

# 101+ Reasons\* to See/Buy Branagh's \*HAMLET\*

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Renie Pickman-Thoon and the members of the Ken mailing list give you plenty of reasons to own one of the masterpieces of the century...

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1. The "Fall of a Sparrow". Writing and delivery in equal perfection.
2. "It is I, Hamlet the Dane." Delivery. And the "tuff" side of Hamlet.
3. The editing during the "mousetrap" scene. From the kiss between Claudius and Gertrude to the call for "Lights!"
4. "Oh my prophetic soul - mine Uncle?" Delivery and expression.
5. Winslet manages not to trip when being thrown about in the nunnery scene.
6. Branagh's many visual parallels. Like Christ figures at the end of Parts 1 and 2.
7. The editing (Fortinbras' approach) during Hamlet's apology to Laertes.
8. The "robocop" fencing outfits.
9. The confetti and Doyle's music in this march.
10. Hamlet's kiss of Claudius. Pure hate indeed.
11. The duel sequences. But especially when Hamlet and Laertes both land at the same time upstairs, a la West Side Story.
12. "Go, bid the soldiers shoot." Melodious and dramatic delivery from Sewell.
13. Black specks of Fortinbras' soldiers on white snow, scurrying into the palace like cockroaches.
14. "That's good. Mobléd queen is good." Briers' delivery. Branagh's reaction.
15. All of Billy Crystal on screen. Amazingly, Shakespeare does sound good with a New York accent.
16. The swashbuckling rope ride and chandelier.
17. Derek Jacobi whispering, "Give me some light, away."
18. "To be or not to be...." Everything about it. The delivery, acting, camera work, music, resonant concept. Genius here.
19. Julie Christie's honest and believable Gertrude.

20. Shots of the back of Hamlet's head. Great and resonant and I've no idea why I love these.
21. The Hamlet and Ophelia flashbacks.
22. The opulent sets, Blenheim Palace, and the checkerboard floor.
23. Branagh's conspiratorial looks when he tosses his head toward a different exit.
24. "fretted with golden fire..." Tremulous vocal moment.
25. The ghost, and especially the close-up editing between the ghost's eyes and Hamlet's, in letterbox.
26. 70 mm.
27. The excessive shots of the earth opening up. At first viewing, they're funny, and overwrought. After a while, you actually look for them.
28. The signature camera movements. The encirclement and trapping of Hamlet by the King's men (which begins with, "Oh, here they come.") (With dogs!)
29. "Not so my lord, I am too much i' the sun." And viewing Hamlet from his boots, up.
30. The modest funeral for Hamlet. And the crane shot.
31. Branagh almost knocks the globe over.
32. The tracking shot which first reveals Hamlet in black, stiff, alone, eyes downcast. And then, Hamlet's first line in voice over.
33. All of Hamlet's clothes.
34. Branagh's hair. Yes. Jarring at first, then you love it. So cool.
35. Branagh's just barely under the lid of the pressure cooker anger in the aftermath of the play - then blowing the lid off. "Then I will come to my mother by and by!" Breathtaking.
36. Branagh's signature framed trio shots and variations thereof, including in the Great Hall when Hamlet is flanked by Claudius and Gertrude, in the closet scene when the ghost appears between Gertrude and Hamlet, Hamlet flanked by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when he questions whether they were sent for. (Many more!)
37. Robin Williams, then Branagh, saying, "imponed."
38. The editing and acting when Hamlet thinks he's escaped into his room, followed by the rifle fall and click.
39. The way Branagh shudders and closes his eyes when Claudius says, "And think of us, as of a father." The music's pause there is also spot on.

40. Placido Domingo.
41. "I loved Ophelia!" Branagh makes you really believe it.
42. This is not a story about a man who couldn't make up his mind.
43. Patrick Doyle's score. Especially Hamlet's theme. After watching "How all occasions..." several times, you realize the music there is not overwhelming, and not simply a riff or rip-off of St.Crispin's Day.
44. Rufus Sewell as Fortinbras. He sure looks like he could shark up a list of landless resolute, and his voice and stature bring life to this part.
45. Hamlet's look at the conspirators below, plotting his entrapment.
46. Camera point of view through the binoculars. I know I mention the whole scene, but this was a device I'm sure Shakespeare would've liked.
47. The way Branagh holds his foil as he heads for Laertes in earnest.
48. The spearing of Derek Jacobi as a send-up of his pointed end in Branagh's \*Dead Again\*.
49. "Do it England!" Jacobi's delivery.
50. "On him." Acting and delivery following Gertrude's question, "Whereon do you look?"
51. The way Branagh deftly whips out the bare bodkin. (No, not that bodkin.)
52. Choice of voice over and camera work during, "Now might I do it, pat." Which I keep thinking is what Nixon must have said.
53. Choice of voice over for " 'T' is the poison cup, 't' is too late."
54. Shot of Fortinbras' soldiers coming through the foggy mist.
55. Voice over of "angels and ministers of grace defend us..." while Branagh runs through the forest. This too just grows on you. You enjoy the pounding of Doyle's music, like Hamlet's heart.
56. "...wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." The camera movement with Branagh's peering through the model stage, and then fall of the king to the cellar below.
57. The cut to the noise behind the mirrored door, Branagh's slow turning head movement and question to Ophelia, "Where is your father?"
58. Winslet's delivery of, "At home, my lord."
59. Julie Christie's deliveries of, "Yet all that is I see." and "What act that roars so loud and thunders in the index?"

60. The way that Fortinbras' sword passes in front of his face.
61. "Propose the oath, my lord." Delivery.
62. Nicholas Farrell's delivery of, "Goodnight sweet Prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." That line is almost as hard to do well as "To be or not to be."
63. "You might have rhymed." Delivery.
64. Branagh's look after Polonius has complimented his recitation.
65. "but it cannot..." Jacobi's delivery during his call to heaven.
66. Winslet's face squished up against the mirror. Uncomfortable, resonant image.
67. "I'll no more on it. It hath made me mad." Tearful, heart-rending delivery.
68. Osric's sword whacking the chair.
69. "I have it." Jacobi's delivery and acting when he thinks up the poison cup idea.
70. "In the secret parts of her, most true, she is a strumpet." Scorn, anger brewing in delivery.
71. The pause and resentment following Hamlet's decision to play the bout instead of drinking.
72. "Re-speaking earthly thunder." Delivery.
73. Camera shots and lighting of Branagh's eyes, all during the revelation of the King's murder.
74. The extra pause when we see Hamlet amidst the confetti after the doors have closed. In silence. A few stray bits making their way down.
75. "The point envenomed too? Then poison, to thy work!" Delivery, acting, editing.
76. "Take up the body." Lilted delivery from Sewell.
77. Gerard Depardieu. He still looks good and seeing him reminds me of his Cyrano de Bergerac.
78. The costumes at the court.
79. "I do not know why yet I live to say this thing's to do." and "How stand I then, a father killed, a mother stained, excitements of my reason and my blood and let all sleep?" Delivery. In fact, after seeing it several times, the whole speech gives me chills. And thrills.
80. Branagh's delivery of "I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!" and his decision not to change that line.
81. Every single camera shot is well thought out, dense and rich in color, shading, and meaning.

82. Ophelia's walking to and facing the wall. Full of meaning and striking.
83. Winslet's cupped hand when she says, "There's a daisy."
84. The drums as the body of Hamlet is carried out.
85. "The mousetrap." Delivery.
86. It's whole thing. The whole bloody glorious text.
87. It's three hours and 58 minutes of everything you could hope for.
88. Hamlet doesn't have a thing for his mom.
89. "O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers." Hamlet to Ophelia "live" in flashback. Perfect.
90. "Not a whit. We defy augury." Delivery, and as good as what follows.
91. "Wretched queen." Delivery.
92. "I die Horatio...The rest is silence." Especially the way Branagh hangs onto the last word, and the decision not to be in Horatio's arms.
93. The clattering of the poison cup as it falls from Horatio's hand to the ground.
94. Branagh's decision to say, "I'll ha'e it", instead of "I'll have it."
95. Hamlet's push of Horatio after Laertes swipes his shoulder, and the music which marks the push.
96. "So much for him". Delivery and tearing up of the letter.
97. "Saw? Who?" Acting and delivery - Branagh barely whispers it and we're hanging on his words.
98. "They did make love to that employment." Almost makes you feel they deserved it.
99. Hamlet is me, Hamlet is Bosnia, Hamlet is this table.....
100. If you buy it (and even if you don't) you can watch it again and again, and, as Branagh says, "It gives you kind of an unconditional feeling. It gives you something. It's poetry and it nourishes the soul."
101. Branagh's "version of Hamlet must rank him as the screen's greatest interpreter of Shakespeare. "
102. Branagh tells us not to see the air, then sees it in several scenes.
103. Jack Lemmon, trying to make the words come out. Felix Unger would have had less of a problem. You can't very well audition him.

104. The way Branagh falls over onto the ground. It's funny - sorry!
105. Branagh doesn't have a thing for Julie Christie.
106. "Seems, madam, Nay it is, I know not seems" -delivery and teary eyes - always has me running for the kleenex.
107. When during the "cast thy nighted color off.."speech, Jacobi reaches to put an arm about Hamlet, and Branagh almost, but not quite flinches. (Slightly different from #39-ed.)
108. The subtle use of the camera to emphasise the fact that the Royal Family's touching scene is being watched by an audience.
109. The Oath in the Woods. The shot of Horatio. Ken and Marcellus standing like a heroic trinity was cool.
110. Can't leave out the most popular reason among my peers: Looking at Ken in tight black pants for 4 hours.
111. The duel. Eat your heart out Errol Flynn. (Different from #11 b/c of E.F. reference is cool.-ed.)
112. The body's under the stairs in the lobby... "Cough"...he will wait till you come." Soooo funny!
113. Hamlet and Ophelia flashbacks. (No different than #21, but too, too good to edit out as a repeat -ed.)
114. "Wrote it fair..."--great dimple shot.
115. "Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I..." scene--one long take, goes from disgust, to rage, to plotting. Perfection itself.
116. Hamlet and Ophelia flashbacks. (#21, #113-ed.)
117. That black outfit. (More particular than #33, and so worthy-ed.)
118. Hamlet running backward during fencing duel. (More specific than #11 or #111 -ed.)
119. The definitive Horatio (the best damn friend a guy could have.)
120. Hamlet and Ophelia flashbacks. (#21, #113, #116-ed.)
121. Looking at Yorick's skull, dead on (Hamlet's P.O.V.)
122. Claudius goes to Gertrude's room, sees Polonius' blood, picks up the two pictures off the bed, susses it out.
121. "My father. Sometimes I think I see him..."

122. After the Mousetrap play, tormenting R & G. Too funny! (Different observation from #35 - ed.)

123. The look on Hamlet's face when the Ghost says "damned incest".

124. Fortinbras--"Go...softly...on".

125. First Gravedigger--"I came to't that day that our last king, (pause) Hamlet (pause) o'ercame Fortinbras" wink, wink! (More specific than #15- ed.)

126. Hamlet--"to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumbshows and noise". ("The Lost World" springs to mind...)

127. "Buzz Buzz!"

128. The whole "where's Polonius?" scene but especially, Hamlet--"In heaven; send hither to see: if your messenger find him not there, seek him i' the other place yourself." Also, Claudius' disgusted, "Alas, alas" when Hamlet goes off on one of his riffs.

129. Patrick Doyle's wonderful music--he even makes the Bard singable (Ophelia's lovely acapella tune in her bonkers scene.) [And check out the English translation of the In Pace song. Perfect choice!] (Different than #43 -ed.)

130. Hamlet and Ophelia flashbacks. (#21, #113, #116, #120. This is her last gasp.-ed.)

131. Make money for Castle Rock who deserves our support and undying gratitude.

132. "Rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument, but greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honour's at the stake."

133. "How does your honour for this many a day?" "I humbly thank you; well, well, well."

134. "I am more an antique Roman than a Dane. Here's yet some liquor left."

135. "As thou'rt a man, give me the cup. Let go. By heaven, I'll ha't." (Different point than #94. - ed.)

136. I believe the Hamlet and Ophelia flashbacks have mentioned once or twice - so I won't bother! (#21, #113, #116, #120, #130. These few, these happy few. -ed.)

137. Hamlet's costume in the graveyard scene (to die for!) (More particular than #33.-ed.)

138. Hamlet in that long black coat hanging out with the fencers with Ophelia and Laertes looking on.

139. "You shall not go my lord!" "Hold off your hands!" "Be ruled, you shall not go!" "My fate cries out and makes each petty artere in this body as hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve!"

140. Hamlet interacting with the children. Way too cute. I can't wait to see Ken with his first (pretend) kids in "The Gingerbread Man"!!

141. The tracking scene with the camera following Claudius from the hallway to the pool of blood in Gertrude's room.

142. "Why look how unworthy a thing you would make of me..."

143. Polonius: "This is too long!"

144. The whole sponge scene leading up to the chase. (Pretty close to #28, but describing it as the sponge scene is very cool.)

145. "Remember me....."

146. The boots. (Different emphasis from #29. But I wonder which ones. I think the black ones were meant here.-ed.)

147. Hamlet is Hamlet, there's nothing more to say.

148. The first and most important reason to go and see it is BECAUSE KEN IS PLAYING AND DIRECTING IT, YOU WALLIES!!!

149. The evolution. You can see Hamlet changing and when he comes back from the ship, he's calmer and has a more fatalistic attitude. Having done the step to one and then two other murders (Polonius and R+G), he stops beating himself up about not having enough courage and being a coward. He's ready to do what his father told him to and he's ready to die (What do you think "the readiness is all" speech is for???).

150. Ken in that black, short, bolero-style jacket for the play. [Dear G\*d in heaven...getting weak in the knees] (A different black outfit than #115.-ed.)

151. The continuous camera shot in the scene where Gertrude tells Claudius that Hamlet has killed Polonius. The camera goes up the hallway, into Claudius' room around the table, follows him out of the room to Gertrude's room follows him to the bed, then, out of the room, into the hallway, and backs down the hallway. NO CUTS! Sooo cool. That's Art.

152. The great camera shot of Hamlet's eyes during "Now might I do it, pat - "You can almost see the point when this guy goes 'over the edge'. (More particular point than #52.-ed.)

153. The fact that we are still talking about this film after 6 months. That's powerful filmmaking!

154. Ken and Kate pressing together on the bed, then Ken reciting poetry for his just bedded young lover.

155. The sight of Ken with muscles and without a shirt! Takes one's breath away just to remember in your mind's eye....

156. Ken's princely self-assured walk as he strides about the castle as if he owns it.

157. "Hide fox and all after!" Branagh's visual translation of Hamlet's state: Escape is impossible. We know it and he knows it, but for the moment he finds pure, giddy release in racing thru the rooms of the palace, guards and all scrambling in pursuit. His chamber is only an illusion of safety, until reality literally clicks into focus. (Different than #28 and #144.-ed.)

158. The demon book. After learning about the appearance of his father's ghost, Hamlet finds a book in his extensive library and opens it to a chapter on devils and demons. He knew right where it was - he has read it before, probably more than once.

159. All those hidden doors! This is where Hamlet grew up - a place designed for secrets and spying.

160. Hamlet's shocking vision of killing Claudius at prayer. Another example of the way virtually everything in the film, from the sets to the camerawork, grew out of the text and Branagh's particular understanding of it. (See #52, #152-ed.)

161. The way acting choices illuminate Shakespeare's text while at the same time being gripping story-telling. Hamlet's last moments are peaceful; he slips into death almost as if going to sleep. It resonates with "To be or not to be", the concern "for in that sleep of death, what dreams may come" and Hamlet's fear of damnation. Then it connects with Horatio's prayer "Good night, sweet Prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." Good night, as in "God give you good night" (OED), a phrase to wish someone safe, untroubled rest, which is Hamlet's most heartfelt desire.

162. The comforting way Horatio puts his arm around Hamlet's shoulder when they realize the open grave is for Ophelia.

163. "Let be." The hug after "the fall of a sparrow" speech, Hamlet is saying good-bye. Horatio's helpless anxiety for this friend - makes his rash impulse to follow Hamlet in death believable, and that he hears Hamlet's plea not to.

164. How convincingly the characters relate to one another: you truly believe Hamlet and Ophelia had been in love, that Hamlet and Horatio WERE old friends, the family dynamics between both the royal household and Polonius.'

165. How the full text, along with the art direction, direction and acting totally immerses the audience in the Elsinore court. By the end, you FEEL likelike you've known these people and their story.

166. Ken's film raises the burning question: What \*are\* those ropes attached to when the Norwegian soldiers swing through the windows of Elsinore?

167. "Will you play upon this pipe?" - where Hamlet makes a grave tactical error by revealing that he knows R & G are spying for the King; Ken really nailed this scene.

168. Sewell's "conquering Denmark expression."

169. The incredible physical likeness between Hamlet and Claudius - you can believe they are related!!

170. "What a piece of work is a man....in movement how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god..." - you said it Ken!!

171. Hamlet lean and fit and blonde!! - I wonder if KB is back on the steak, chips and tomato ketchup now??

172. 65 mm. (See #26.-ed.)

173. Analogue, mag-stripe sound. (See #26.-ed.)

174. The scene that starts with "Now I am alone ..." with the old clock on the extreme right and its slow "tock ... tock ... tock ..." coming from the right-hand speakers. (The clock is different than #115.-ed.)

175. Branagh's use of long, single-shot takes - so very difficult to do well.

176. The remaining teeth in Yorick's skull match those of Yorick alive (and, yes, those are Ken Dodd's real teeth)!

177. Gertrude's "if-looks-could-kill" look at Claudius when she refuses to follow him.

178. The magnificent wide shot in the State Hall as Claudius and Gertrude leave under a cascade of confetti and the sound "fills" the screen as much as the image - simply awesome. That scene alone justifies Branagh's use of 65mm camera stock and multi-track sound!

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