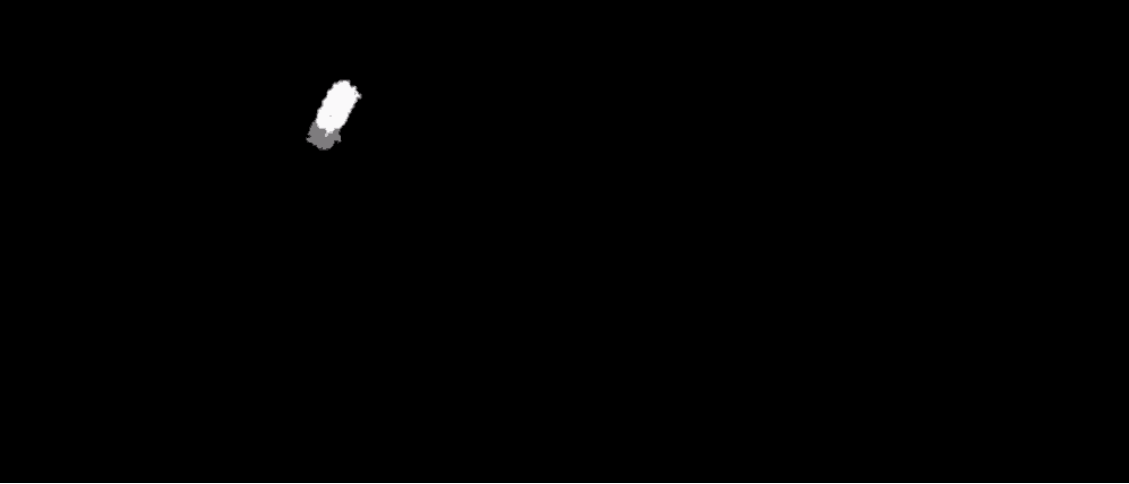


Illustration by o Banquinho

# Donald Trump and the Witch

The president has repeatedly identified with this ancient, persecuted figure, just as young marginalized women have started to do the same.

BY JOSEPHINE LIVINGSTONE

July 21, 2017

In the book of laws he compiled toward the end of the ninth century, King Alfred outlawed *wiccan* among the people of England, on pain of death. From its first appearance in English, the word “witch” has referred to a person not merely magical but actively abhorred by state power.

This ancient word has lately bubbled up from the mud of time into American culture. “Witch” now resonates among two sharply different sets of people: Young, often queer women, who see the witch as an appealingly transgressive and charismatic archetype, and President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly described his critics as the perpetrators of a “witch hunt.”



**Donald J. Trump**   
@realDonaldTrump

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This is the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history!

7:52 AM - 18 May 2017



36,841



123,474



There is a fun surface element to the witch-discourse: gifs of *The Craft*; jokes playing off the difference between the two chief witch stereotypes, oversexed teen and withered crone; ten thousand funny Tumblr usernames; an excuse to re-watch *Buffy*. Numerous trend pieces have taken notice of Instagram players like The Hoodwitch and podcasts like Witch, Please. Cultural critics have even labeled millennials’ interest in casting spells and other witchish activities “mysticore.”

This interest in witches and the occult is approximately half about humor—the counterintuitive, absurd humor of the internet—and half about a fascination with the power that spells, covens, and astrology offer. Mallory Ortberg’s roundup of women murdering men in art history expresses this combination well. Look at the Instagram tag #witchvibes and you will see fashion, makeup, and sorcery, as well as women paying each other compliments. The internet sends up the violent history of the word “witch,” while exploiting its capacity for fostering feminist communities.

Practices like astrology, palm-reading, and tarot offer alternative ways of conceiving the world. They build and consolidate community with humor and fun, while subverting the dominant forms of knowledge that we might learn at school or in the workplace. The witch rejects empiricism; by embracing witchcraft, the young woman is rehabilitating an old, stigmatized identity and finding within it a source of strength.

When a person mentions a “witch hunt,” in contrast, she invokes a dark time in the past. The phrase has now come to possess three distinct senses: a search for actual witches; what the *OED* calls a “single-minded and uncompromising campaign against a group of people with unacceptable views or behavior”; and a campaign that viciously targets a single individual. When Trump uses the phrase, he is employing that third sense.

**By embracing witchcraft, the young woman is rehabilitating an old, stigmatized identity and finding within it a source of strength.**

But it is the second sense that is more prevalent in American political history. In the twentieth century, the violent mania over witchcraft that famously gripped seventeenth-century Massachusetts was repurposed into a term for the wish to locate and eradicate sympathies

with Russia—real or imagined.

As Kate Bolick wrote a couple of years ago for the *New Republic*, Raymond Robins used the phrase in a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing in 1919 titled “Bolshevik Protaganda.” “I have faith enough in our institutions to believe that we will throw that foreign culture, born out of a foreign despotism, back out of our land, not by treating it with the method of tyranny, not by a witch hunt, nor by hysteria, but by strong, intelligent action,” he said. Later, Robins clarified that by “witch hunt” he meant “when people get frightened at things and see bogies,” describing McCarthy several decades before he would make his own name synonymous with the phrase.

Trump’s insistence that he is the victim of a “witch hunt” is thus a strangely symmetrical reclamation of a term that has for decades been strongly associated with fear of and hatred for Russia. But that was the old Russia, the Soviet threat; this is the new Russia, and there’s something impressively artful about the way Trump has directly inverted the old language.

By using the term “witch hunt” in the third rather than the second sense—in which he as an *individual* is the target, rather than as part of a group—Trump implies that he is a special and individual martyr, like the misunderstood witch on the outskirts of town. By presenting himself as brave enough to join the Russians on the correct side of history, he atomizes himself, away from his party. As in Alfred’s time, Trump’s use of the phrase suggests that the witch is a sheep apart from the political flock, intellectually and spiritually. It is also reminiscent of the dictator’s penchant for martyrdom, recalling complaints from men like Pinochet or Putin that their regimes are unfairly maligned in the free Western press (*pace* fake news).

What should we make of these two witches, staring at one another in the mirror? On the one side, we have the young woman. Her natal chart is fully indexed; she can read tarot. She knows that Planned Parenthood guards her liberty. Her interest in witchhood is bound up with her political conscience, gender identity, and sense of humor. On the other, the President of the United States. His witchhood is, by contrast, a simple claim: that enemies hunt him for no good reason.

Perhaps the mirror is not a mirror at all, but a screen. The marginalized young woman looks into the surface of the word “witch” and hopes to see her struggles reflected, but instead a man

appears. He's everywhere, flickering into the corners of all the screens she looks into, omnipresent and terrifying as Bloody Mary or the Candyman. The only sorcery effective against him is solidarity: more magic, more craft, more witches.

Josephine Livingstone is the culture staff writer at *The New Republic*. [@Jo\\_Livingstone](#)



Alex Wong / Getty Images

# America, Don't Let Donald Trump Fire Robert Mueller

If the opposition waits for Trump to fire the man investigating the Russian collusion scandal, it will be too late. The street protests must start now.

**BY JEET HEER**

July 21, 2017

With President Donald Trump reportedly contemplating radical measures to defend his beleaguered administration from investigation, the United States stands on the brink of a constitutional crisis. According to *The New York Times*, Trump's staff is trying to dredge up opposition research to discredit special counsel Robert Mueller's legal team on the

investigation into the Trump campaign's collusion with Russia in last election's election interference. *The Washington Post* reports that Trump has inquired as to whether he can pardon associates, family members, and himself. And firing Mueller is a real possibility. As the *New Republic's* Brian Beutler argued last night, there's every indication that the Republican-controlled Congress will give a pass to these abuses of power, edging the American republic closer to authoritarianism.

Bob Bauer, former White House Counsel to President Barack Obama, wrote Thursday on the blog *Lawfare* that Trump's gambit would end the investigation and leave only impeachment as a remedy, with Trump counting on Republicans in the House and the Senate to support him no matter what. This could pay off if the Republicans stay in line ahead of the 2018 midterm elections: at worst, if the Democrats took back the House, Trump would be impeached, but would remain in power since Democrats won't have the two-thirds votes necessary in the Senate to remove him. Last night, Emma Loop of BuzzFeed interviewed four Republican senators about whether firing Mueller would be a mistake. Only one, Marco Rubio of Florida, unequivocally said yes.


All of this suggests that the constitutional crisis is also a political crisis. Democrats and the larger resistance needs to make Mueller the next big political battle. Defending the special counsel goes beyond defending one single investigation; it would be a proxy for a larger effort to guard the rule of law from a president with authoritarian aspirations. It would also be aimed at the Republican Party, letting them know that if they refuse to stand up to Trump's thrashing of the rule of law, they will be held accountable at the election booth.

Politically, the time is right for such a pivot. The special congressional elections are in the rearview, all the key races lost, and the battle against Obamacare repeal appears to be ending with a Democratic victory. The party has the resources—the money for advertising, and energized activists for street protests—to pour into a major effort. It is time to make saving Mueller's job the focus of a nationwide campaign.

**One of the main reasons for mobilizing immediately is to elevate Mueller** as a public figure—to make him a household name—so that firing him would become a more politically costly act. If Trump fires Mueller before the Democrats can make it a national issue,

then the public will be playing catch-up with the story. The better known Mueller is, the more costly his firing would be to Trump.

Some opponents of the Trump regime are already discussing how to defend Mueller. One obvious way is with street protests. Neera Tanden, the president of the Center for American Progress, has the right idea here—

**Neera Tanden** 🙌🇺🇸  
@neeratanden

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If Trump fires Mueller, we are going to have to have massive street demonstrations. Who is with me in taking to the streets?

10:21 PM - 20 Jul 2017

🔄 4,040 🍷 12,574

—except that we should not wait for Trump to fire Mueller. To truly provide Mueller political protection, the street protests should start this weekend.

Another way to shield Mueller would be for prominent figures to promote Mueller's stellar reputation, thereby inoculating against any calumny the Trump team might bring. Former Attorney General Eric Holder tweeted on Thursday night:

**Eric Holder** ✓  
@EricHolder

Follow

There is NO basis to question the integrity of Mueller or those serving with him in the special counsel's office. And no conflicts either

10:22 PM - 20 Jul 2017

💬 🔄 6,506 🍷 15,887 ⓘ

Preet Bharara, the former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, is also thinking along these lines, suggesting that high-level Department of Justice officials be prepared to resign if Mueller is fired:





**Preet Bharara** ✓  
@PreetBharara

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If Mueller is fired, how much obscene & horseshit character assassination will Trump & allies level against this honored military vet? 3/X

[twitter.com/preetbharara/s...](https://twitter.com/preetbharara/s...)

10:24 PM - 20 Jul 2017

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Beyond these actions, Democratic representatives and senators can raise a fuss in the halls of Congress, forcing their Republican counterparts to defend Mueller's job. If Republican lawmakers don't take a stand, and Mueller is fired, they'll be tainted as enablers in the next election.

Trump's recklessness is raising the stakes, such that the only eventual remedy may be impeachment. The claims that Trump and his legal team are putting forward are already radical: that Trump can't be charged with obstruction of justice because it's in his power to terminate an investigation at any time.

As Bauer wrote of Jay Sekulow, Trump's personal attorney in the Russia investigation, after the lawyer made the TV rounds on Sunday: "He is building the case for dismissal with all his claims against Mueller and others of 'conflicts' [of] interest, and he reaffirms in the interview that he has that authority: '[I]t can't be obstruction because you can say: It's ended. It's over. Period.'" Bauer adds:

Few lawyers would say that the president helped his legal position with this interview. It may be that he only cares so much about the substance if he has concluded that he can end it all, "period," terminating the investigation and then daring the Congress to impeach him. He would then have put the law behind him and it would be all politics. In the end, though he came close, Nixon would not go that far. As president and as "client," Trump is different.

Trump, if this account is accurate, is preparing to drive the political system over the cliff. Democrats must try to be the brakes, and they need to slam on them right now.



Courtesy of TNT

# The New “Hot Shakespeare” Show Is ... Good?

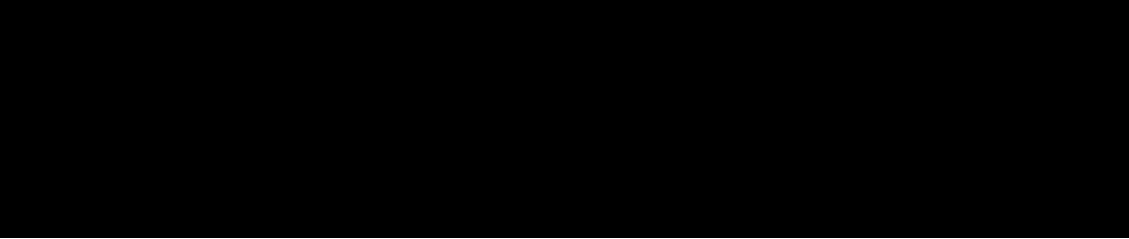
TNT’s new drama "Will" is an odd but invigorating fantasy of the Bard's salad days.

**BY JOSEPHINE LIVINGSTONE**

July 20, 2017

“Now, I know Shakespeare is a dead white guy, but he knows his shit.” So proclaims the cool teacher from 1999’s *10 Things I Hate About You*, just after he raps Sonnet 141 (“In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes...”). The teens’ mouths fall open. Adolescent minds are almost audibly blown.





*10 Things* director Gil Junger is hardly the only person to recognize that, because rap and poetry are both in verse, he could try to hip-hopera his way into a skeptical audience's heart. White House consigliere Steve Bannon once even co-authored a rap version of *Coriolanus* that featured lines like “I will return to rep my peeps!”

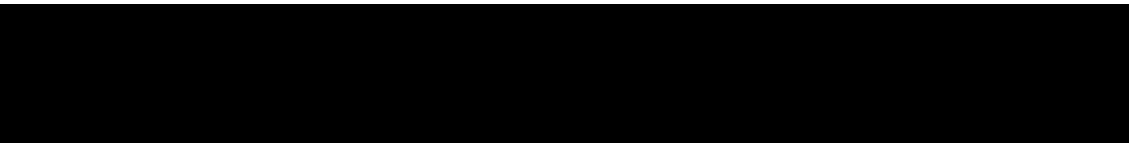
The latest attempt to repackaging Shakespeare in rap stylings is TNT's new drama *Will*. The eponymous playwright is done by newcomer Laurie Davidson, who watched *Straight Outta Compton* and *8 Mile* to warm up for his role. “Whilst I didn't go full-on gangsta rap,” he told *Metro*, “it just gave an idea of the way that people use words as weapons.”

In the first episode of *Will*, Shakespeare has to face down an actor who doesn't like him. That actor challenges him to a “duel” of words. Will starts off stutteringly, then takes flight:

*Why take offense, that this dull brain  
Doth foolishly wish to entertain?  
I make no claim to fame. Hold none in disdain.  
Why does thou fear this rustic swain?*

It's drivel, but the crowd goes wild. He hits his stride. “Thy wit is so stale, only worms would eat it!” The scene is more like the walk-off in *Zoolander* than a rap battle. But Will wins the day.

*Will* makes a story out of Shakespeare's youth, coming down hard on the theory that he was Catholic and wasn't keen on his wife Anne. It's almost *anti*-historical in its anachronisms, throwing bright lights over party scenes and dressing its extras in neon outfits. Despite its rap battle motif, the soundtrack is punk-heavy, making the most of the cultural associations of London. The hair and makeup is more like a beauty school's interpretation of punk, however, with lots of Adam Ant-style facial stripes.





Though the show is ridiculous and shares no themes whatsoever with the works of William Shakespeare, it is made warm and wonderful by a series of great casting choices. Jamie Campbell Bower plays Christopher Marlowe in a turn almost indistinguishable from Jonathan Rhys Meyers in *Gormenghast*, which is a good thing. *Trainspotting*'s Ewen Bremner plays a Catholic-hunter, while *Star Trek*'s Colm Meaney treads the boards. The only choice bit of casting for women, however, comes with Jasmin Savoy Brown as the “dark lady” of Shakespeare’s poems.

TNT has also dug out some great characters from Renaissance England. In episode three, Shakespeare and Co. go to a super-decadent party lit by blue lights and soundtracked by electronic music. (“Let’s get shitfaced,” Shakespeare’s girlfriend Alice

announces.) But there’s a secret party in the back, where John Dee and Francis Bacon and Sir Walter Raleigh supposedly lurk. Shakespeare asks Raleigh about America, and he calls it, “A brave new world, that has such things in it.” He delivers the line slowly and clearly, so that you can tell it’s from *The Tempest*. Ten seconds later, we have another garbling, as Marlowe bemoans the “fault” that “lies in [his] astrology.”

Some of the jokes are excellent. At one stage Alice comes over to Will, who is up late working on a play. Are you working on your prequel? She asks. Because she’s been thinking, and she’s got a title: “Henry VI Part 1: Rise of the Dauphin Menace.” I laughed hard, and not for the last time. Will repeatedly gets called “Shakedick.” The actor Richard Burbage seduces a girl with Sonnet 29, which he claims to have written. Raising one eyebrow, he suggests, “Shall we both get ... bootless?”

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**According to Will’s mates from the theater, “You must live fast, die young, and leave a pox-ridden corpse.”**





Courtesy of TNT

In the show's sweetest moments, shards of Shakespearean language are thrown in to teach the audience a little something about stage history. "Bedazzle is *not* a word," insists one actor. Shakespeare objects: He has coined something that makes sense, and he will not have petty convention ruin it. "You can't just make up words!" the actor responds. Will, riled up, yells: "Someone must!" He's not wrong.

According to Will's mates from the theater, "You must live fast, die young, and leave a pox-ridden corpse." And in this new show, Shakespeare is shown as young, sexy, cynical, and kind of an asshole. He gets his landlady to give him a week's free board by using his "My lips are two blushing pilgrims" line. He cheats on his wife, and writes her letters telling her to go stay at a nunnery for a while, because he can't come home: He's having too much fun.

Why not cast Marlowe and Shakespeare and Burbage as handsome anti-heroes? And as long as the jokes keep coming thick and fast *Will* is, surprisingly, a seriously watchable morsel. The leather trousers are matched by the slippery sexiness of the script. As Kit Marlowe says just after pouring a jug of red wine on a sleeping prostitute, "I must go wrestle with that bitch, the muse."

Josephine Livingstone is the culture staff writer at *The New Republic*. [@Jo\\_Livingstone](#)





Illustration by Dan Bejar

# Ultimate Salesman

How Trump is helping to revive the publishing industry.

BY ALEX SHEPHARD

July 20, 2017

The glass-encased Javits Center in Manhattan, where Hillary Clinton held her ill-fated victory party last November, now feels haunted by the ghosts of the election. In early June, during BookExpo America, the publishing industry's largest annual trade conference, Donald Trump is everywhere. Authors, booksellers, and attendees are all eager to discuss the president's latest assaults on democracy and common decency. Amid the banners promoting Dan Brown and John Grisham, a life-size cardboard cutout of Alec Baldwin doing his best Trump impression promotes the actor's forthcoming book: *You Can't Spell America Without Me: The Really Tremendous Inside Story of My Fantastic First Year as President Donald J. Trump*. For a moment, Clinton herself manages to steal back the spotlight—she shows up at the conference to push a collection of personal essays and a children's version of her 1996 best-seller, *It Takes A Village*. But it's clear that the book industry—like the rest of the country—is now consumed by all things Trump.

Since the election, dozens of books about Trump have already hit bookstores—and they're selling at a rapid clip. On the right, Trump adviser Roger Stone has written *The Making of the President 2016*, an account of the president's insurgent campaign that has sold nearly 20,000 copies. Newt Gingrich has jumped in with *Understanding Trump*, which purports to explain



Trump's populist appeal to elites in Washington and New York. On the left, scholar Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, which offers tips on how to resist authoritarianism, has sold more than 100,000 copies, while historian Allan Lichtman's *The Case for Impeachment* sold 10,000 copies in its first seven weeks.

"We are seeing more and more book publishers stepping up," says Jenn Abel Kovitz, the associate publisher of Catapult, Counterpoint Press, and Soft Skull books. "They're saying, 'These are issues that need to be handled with a complexity and depth that an online hot take can't provide.'"

Trump's rise has also sparked renewed interest in dystopian fiction. To keep up with a spike in demand after the election, Margaret Atwood's publisher reprinted 150,000 copies of her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* have shot up the best-seller lists, while sales of George Orwell's *1984* skyrocketed by 9,500 percent following Trump's inauguration. Signet Classics, which publishes the mass-market edition, rushed out 200,000 additional copies. "We've printed, just this week, about half of what we normally sell in a year," Craig Burke, the publicity director for Signet Classics, told *The New York Times* in January.

Trump didn't always fuel such a frenzy on the part of publishers. When Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist David Cay Johnston first pitched the idea of a Trump book, shortly after Trump announced his candidacy, he was met with blank stares. "I tried to do a book when Donald announced in June of 2015, and Alice Martell, my literary agent, called around," Johnston told *Publishers Weekly* last fall. "But nobody believed he would get the nomination, so nobody wanted the book." *The Making of Donald Trump* was eventually published by Melville House, a small independent press in Brooklyn, shortly after the GOP convention. It has gone on to sell more than 30,000 copies and spend four weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

By and large, however, the publishing industry—like so many others—was slow to recognize that Trump was a force to be reckoned with. It was a costly mistake: When Barnes & Noble released disappointing financial

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**Trump's presidency has created a huge market for everything from campaign memoirs to resistance**

numbers last fall, the company blamed the election. “The current trend can be traced precisely to the current election cycle, which is unprecedented in terms

of the fear, anger, and frustration being experienced by the public,” chairman Len Riggio complained to investors. “The preoccupation with this election is keeping them at home, glued to their TVs and at their desktops.” If it wasn’t about Trump, Americans weren’t buying.

Now publishers are scrambling to make up for lost time. A slew of Trump-related books have hit bookstore shelves in recent months, and more are on the way. Naomi Klein recently rushed out *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump’s Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need*. Fox News host Eric Bolling is publishing *The Swamp: Washington’s Murky Pool of Corruption and Cronyism and How Trump Can Drain It*. MSNBC anchor Katy Tur, who became a media star after she tussled with Trump during the election, will publish a campaign memoir in September, while journalists Mark Halperin and John Heilemann will churn out their inevitable take on the campaign sometime next year.

The person who may gain the most from the surge of interest in Trump books, of course, is Trump himself. By the time the real estate mogul launched his presidential campaign, his book *Trump: The Art of the Deal*—“the number-one-selling business book of all time,” he has falsely claimed—had faded in popularity. But during the election, Trump published a new paperback edition and encouraged fans at his rallies to purchase it. He even offered to sign copies for supporters who donated to his campaign. The book has once again soared up the best-seller lists. In the first six months of this year, it’s already sold more than 74,000 copies.

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**manifestos to dystopian fiction.**