



# Beginning

*Kenneth Branagh*

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## **Beginning** Kenneth Branagh

A readable, engaging and insightful account. Chicago TribuneBreezy, high-spirited, interesting... New York NewsdayIn Beginning, Academy Award nominee Kenneth Branagh charts the ups and downs of a life in acting - a young career that has made him the most acclaimed actor of his generation. Opening with his childhood in working-class Belfast, in a neighborhood of drinkers and dreamers, Branagh describes the fires of early ambition that drew him to the stage and to the plays of Shakespeare. At age twenty-four he founded his own actor's troupe with the goal of performing those plays; at twenty-eight, he directed and starred in the movie of Henry V, the role that won him international fame. Beginning is crammed with colorful anecdotes and insights into the actor's and director's craft, including: Stories about Olivier, Gielgud, Finney, Jacobi, and a private audience with Prince Charles to research the role of Henry VAd-libbing Shakespeare when props are missingThe differences in performing on stage, television, and large-screen filmsA near-miss in landing the role of Mozart in the film Amadeus: an actor's dream turned nightmareRaising millions from scratch and filming Henry V in seven weeksWritten with great humor and a natural storyteller's gift, Beginning is an intriguing book for anyone interested in theater and film.Kenneth Brannagh has received Academy Award nominations for both his acting in and direction of Henry V. His varied stage and screen performances include several major roles with the Royal Shakespeare Company, on the screen in A Month in the Country, and in Masterpiece Theater's Fortunes of War. As the founder of the Renaissance Theater Company he has directed King Lear, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and many other plays that have toured throughout the world. Now working on new film and theater projects. Kenneth Branagh lives in England.

## **Beginning Details**

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Author : Kenneth Branagh

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# From Reader Review Beginning for online ebook

## Glen Engel-Cox says

I'm in love with Kenneth Branagh—no! Not that way! I'm in love with the talent and the drive. And the love is mixed with equal parts envy and recrimination. Oh, how I would like to be Branagh, aged 28, and directing himself in Henry V, or, even before that, just as a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, filming a movie of the early life of D.H. Lawrence in Australia. Yes, I would like to be an actor, but for ever much a dream it may be in Britain, even more so in America. Here, there are only two places where one can gain recognition—New York and Los Angeles. Even more so, those are probably the only places one could make a living at it. But it's envy of the man's energy just as much. Sure, it may be the case that becoming an actor is easier in Britain, but then how does one explain Branagh's writing his own one-man shows, or his first play. No, this is truly a man with talent and drive, probably equally strong. And so the recrimination. I am 27, only a year away from the magic age at which this book was written, and what do I have to show for it? I finally have my Bachelor's degree, I've published two stories and written a few more, I've been involved in one magazine of note, and I've lived in several places besides where I grew up. And that's it. Not really a lot. Wasted time? Some of it, and yet, on the other hand, I wouldn't exchange it, either. I just wish that I had something more tangible to show for it. Branagh's young to write an autobiography, even a first volume as this undoubtably will turn out to be, and he comments as much. Even for all his accomplishments, he isn't content to rest. There's a moral there, I believe. What Branagh has to show you is that greatness, which I do believe he has already obtained, is not an ephemeral quality, but elusive and rare. It can be had, through hard work. I heard someone recently on NPR—a poet, I think—talk about writing. He said, attempt greatness, because if you fail, well, then, it may simply be good, which isn't bad. But if you only attempt to be good.... I will attempt greatness.

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## Lynette says

Branagh has such a way with words! I've read book three times, and the story of the kangaroo still makes me laugh so hard I cry!

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## Bobbe says

As a great Branagh fan, I'm finding this entertaining, fun--seems to be a straightforward memoir, so far covers his earliest years, acting school, first jobs. Oops, spoke too soon; a bit too much me, me, me (he was I think 26 when he wrote this, perhaps too early for a memoir. I quit about halfway through.

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## Marge says

Kenneth Branagh had the "audacity" to write an auto- biography before he was 30! And thank you Ken! This is a wonderful book about his early years with the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, meeting his first wife, Emma Thompson and directing his first movie, the brilliant Henry IV. He's open, honest, and a terrific read. I highly recommend it and eagerly await his next auto-biography!

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## Alice says

Such a brilliantly funny and totally fresh account of a young actor/director growing up, training, and producing his own work. Branagh is such a powerful and significant force in modern theatre and this book hilariously and transparently outlines his beginning. Would so recommend.

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## Lori says

I like Kenneth Branagh as an actor and as a director and I just recently heard him speak about Hamlet. I look forward to reading this book.

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## Brad says

I am a huge, unabashed fan of Ken. I love him. I have loved him for years. And this extremely early biography simply made me love him more. I love him so much that if you ask me the question, "Emma or Ken?" My answer is Ken (though I love Emma too).

Beginning took much heat for being precipitous. It came out extremely early in Ken's career, just after his amazing triumph with Henry V, and everyone thought it was dreadfully narcissistic to write an autobiography when he was so damn young. They're probably right. But that arrogance, that self belief, the surprising humility beneath the arrogance, the recognition that it was too much, and the wonderful tale of a young life on the brink of a greatness that would fizzle and remain on the verge for years is just too beautiful to dismiss.

A good portion of the book is taken up with his production diary for Henry V (which is excellent, particularly for anyone interested in some day directing films), but the best parts of the book are the truly autobiographical chapters, which offer unforgettable anecdotes about all of Ken's heroes. These sections made me fall deeply in love with a couple of generations of amazing British actors, and I remain fans of them all to this day. Branagh's marathon runs with Brian Blessed, his awe over the Hamlet recall of Derek Jacobi (the man knows the ENTIRE play by heart), his love for Olivier and Gielgud, his crush on Judi Dench, all of it dazzles, and it is obvious that Branagh was -- and if one considers his body of work he must remain -- as big a fan as he is a colleague of these geniuses.

And you know what, apart from his appallingly shabby rendition of Frankenstein, I remain a massive fan of Branagh's body of work. I loved him most recently in Valkyrie (regardless of my general disappointment in the film) and Wallander, but I really can't think of anything else I've disliked. I know some find his Hamlet overwrought, but I love huge portions of it and like most of the rest (and casting Heston as the Player King is genius). I loved him as Gilderoy Lockhart. I still adore Dead Again. And I don't care what anyone thinks, I love his casting of Keanu as Denzel's brother in Much Ado About Nothing.

You can tell me he sucks. But I'll disagree. You can tell me I am a fool. And I will say you're probably right. But I love Ken. Nothing's going to change that. And I know, at least, that James has my back.

Kenneth Branagh is the King. I can't wait for The Mighty Thor!

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### **Susan says**

I've been a Ken fan for a long time. I actually had this book in my bookcase waiting to be read. However, between moving and unpacking and weeding out I'm afraid this book was a casualty. I recently discovered it again at the library and am so glad I finally read it.

I am amazed at the ambition of this guy! And his humbleness that went along with it. Sure, it is one thing to pitch an idea and say it is the best thing going and will be wildly successful, but it is another, when rethinking and having second thoughts that perhaps it wasn't such a great endeavor after all. This happens quite a bit with Mr. Branagh's project, however all of them seemed to have come off rather well.

I also got alot of the behind the scene stuff with raising money for productions, hiring directors and actors, location shooting, different venues for plays, rehearsing for TV productions and so much more which I found extremely interesting.

Highly recommend.

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### **Surreysmum says**

Enjoyed this memoir very much, although I'm sorry that Branagh didn't hold off a few more years (it was published in 1989) so that it could have been even more full of anecdotes and reflections on Branagh's remarkable (and by no means concluded) career. It helps that even as a young man he was both self-reflective and capable of being ironic about himself; indeed, it's probably what made him in any way tolerable to those who dealt first-hand with his precocity and ferocious drive in his early 20s! What we lose in scope, we gain in relative freshness of perception, and for something that was thrown together, as he disarmingly admits, for the money, during what sounds like an entirely inhuman schedule of acting, directing, and forming a company in the late 80s, this is a remarkably readable and enjoyable piece of work.

Among the many highlights, his appreciative comments about Judi Dench's debut as a director, his very funny anecdote about ad-libbing in iambic pentameter about the absence of an absolutely crucial prop - a glove - and his diary-like daily entries about the filming of *Henry V* are what stick in my memory right at the moment. Very much recommended to anyone who's enjoyed his work.

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### **IOSEPHVS BIBLIOTHECARIVS says**

A wonderful, entertaining look into Branagh's early personal and professional life up to the completion of *Henry V* (1989). I hope he writes a book soon called 'Middle'.

My favorite quote: "Henry [V] was a young man, and so was I. He was faced with an enormous responsibility. I didn't have to run the country and invade France, but I did have to control Brian Blessed and open the Stratford season."

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## **Annaklara says**

Did he write this at 28 or something. I was twenty when I bought it and sort of had à crush in Branagh, Firth and Linus Roache. Jesus, this is not High litteraturen, Mr Branagh does better at the movies. But I am à sucker for biographies and out of nostalgia I just can't throw it away. And of course, are you interested in the early life of Mr Branagh, this is à first account Easy read.

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## **Antoinette says**

I thought Branagh was the most talented writer, actor, director around before I read this book so I evaluate it with prior bias. He says right out he wrote it for money so that he could mount the productions he choose with the actors he wanted. He has a wonderful sense of humor and, at least at this point in his life, was very self-effacing.

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## **JCB says**

Interesting read, but a bit dry and technical. Not exactly a Kitty Kelly type of celebrity bio. But then again, who wants that? Still worthwhile to read, although not entirely sure how valuable it is since he wrote it as he was just becoming well known worldwide (with Henry V), and he admittedly wrote it because he needed the money.

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## **Julie Bozza says**

Absolutely loved it. Branagh writes in a steady, clear and detailed style leavened with a great deal of humour and honesty. The book - and Branagh himself - are not only loveable but immensely likeable, too.

This tells the tale of Branagh's early years, from his family background in Belfast, through his developing urge to act, to his hard-won independent successes in acting and directing during 1988-89. And of course it's not just about him but about acting, actors, RADA, Shakespeare, London, and so on - and also includes loving portraits-in-words of Judi Dench, Brian Blessed, and other theatrical luminaries.

One such portrait I deeply appreciated was that of Rupert Everett, with whom Branagh starred in a stage version of *Another Country*. I am a big fan of Everett, but it can be difficult to see past the 'frosty' exterior, and the external noise, to the man himself. Not so in this book, where Branagh praises Everett's humility, patience and talent:

At the second audition for the play, Branagh is unexpectedly asked to read the character Judd. "I relied on sight-reading and discovered the scene as I went along. Rupert judged his reading beautifully. He could easily have bulldozed me, having played the part of Bennett already [in the film] to huge success; alternatively, he could simply not have bothered. Instead, he played the scene with me so that I could start to understand it as we went along." And so on. Bless them both.

Similarly we are treated to a wonderful view of Prince Charles, who Branagh first met when he was cheeky enough to ask for insight into playing the character Henry V for the RSC. Branagh tells Prince Charles his thoughts on how Henry's "loneliness is intense and his hurt at the various betrayals and losses is very acute". They talk about how profoundly this can change a person. Branagh sees in Charles the resulting "extraordinary melancholy" that had produced not bitterness but "a more useful but painful wisdom". Branagh concludes:

"He bore the inevitable bruises of his position with great courage, and although ... I could detect the haunted look of responsibility, the very fact that he was speaking to me was an indication of his continuing desire to give people the benefit of the doubt."

Wonderful stuff!

Recommended for anyone interested in acting, actors, or Britain generally.

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## **Grey Rzeznik says**

No actor should go without reading this, particularly if you've ever been part of a theatrical production. I knew I was going to love it when, in the prologue, he unabashedly admits that the only reason he went along with writing this book was to fund new office space for his fledgling production company because he couldn't imagine why a 20-something should be writing a biography. The rest of the book follows that self-depreciating vein and is candid and humorous.

This is the third time I've read it since having it.

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