

# Review of *The Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show!*

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*The Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show!*. <https://hurlyburlyshakespeareshow.com/>. First published October 17, 2017.

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## Abstract

*The Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show!* is a podcast featuring creators and hosts Aubrey Whitlock and Jess Hamlet, or as they like to call themselves, Whamlet. This project walks listeners through early modern texts, the bulk of which come from Will "The Thrill" Shakespeare (as they affectionately call him). Informal and cheeky, the show is also engaging and smart, drawing on both hosts' rich expertise as academics and practitioners.

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Have you ever needed a(n attempted) five-minute summary of a Shakespeare play? Well, you're in luck! *The Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show!* is here for you! From the power duo, Aubrey Whitlock and Jess Hamlet, *The Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show!* is a podcast featured on the Apple iTunes store and Soundcloud. The show stars both hosts as they walk listeners through Shakespeare's texts, as well as other early modern plays. The self-proclaimed #ladyacademics met while at Mary Baldwin University (né Mary Baldwin College) while pursuing their MLitt/MFA degrees. The two, known as "Whamlet," now live across the country from each other, Hamlet attending the Hudson Strode Program in Renaissance Studies in Alabama, while Whitlock lives in California pursuing her career as actor/director/stage manager. Their first meeting happened back in 2013, and their friendship eventually spurred this podcast in 2017.

The podcast has a three-and-a-half minute quick intro that gives you the down and dirty basics while also perfectly showcasing Hamlet and Whitlock's personalities.<sup>1</sup> But if you'd like a lengthier introduction, then you can skip right to the first episode. Here you'll find tidbits about the show, such as the distinctions between the 101, 201, and 301 levels, and the duo's main purpose for the podcast. The intended audience includes novices and professionals alike, basically anyone who would like to investigate the "intersection of Shakespeare, modern theater, and modern academia" ("Trailer" n.d.). This first episode highlights their passion behind the project, and much

can be said for Whamlet's passion project! As they state, they strive to "elevate the voices of lady academics and other marginalized voices within the Shakespeare universe" (Whitlock and Hamlet, 2017b). Their very conscious decision to steer away from clichéd, old school interpretations helps keep Shakespeare studies relevant and easily graspable for any skill level. So if you're interested in Renaissance plays and playwrights, then *The Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show!* would love to welcome you as an audience member. In fact, both hosts make assurances that this will not be your typical Shakespeare (or Shakespeare adjacent) conversation.

As of the end of the 2020 academic year, the duo hit the big 100 with their episode list (mini episodes included). So if you're tuning in during the summer breaks, there's plenty for you to catch up on. And although the content of each episode depends on the desires and conversation interests of Aubrey and Jess, you can skip to those that intrigue you, since all episodes stand alone in their specific focus. One of the easy ways to enter the episode pool is to follow the educational gradations broken up by the clearly marked 101, 201, and 301 levels. The 101 level handles all of the introductory stuff, providing a textual overview, major themes, and "cool stuff; some knowledge that you won't get anywhere else...[their] opinions!" (Whitlock and Hamlet 2017b). The 201 level focuses on deeper dives like close readings, and differences in performance productions. Rounding out the educational climb, the 301 level explores specific ideas and concepts, or as the duo state, the 301 episodes are where they "light shit on fire" ("Trailer" n.d.). Every episode begins with a "bawdy language warning," acknowledging the use of saucy early modern and contemporary language, which also serves to indicate the conversational tone of the podcast. From there, they cycle through different games, such as the Rhetorical Device of the Week; the Burbage Break with Master Master Hamlet; Five-Minute Summaries of each play; Performance Histories; Hot ShakesBubble Gossip; and my personal favorite, Five-Word Unhelpful Title Alternatives. All of these sections/games bring awareness to the play in entertaining and non-traditional ways and ensure that *The Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show!* never bores.

Focusing on the 101/201/301 trajectory of *Romeo and Juliet* in particular, the progressive building of knowledge should not feel intimidating. Episode 2: "*Romeo and Juliet* 101" (published 10/23/2017) offers "a quick and dirty crash course" about the play, and confirms its "raunchy" nature. This episode details the origination of the Burbage Break. As Master Master Hamlet states, theater historians have explained Romeo's disappearance in the fourth act as a trope typically used by Shakespeare to give the main actor (Richard Burbage) a break during each production. Along with the Burbage Break, the duo move through the other games mentioned above, which tend to find more footing within the 101 level episodes. This particular episode explores how *Romeo and Juliet* is typically heralded as a love story first and foremost, but Whamlet call it out for what it truly

is: "what happens when teenagers and hormones collide dangerously." But my favorite moment comes when Jess describes the beautiful poetry within the play. During Romeo and Juliet's initial meeting, and their following conversations, they "get all iambic in each other's pentameter." If anyone asks me, that line is pure poetry.

The 201 level jumps back into previously 101-ed plays, but with more intricacy and specificity. This gradual movement through the early modern oeuvre creates a relationship with the texts that is movable, active, and still very much alive. Episode 16: "*Romeo and Juliet* 201" (published 1/29/2018) picks up where its 101 counterpart left off. The discussion about the play moves into questions of Juliet's agency based on her "lady brain" equivocation, an examination of print history and secretary hand, and some current theater performance history with the problems of acting with the "Shakespeare hand." This particular episode offers visuals on the online platform to support the secretary hand conversation, as well as offering links to all of the productions mentioned. The 201 episode provides an immersive experience, which brings the play to the reader in a more robust way. I personally feel compelled to pull the text out to follow along with their thoughts. Also, the discussion of current scholars and practitioners allows the listeners to locate themselves within the sphere of early modern academia and performance.

Finishing out the educational gradation there's episode 75: "*Romeo and Juliet* 301" (published 10/14/2019). This hyper-focused discussion does not utilize the same structured bits as the earlier levels. Although the co-hosts note that not all 301-level episodes will follow the same format, this in-depth look provides a great discussion of Q1 variations in *Romeo and Juliet*. They walk through the Queen Mab speech first, which, in case you didn't know, is given to Benvolio in the Q1 edition, whereas most know Mercutio as the Queen Mab expositor. While working through a couple of other speeches, the duo highlight why choosing your text matters. It isn't so much about quarto editions being bad or worse than another edition (which is the usual narrative), but about actively deciding what you want a performance to say.

You also have the opportunity to follow *The Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show!* on social media (and you definitely should); they're active on both Instagram (@hurlyburlyshakes) and Twitter (@HurlyBurlyShake). Once the academic year starts you'll see more posts in connection to the episodes coming out, but for the summer time their Twitter presence retweets and enhances the very voices they speak about in the introductory episode. These presences will never disappoint. Within the 2018-2019 academic year, for example, Hamlet and Whitlock created an "Early Modern Dick Bracket Draft" competition involving characters across various early modern dramas. It included interactive polls on both Twitter and Instagram where you, the audience member, could vote for

which characters are the biggest "dicks" of the renaissance play genre. I don't want to spoil anything for you, but the winner of this draft can be found in the episode about "2 *Henry VI* 101" from 4/22/2019.

All in all this podcast fulfills the intentions laid out in its introduction. The information is always entertaining, and the expertise of Jess Hamlet and Aubrey Whitlock is at times very daunting. I'm particularly jealous of their ability to quote these plays at the drop of a hat. So I hope my fondness for this particular podcast convinces you to tune in. Plus who doesn't love knowing that "you never need to worry about someone mansplaining Shakespeare to you" ("*Romeo and Juliet* 101" 2017). There's heart in this production, which isn't often felt in academic arenas, or in everyday ones for that matter. You'll feel connected to these #ladyacademics, as if you're discussing these plays with a friend in your own home, and there's something extremely special to be said of that type of connection. I cannot talk this podcast up enough. So do it, click play, I promise you you won't regret it.

### Notes

1. This intro episode is available at the foot of the podcast's home page, <https://hurlyburlyshakespeareshow.com/>.

## References

- Whitlock, Aubrey and Jess Hamlet. n.d. "Introducing the Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show! – a Trailer." *The Hurly Burly Shakespeare Show!*. Available online at <https://hurlyburlyshakespeareshow.com>. [Accessed 19 December 2020.]
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