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**UNIVERSAL MAN  
A REVIEW ARTICLE**

**K. VELA VELUPILLAI**

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# Universal Man<sup>1</sup>

## A Review Article

K. Vela Velupillai  
Tottvägen 11 (1 tr.)  
16954 Solna  
Sweden

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kvelupillai@gmail.com

*Me Tutore Tutus Eris*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A Review Article of **Universal Man: The Lives of John Maynard Keynes** by *Richard Davenport-Hines*, Basic Books, New York, 2015. I shall, in this paper, for simplicity, refer to the author as **RD-H** and the title of the book as **UM** (I had referred to Gunnar Myrdal as the *Universal Social Scientist* (**USS**) and Paul Samuelson as the *Universal Economist* (**UE**) and worked, fairly intensively, with the *Universal Turing Machine* (**UTM**) of Alan Turing in earlier writings. So, it is only fair that RD-H refers to John Maynard Keynes as the *Universal Man*, which, in many ways he was.

<sup>2</sup> The *motto* Keynes took when he was ‘gazetted with a barony’, in June, 1942, for the heraldic shield. It derives from Orvid’s **Ars Amatoria** (line 58): ‘*me duce tutus eris*, which I translate as ‘under my leadership thou wilt be safe’ - but RD-H renders it as ‘with me as leader you will be safe’, which is, of course, more ‘modern’ (UM, p. 326). I think the classics scholar Keynes would have preferred the former translation.

## § 1. A Preamble

Almost exactly eighty years ago, **The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money** by John Maynard Keynes (Keynes, 1936) was published. Ten years later, as *Lord Keynes of Tilton* he died at his home in the Sussex Downs, on Easter Sunday, 21 April, 1946, at the age of 63. He died ‘before his wife’s eyes - held in the arms of his mother who had hurried to the room at the sound of [Lydia Lopokova’s] cries’ (RD-H, p.359)<sup>3</sup>. There will, surely, be written and published, many anniversary and commemorative essays and books, to mark these momentous events, this year. The book being reviewed here, by RD-H, may well be considered a kind of *apéritif* drink<sup>4</sup> for what will be on offer as one of many main courses, during 2016.

In his annotated comments in the copy of Hayek’s August, 1931 **Economica** review of the *Treatise*, Keynes wrote (CW, XIII, 1973<sup>5</sup>, p. 243,):

“Hayek has not read my book with that measure of ‘good will’ which an author is entitled to expect of a reader. Until he can do so, he will not see what I mean or know whether I am right. He evidently has a passion which leads him to pick on me, but I am left wondering what this passion is.”

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<sup>3</sup> Although this exactness, like many others in **UM**, may have to be taken with the proverbial ‘pinch of salt’. Skidelsky, in the third volume of his monumental 3-volume biography of Keynes, was characteristically cautious in his description of the tragic event (Skidelsky, 2000, p. 471):

“There is some dispute about the details.”

Judith Mackrell (2008, p.397)), in her wholly sympathetic account of the life of Lydia Lopokova, as the **Bloomsbury Ballerina**, was equally circumspect:

‘The exact circumstance of [Keynes’] death varied in the telling.’

Moggridge (1992, p. 836), deftly avoided ‘exactness’.

<sup>4</sup> Therefore, *dry*, which may well be why the contents of this book, interesting though they are, conform to the conventional *dryness of such drinks!*

<sup>5</sup> This kind of reference indicates ‘Volume XIII’ of the **Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes**, published for the by Macmillan at the St. Martin’s Press, London (edited by Donald Moggridge, or Elizabeth Johnson, from 1971 onwards). In some volumes no explicit name of an editor appears.

I believe that RD-H has written an interesting biography of *The [Seven<sup>6</sup>] Lives of John Maynard Keynes*, with sympathetic, if also critical, interpretation of facts<sup>7</sup> surrounding these imagined ‘seven lives’.

However, this reviewer, educated in Cambridge during the ‘afterglow’ of the dominance of the Faculty of Economics and Politics, in terms of the epistemology, methodology and philosophy of Keynes’ Legacy, must wonder where **UM**, tells a different story of the *Seven Lives of Maynard Keynes*, from those of the monumentally classic biographies - Harrod (1951), Skidelsky (1990,

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<sup>6</sup> Seven seems to have a ‘magical’ hold on the imagination of ‘Western’ scholars - think of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, *Seven Kinds of Convexity*, the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, *Seven Schools of Macroeconomic Thought* (Phelps, 1990), *The Magical Number Seven* ... (Miller, 1956) and the various *Seven Wonders of the World* (Old and New), the *Seven Deadly Sins* and even the *seven plenteous years of the Genesis* (41-46, King James’ version). Then, there is that sublime dialogue between Duke Senior and Jacques, in *As You Like It* (*Act II, Sc. VII*), where reference is made to the *seven acts a man plays* in the stage that is the world. Frankly, the *four-fold* difference that seasonal changes imply, with overlapping tendencies, which a sceptical intellectual prefers, over a rigid *seven-fold*, artificial separation of boundaries - as the Duke Senior said (*ibid, Act II, Sc. I*):

‘Here feel we ...

The seasons’ difference .... ‘

One of the problems of **UM** is that this rigid separation invites *overlapping facts* to be imaginatively recast to fit the characterisation in terms of *seven lives*.

<sup>7</sup> The *Preface* to Moggridge (1992, p. xiii), begins with Virginia Woolf’s important observation on the writing of biographies:

“Almost any biographer, if he respects fact, can give us more than another fact to add to our collection. He can give us the creative fact; the fact that suggests and engenders.”

Having read **UM**, I feel that RD-H gives the reader some *imaginary facts*, but they do ‘suggest and engender’ critical re-interpretation of previously known facts - and some not known ones, too. However, I am not sure that RD-H has not allowed his imagination free(er) reign than is warranted by even a ‘creative fact’. A good friend advised me to use ‘rein’, rather than ‘reign’ - but I prefer the latter (as defined under *item 1, b*, in the **The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary** (3rd edition, p. 1754).

1990, 2000), and Moggridge (1992)<sup>8</sup>. In my reading of **UM**, what I find interesting is that RD-H rearranges the facts that can be found, with different emphasis and detail in Skidelsky and Moggridge (and parts of Harrod), and ‘suggests and engenders’ alternative possible worlds that emanate from the ‘lives of Keynes’. I feel however, as Leonard Woolf did in his review of Harrod in the *Listener* (Skidelsky, 2000, p. 494), that **UM** would have been a much better book:

“[H]ad he [Harrod] reduced [the] length [of the book] by a hundred pages, cutting out ninety percent of his own reflections, [and] the Stracheyan reconstruction of Keynes’s reflections...”

## § ***The Sympathetic Facts of the Imagined Seven Lives of Maynard Keynes in UM***

**UM** begins with a chapter on the **Altruist**, obviously a reference to the first of Keynes’ seven lives, and *Seven Snapshots of a Universal Man*. The second of the seven snapshots is a re-telling - perhaps I should refer to it as an imagined fact - of the story of the thirty-one year old Keynes, ‘perched in the side-car of a motorbike driven by his brother-in-law hurtling at top speed on the dusty hot roads from Cambridge to London on 3 August 1914.’ This story is repeated, embellished in a different way, in the third of Keynes’ seven lives, **Official**, in chapter 3 (**UM**, p. 74). The fertile imagination of RD-H has taken too many liberties with the bare facts of the situation<sup>9</sup>. The reference to a ‘bank-holiday *Sunday*’ (*ibid*), and that *fact* that ‘the bank rate was reduced to 5 per cent on 8 August [1914]’ (*ibid*, p. 75), do not inspire too much confidence in the construction of the *Imagined Seven Lives of Maynard Keynes*! After all, any reader - not only the economist - would want know: reduced to 5 percent from what rate, and what were the reasons for that rate, from which it was reduced, to have been ‘fixed’, in the first place (see Moggridge, *op.cit.*, pp. 235-237).

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<sup>8</sup> In **UM**, RD-H states that (p.126; italics added):

“This book is not an intellectual history of Keynes as an economist, and does not duplicate the compendious accounts of the development of his theories given by Peter Clarke, Donald Moggridge, Robert Skidelsky and other scholars.”

I assume that RD-H refers to Clarke (1998), but, surely, this is not a book with the scope of the three monumental classics by Harrod, Skidelsky and Moggridge? Moreover, despite the subtitle in Moggridge (1992), the three classics are definitely not exclusively about ‘the development of [Keynes’] theories’. They are, particularly Skidelsky and Moggridge, about the Social, Political, Economic and Humane Man that Keynes was, and they, with varying detail, provide excellent background for the theories - and policies - that Keynes the Political and Economic Man developed and advocated.

<sup>9</sup> Not without considerable help from Russell’s own fertile imagination (cf. Russell, 1967 p.96).

Although the romantic reconstruction of a fictional scene, to illustrate the veracity of this important story, makes one sceptical of the relevance of the rest of the six snapshots, one should at least cast a nodding glance at them. RD-H does imagine sympathetically, even if not entirely basing them on *facts*.

The second of the Seven Lives of Maynard Keynes, in the re-telling by RD-H in **UM**, is that of the **Boy Prodigy** that Keynes was - dominated by his election to membership of the *Apostles*<sup>10</sup> and the dominating influence of GE. Moore's **Principia Ethica**, in addition to work on the Fellowship Dissertation, which became **A Treatise on Probability** (Keynes, 1921), the beginnings of Keynes' life as a civil service official, his brief education in formal economics, the appointments as a Fellow of King's College, as a Lecturer in the Faculty of Economics and Politics, the Bloomsbury<sup>11</sup> friendships<sup>12</sup>, and finally, as a result of his membership of the British delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference, in the aftermath of WW I, the publication of the influential **Economic Consequences of the Peace**. It was a crowded, eventful, period for the **Boy Prodigy**, who emerged, from boyhood, as a Man, who was formed into the personality that he seemed to have remained,

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<sup>10</sup> The *Cambridge Conversazione Society*, to which Keynes was elected on the 28th of February, 1903, as its 243rd member (cf. Moggridge, *op. cit.*, p. 65). Less than three weeks after this election, on 18 March, 1903, G.E. Moore 'delivered to Cambridge University Press' (*ibid*), the manuscript of **Principia Ethica**!

<sup>11</sup> A 'loose' name that was coined by Molly MacCarthy - Mrs. Desmond MacCarthy (but used by Lytton Strachey much earlier, in April, 1910) - in 1911, and referred to the pre-1914 group of friends who formed the *Memoir Club* (see **UM**, p. 58 & pp. 272-273, which is an indication of the overlapping nature of the attempted straitjacket into which the lives of Keynes was buttonholed. Incidentally, a strengthening of this overlapping characteristics is provided in the reading of *My Early Beliefs* - permeated with the influence of **Principia Ethica**, and its distinguished author - to the Memoir Club, in 1938 (cf, **UM**, p. 58).

<sup>12</sup> I cannot resist reporting the wonderful conversation between G.H. Hardy and Lionel (Lord) Robbins (1973, p. 531; bold italics added):

“One evening in New College Senior Common Room, he pushed over to me .. a team of eminent members of the Bloomsbury circle. I inspected it. There they were: L. Strachey, Woolf (L.), Woolf (V.), Bell, R. Fry and so on. But one name was missing from this very distinguished, if somewhat esoteric, group, one which one would have imagined capable, in the Hardy universe of discourse, of knocking up century after century and marvellous exploits as a spin-bowler, not to mention fine work in the slips. Naturally I indicated to Hardy my surprise at the omission. " My dear Robbins," he said, "*I should no more regard Maynard Keynes as a typical Bloomsbury than I should regard J. B. Hobbs as a typical member of the Surrey County Cricket Club.*" (For the benefit of foreign readers and the younger generation at home, J. B. Hobbs was the outstanding British cricketer of the first half of this century.)

Readers of [Essays in Biography] will be able to judge *how right Hardy was.*”

without much change, for the rest of his *Six Lives*. This is summarised in the ‘previous’ life - of an **Altruist** - as (*ibid.*, p. 5):

“Each snapshot shows the same man in similar postures: a disciplined logician with a capacity for glee who persuaded people, seduced them, subverted old ideas, installed new ones; a man whose high brilliance did not give vertigo, but clarified and lengthened their perspectives.”

The next life of Keynes, **Official**, the third of seven in **UM**, is easily the most enjoyable, interesting and imaginative in the book being reviewed. It could have been subtitled: **The Economic Consequences of the Peace** (Keynes, 1919), for it narrates with finesse, not devoid of affection and admiration, the genesis of the book, in the form of the build up to Keynes’s resignation from the British delegation to the Peace conference at Versailles, and his - Keynes’ - passionate plea for a just treatment of the vanquished<sup>13</sup>. But there is much more to be savoured in this, his third life. There is the fact that Keynes, single-handedly, broke the British-Spanish foreign-exchange market, is reported on pp. 80-1, (but without specific dates!), with an almost cryptic reference to the famous sorry narrated by Niemeyer & Hopkins (p. 402, in Pigou, 1946)<sup>14</sup>:

“There was urgent need for Spanish pesetas. With difficulty a smallish sum was raked up. Keynes duly reported this, and a relieved Secretary of the Treasury remarked that at any rate for a short time we had a supply of pesetas. “Oh no!” said Keynes. “What!” said his horrified chief. “I’ve sold them all again: I’m going to break the market.” And he did. “

Unfortunately, RD-H does not tell his readers that such an action would be illegal today, considered an element of ‘insider trading’; nor does he suggest that this is a topic that needs to be investigated,

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<sup>13</sup> I half expected RD-H to quote, in support of his generous interpretation of Keynes’s actions in the aftermath of the Versailles treaty, Russell’s wonderful characterisation (Russell, 1967, pp. 94-5; bold italics, added):

“He went about the world carrying with him everywhere a feeling of bishop *in partibus*. True salvation was elsewhere, among the faithful at Cambridge. When he concerned himself with politics and economics he left his soul at home. This is the reason for a certain hard, glittering, inhuman quality in most of his writing. There was one great exception, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* ... Something of the Nonconformist spirit [of Keynes’s father] remained in his son, but it was overlaid by the realisation that ***facts and arguments may lead to conclusions somewhat shocking to many people***, and a strain of arrogance in his character made him find not unpleasant to *épater les bourgeois*. In his *Economic Consequences of the Peace* this strain was in abeyance. The profound conviction that the Treaty of Versailles spelt disaster so roused the earnest moralist in him that ***he forgot to be clever - without, however, ceasing to be so***.”

<sup>14</sup> The episode is referred to in Harrod (1951, p. 203), but immediately after a letter to his Mother, dated 17 July, 1915, by Keynes. The implication a reader inevitably draws is that the episode happened immediately after that date, i.e., in 1915!

just as Keynes' calculations of Germany's ability to pay war reparations has come under constant scrutiny.

I myself am of the opinion that T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* captures the horrors and the meaningless slaughter of a whole generation of young European men during the senseless, so-called *Great War* (WW I). That it was inspired by **The Economic Consequences of the Peace** (UM, p. 117 & Note 68, p. 374) is obvious, but very few have made such an explicit observation as RD-H has done. It does show an aspect of his erudition, which is, perhaps, why he feels able to, and the reader with him, to suggest and engender sympathetic facts on Maynard Keynes.

There are notes and, then, there are *footnotes*! The first of the latter appears on p. 150, of the chapter on Keynes' fourth life, as a **Public Man** - but where is the dividing line between the kind of **Official** Keynes was, more-or-less all his life, after graduation in Cambridge, and the **Public Man**? I don't see the point of the subject matter of the footnote on p.150, and the reference to Alister Watson as the 'first communist' to be elected as an Apostle is a gratuitous remark<sup>15</sup>. Apart from a reiteration of the main message of the **General Theory** (especially on p. 185, in **UM**), and an unfortunate misuse of both 'classical' and neo-classical (ibid, p. 183), the chapter is not very strong on anything. A judicious reading of the second of Skidelsky's three volumes, together with Moggridge (op.cit), would be more than adequate for this purpose. But two central themes that characterise the **General Theory** seem to have got buried in the thicket of the excellent, but abundantly verbose prose that seems to be the way RD-H expresses his empathies and sympathies. The two central themes are, the nature of the self-adjusting properties of a decentralised monetary production economy and the much-hyped notion of *animal spirits* from chapter 12 of the **General Theory**<sup>16</sup>.

I don't think the life of Keynes as a **Lover**, his fifth of seven lives, as described in chapter 5 of **UM**, adds much of serious value to that which can be found in the 3-volume biography of Keynes by Skidelsky and even more so with the contents of the Moggridge biography - except for one most

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<sup>15</sup> Alister Watson was one of three mathematicians who were mentioned in the Preface to Sraffa (1960). It was also Watson who persuaded Alan Turing to attend Wittgenstein's lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics.

<sup>16</sup> As Robin Matthews pointed out, in his **Keynes Lecture On Economics**, on *Animal Spirits*, to the British Academy (Matthews, 1984, p. 210:

“Chapter 12 [of the **General Theory**] was apparently written less carefully and in a more light-hearted spirit than most of the *General Theory*. It was not subjected to the scrutiny if the group of younger colleagues assembled by Keynes to help him (information from Richard Kahn).”

It is refreshing to note that RD-H, in **UM** does not give any importance to this issue, in spite of the fact that the gambling lives of Keynes is a recurring theme in the seven lives of the Universal Man.



felicitous factor, pointed out with admirable directness by RD-H: it is an indictment - there is no better or more appropriate word to describe this point - of Niall Ferguson's thoroughly reactionary and deliberate misconstrued of Keynes' use of the word *love*<sup>17</sup> (pp. 194-5; italics added):

“‘In a way I was in love with [Melchior].’ The historian Niall Ferguson, who has shown a reiterative need to make illiberal references to Keynes's carnality, reinterpreted these words. Keynes, he wrote in 2010, ‘*felt an almost sexual attraction to Melchior.*’”

Once again, I don't find anything in RD-H's stories of Keynes' sixth and seventh lives, referred to, respectively, as **Connoisseur** and **Envy**, in chapters six and seven of **UM**, that I could not find in a careful and complete reading of Skidelsky and Moggridge, particularly the third volume of the former's biography of Keynes.

But there is, again, one exception to the above caveat. This is the passing reference RD-H makes, to the *Latin Monetary Union (LMU)*, and Keynes' undiluted pleasure in receiving, ‘as change in the Roman Forum a Greek five drachma silver coin as if Pericles was still alive’ (**UM**, p. 262).

However, I did feel that this mention could have inspired RD-H to discuss, also, the *Scandinavian Monetary Union (SMU)* and the *European Monetary Union (EMU)*, and the political and economic ramifications of the monetary arrangements leading to the establishment of the *Euro*. After all, it was the unwieldiness and the *Gresham's Law* implications of a bimetallic system of currency that was the original catalyst for the emergence of Macroeconomics as a separate discipline - and, hence, immortalising Keynes the Economist.

Finally, on a slightly ‘frivolous’ note, RD-H observed (p. 279; italics added) that: ‘Keynes abominated nail-biting.’ That:

“He inspected young men who were candidates for King's fellowships to check that their manicures were not bestial. On one occasion, at least, the *finger nail inspection* was to prove of historic importance.”

RD-H then goes on to quote from a letter Keynes wrote his wife on 11th April, 1935: (bold italics, added)

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<sup>17</sup> The only ‘true’ British/Irish aristocrat I ever knew personally and intimately, Wynne Godley, used the word *love* exactly the way RD-H describes Keynes' usage (and of the words *flirt*, *flirtations* and *flirtatious*). Wynne Godley was the grandson of Lord Kilbracken who was Keynes' immediate superior at the India Office, in the period 16th October, 1906 to 20th July, 1908. Wynne Godley, in my opinion, was the *true* - perhaps the *only* - man to carry the spirit of the many men that Keynes was - as an economist, as a lover (sic!) of music and the arts, as a Fellow of King's as a Treasury official and as a scholar who understood humbug in the use of statistics by all and sundry.

“I had to lunch to-day the fellowship candidate who seems much the cleverest on paper to inspect him and his *fingernails*. He is *excellent* - there cannot be a shadow of doubt about it. Fingernails as long as yours (in proportion) - *it is infallible*. And he was very nice ‘*Turing* his name ... .”

But the doyen of Turing scholars, Andrew Hodges, in an interview - on October 28, 2014 - with Rebecca Jacobsen of the PBS<sup>18</sup> reminded us that:

“It wasn’t uncommon to see Turing dressed rather shabbily, with bitten nails and without a tie ... .”

It was good to know that even the Gods nod, sometimes!

### § 3. Ultra-Brief Concluding Notes

This is an interesting book, that will be a touchstone to the two important anniversaries mentioned in the opening lines of this essay. But, using the prerogative of a reviewer’s autonomy - even while respectfully nodding to Keynes’ acid remarks on Hayek (see above) - I need to point out that the book is marred by innumerable infelicities in the way RD-H uses quotations to buttress his different points of view of Maynard Keynes’ *Seven Lives*. I am not sure I can grant RD-H the benefit of the doubt, and assume that these errors were inadvertent; there are too many for this assumption to make sense.

Apart from this, there is the welcome omission of senseless comparison with Hayek, or even to be tempted by Hayek’s jaundiced views of Keynes and his economics.

Two final remarks need to be made. After the death of Beatrice Webb, the first woman *Fellow of the British Academy*, Keynes tried - vainly - to get Joan Robinson elected to be the second woman Fellow of the British Academy (she was finally elected in 1958)<sup>19</sup>. RD-H remains, correctly, silent on Maynard Keynes’ possible election as a *Fellow of the Royal Society* - had he been elected, he would have been the first economist to be honoured by this august society<sup>20</sup>. He was to be elected in

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<sup>18</sup> Accessed at: [www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/8-things-didnt-know-alan-turing/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/8-things-didnt-know-alan-turing/)

<sup>19</sup> See the footnote in p. 274 of **UM**. Keynes’ nomination for a Fellowship at the British Academy in 1920 was also rejected, but the next attempt, in 1929, was successful (*ibid*, p. 120). Here too, I expected a more detailed study of Keynes’ involvement with the affairs of the British Academy, in **UM**, but was disappointed not to find any.

<sup>20</sup> On the other hand Chandavarkar (1989, p. xiii) does not ‘remain silent’ on this issue; he lists, among the ‘honours’ bestowed upon Keynes, also a *Fellowship of the Royal Society (FRS)*, awarded in 1946!

1946, but death intervened, cruelly in April, 1946 - or, as T.S. Eliot's poignant first line of **The Waste Land** expressed it:

*“April is the cruellest month...”*

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