



Universal Man: The Lives of John Maynard Keynes

By Richard Davenport-Hines

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In *Universal Man*, noted biographer and historian Richard Davenport-Hines revives our understanding of John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), the twentieth century's most charismatic and revolutionary economist. Keynes helped FDR launch the New Deal, saved Britain from financial crisis twice over the course of two World Wars, and instructed Western nations on how to protect themselves from revolutionary unrest, economic instability, high unemployment, and social dissolution. Isaiah Berlin called Keynes “the cleverest man I ever knew”—both “superior and intellectually awe-inspiring.” Eric Hobsbawm, the twentieth century's preeminent historian, considered him as influential as Lenin, Stalin, Roosevelt, Hitler, Churchill, Gandhi, and Mao. Keynes was nothing less than the Adam Smith of his time: his *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, published in 1936, became the most important economics book of the twentieth century, as important as Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in inaugurating an economic era.

Keynes's brilliant ideas made possible 35 years of prosperity after the Second World War, the most sustained period of rapid expansion in history. And now, and in the wake of the 2008 global economic collapse, he is once again shaping our world. Every day, we are likely to hear about “Keynesian economics” or the “Keynesian Revolution,” terms that testify to his continuing influence on both economic theory and government policies. Indeed, with the thorough discrediting of his opponents—Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, Alan Greenspan, and other supporters of the notion that capitalism is self-regulating, and needs no government intervention—nations across the world are turning to Keynes's signature innovations: above all that governments must involve themselves in their economies to stave off financial collapse.

Previous biographies have explored Keynes economic thought at great length and often in the jargon of the discipline. *Universal Man* is the first accessible biography of Keynes, and reveals Keynes as much more than an economist. Like many Englishmen of his class and era, Keynes compartmentalized his life.

Accordingly, Davenport-Hines views Keynes through multiple windows, as a youthful prodigy, a powerful government official, an influential public man, a bisexual living in the shadow of Oscar Wilde's persecution, a devotee of the arts, and an international statesman of great renown. Delving into Keynes's experiences and thought, Davenport-Hines shows us a man who was equally at ease socialising with the Bloomsbury Group as he was persuading heads of state to adopt his policies. Exploring the desires and experiences that compelled Keynes to innovate, Davenport-Hines is the first to argue that Keynesian economics has an aesthetic basis.

In this book we come to understand not just the most enduringly influential economist of the modern era, but one of the most gifted and vital men of our times: a disciplined logician with a capacity for glee who persuaded people, seduced them, subverted old ideas, and installed new ones; a man whose high brilliance did not give people vertigo, but clarified and lengthened their perspectives. Engaging, learned, and sparkling with wit and insight, *Universal Man* is the perfect match for its subject.

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Editorial Review

Review

London Evening Standard (UK)

"[A] succinct, lively and well-written biography.... [Reducing the amount written on Keynes] has been done with great elegance and panache by Davenport-Hines, in a volume that will introduce Keynes and his strange world to a new generation of readers."

H-Net

"[Davenport-Hines's] lens is directed not at Keynes the macroeconomist but at Keynes the man himself. Fortunately, the author has a rich and compelling story to tell....non-economists who have never read a Keynes biography and are not looking for lots of technical detail and jargon will find it an absorbing read. Even many economists, like me, are likely to derive some fun and profit from it."

The Oldie (UK)

"This is an entrancing book, always light but never weightless and I am sure that John Maynard Keynes would have enjoyed it."

Library Journal

"This book will suit a broad audience wanting to understand Keynes and the period in which he lived."

Kirkus

"An admiring and nuanced book filled with insights into this scholar and man of action in all his complexity."

Publishers Weekly

"[A] gracefully written biography.... This is a delightful, detailed portrait, rich in interesting anecdote and encompassing the entire roster of Keynes's accomplishments."

Wall Street Journal

"Quite short, readable and a lot of fun in a rather tawdry sort of way, it is the ideal companion for a weekend break or a short holiday. Certainly it is the best biography now available for noneconomists."

Forbes.com

"Richard Davenport-Hines has given us an internationally acclaimed book that will reward its readers both in pleasure and in virtue."

Economist

"A biography of John Maynard Keynes without the economics may seem like 'Hamlet' without the prince. But Richard Davenport-Hines has set out to write such a book, and the result is utterly absorbing.... Davenport-Hines manages to pick out little-known stories, brilliant details and curiosities, relayed with affection.... [An] accomplished biography."

The Times Book of the Week (UK)

“For the reader already acquainted with the economics, or indeed not especially interested, there is a lot of fun to be had in this book.”

Financial Times

“With wit and grace, as well as a good deal of scholarly digging, the author looks at Keynes in seven distinct but overlapping guises.... [I]t is always, in Davenport-Hines's hands, a story told in an incisive and thoughtful way.... The book conveys its own vision of this wholly extraordinary and undeniably idiosyncratic figure with persuasive artistry and conviction.”

***The Observer* (UK)**

“Treating Keynes's lives as interesting and valuable for their own sake, and not just as a means to his economics, gives them an extra vividness.... With a keen eye for telling detail and social connections, Davenport-Hines brilliantly conveys what one might call the peripheral atmospherics of Keynes's existence.”

***Independent* (UK)**

“Who said economists were dull? For anyone practising economics today...this book is a treat.... We read endlessly about Keynes the economist. But he was so much more and this unputdownable book explores not so much Keynes the economist as much as Keynes the man.”

***Daily Mail* (UK)**

“[A] rewarding and fascinating book.”

***Daily Telegraph* (UK)**

“[A] highly enjoyable series of portraits.... Above all, Davenport-Hines sells his title and his proposition: Keynes is about much more than borrowing and spending, deficits and interest rates and in order to understand his economics one needs to understand the man and his times.”

***The Scotsman* (UK)**

“[An] engaging and sympathetic biography.... It is extremely difficult to write a biography for the general reader of a man much cleverer than oneself, and to do so admiringly yet critically, but Davenport-Hines brings it off.”

***Spectator* (UK)**

“[F]ascinating reading.... [Davenport-Hines] has understood his subject better than any previous biographer.”

***Daily Mail*, UK**

“Never has the biography of an economist been so gripping, so witty or, indeed, so racy: Keynes had countless flings with men before, as his biographer puts it, ‘he got the knack of heterosexuality’ and enjoyed a happy marriage.”

***New Statesman* (UK)**

“Richard Davenport-Hines' fine series of sketches of Keynes makes a clear case that he was a great man — intellectually dazzling and original, generous-spirited, industrious, astonishingly wide-ranging and largely effective.... Davenport-Hines has produced a very readable single volume that succeeds...by providing a professional, temperate and clear account of a gripping subject.”

***Toronto Star*, Canada**

“[T]his marvelous book is a high achievement: It shows us Keynes as altruist, boy prodigy, official, public man, art connoisseur and envoy. He was a gay man who switched over when he met the Russian dancer

Lydia Lopokova, an enjoyer of life who worked himself to death, an economic savior, a truly great man who never imposed a dull moment.”

Eric Rauchway, author of *The Great Depression and the New Deal: A Very Short Introduction*

“As often earthy as he was austere, cruel as he was humane, crude as he was genteel, Keynes the politician and economist yields here to Keynes the man. Richard Davenport-Hines' fascinating character sketch shows that Keynes was all the things that the rest of us are, except ordinary.”

Sylvia Nasar, author of *A Beautiful Mind*

“Richard Davenport Hines' portrait of Keynes is as vivid as fresh paint. You can see the genius of many parts dashing to Number Ten Downing Street or dancing a jig with Lydia. It's wonderful.”

A. N. Wilson, author of *Victoria: A Life*

“A book which is worthy of its brilliant subject, *Universal Man* manages to expound Keynes's ideas while shining with his own optimistic spirit. The fact that this is a book about intellectuals and ideas, does not prevent it from shimmering with low gossip. Richard Davenport-Hines is as deft at describing international political summit meetings as he is at evoking the ballet. Lively, funny, original, and beautifully written.”

Choice

“This book is organized in an unusual but very effective way...The result is that the intellectual, social, professional, and personal aspects of Keynes are described and analyzed both independently and as they interrelated to create a complex and brilliant thinker. This is a splendid biography that will fascinate the general reader and give new insight to the scholar. Highly recommended.”

Los Angeles Times

“*Universal Man* ranges effortlessly across Keynes's overstuffed life.”

Mail on Sunday (UK)

“Davenport-Hines is incapable of writing a dull sentence. His prose sings, his curiosity is omnivorous and he has a piercingly sharp eye for detail.... Has there ever been a more entertaining biography of an economist? I doubt it.”

Sunday Times (UK)

“[A]n amusing, elegant and provocative writer...great fun. By focusing on Keynes as a private man and public figure rather than an academic economist, it is possible to see him as the last and greatest flowering of Edwardian Liberalism.”

Literary Review (UK)

“[A] first-class book, which I cannot praise highly enough.... Keynes possessed a largeness of mind that one can only call noble and a generosity of spirit that was truly princely. This admirable book does him justice.”

About the Author

Richard Davenport-Hines is the award-winning author of *Dudley Docker* and acclaimed biographies of W.H. Auden and Marcel Proust. He is an adviser to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and the Royal Society of Literature, and a regular reviewer for the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Users Review

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Carol Rodgers:

Have you spare time to get a day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a go walking, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or even read a book titled Universal Man: The Lives of John Maynard Keynes? Maybe it is for being best activity for you. You recognize beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have some other opinion?

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Kirk Mathews:

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