Brief biography and the ‘all-round-man’
Michael Piggott

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Encapsulating an entire life and career in a short essay or outline, such as those published in biographical dictionaries and encyclopedias, is not a straightforward exercise. This article canvasses some of the broader issues and then as a case study examines the writing of the entry for Percy Grainger for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. The author in question, Dr Kay Dreyfus, faced particular challenges such as an over-abundance of primary source material, some controversial aspects of the subject’s private life, and differences of opinion between author and commissioning editor.

‘It’s a long story,’ Wallander said.
‘Make it short,’ Hemberg replied. ‘But leave nothing out.’

Jackson: This shed business—it doesn’t really matter. The sheds aren’t important. A few friends call me Two Sheds and that’s all there is to it. I wish you’d ask me about the music. Everybody talks about the sheds. They’ve got it out of proportion—I’m a composer. I’m going to get rid of the shed. I’m fed up with it!

Host: Then you’ll be Arthur ‘No Sheds’ Jackson, eh?

The ability to produce the essential outline of a life, in speech, image or print, is an uncommon and enviable skill. We see it attempted in a variety of contexts, where the precise intent varies. Typically, pen portraits in school yearbooks aim for cleverness; eulogies for sympathetic gloss; obituaries for balance; social introductions for the conversational prompt; and a *Who’s who* entry for orthodox facts. Underpinning all, however, is the hope to achieve something beyond masterly summary.

Where it all began is unclear. But what Nigel Hamilton calls the commemorative instinct predates writing, if we think of busts, portraits on coins, oral sagas, recited lineages and funeral orations.

Within this broad family, collections of short biographies emerged early, with Plutarch’s *Lives*. In the era of print publishing, the précis idea is usually attributed to the *Brief lives* project of the late 17th-century antiquary John Aubrey, its cousin the press obituary having appeared 50 years earlier. From these, later centuries had their distinctive departure, both Butler’s *The lives of fathers, martyrs and other principal saints* from the 1750s and Agnes Strickland’s *Lives of the Queens of England* in the 1840s resulting in new editions and followers. The rise of national compilations such as Leslie Stephens’ *Dictionary of national biography* (1885–1900) represented a further variation. The genre has remained popular, evident in recent series such as Haus Publishing’s *Life and times*, Reaktion Books’ *Critical lives* and Oxford University Press’s *VIP/Very interesting people*. In 2004 Chatto & Windus commissioned its own Aubrey, Peter Ackroyd, to begin a new set of *Brief lives*.

Occasionally, we are privy to the author’s guiding criteria. The founding editor of the *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, Colin Matthew, specified that each ‘article’ should be ‘accurate, informative, clear, and interesting to read’. To him, the *Dictionary’s* purpose was ‘to give a complete and balanced account of the life and work of its subject by supplying both detailed personal information and a general assessment of the subject’s significance.’ The *Dictionary* website elaborated, indicating that:

Authors were encouraged to write accessibly for the general reader, and to treat lives in the round rather than focus on one aspect to the exclusion of others. The article should take the form of a biographical narrative, as in the *DNB*, with some modifications to the earlier pattern: most notably an ampler treatment of context, a more integrated treatment of personal relationships, and (in longer articles) fuller attention to the person’s long-term reputation.

Thus, the theory. In practice the spectrum of results begins with the potted study or profile which fails to unmask the persona; as Auden’s poem *Who’s who* mocks, ‘A shilling life will give you all the facts’. Higher up the scale reside all manner of journeyman cradle-to-grave overviews. And just occasionally, the subject is caught with economy and elegance. Here the gold standard remains Lytton Strachey’s four long essays collectively titled *Eminent Victorians*. Once dismissed as ‘a flippant, clever, wholly superficial character’, Strachey is now seen as helping take down ‘once and for all, the pretensions of the Victorian age to moral supremacy’.

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Capturing Grainger briefly

To the Australian dictionary of biography’s most prolific contributor, Gerald Walsh, the full story of a person can only be written:

if, according to the old classical formula, you know a great deal about three things: what the person does, what the person thinks and says, and thirdly what other people say about them. ... [And] there must be adequate material under each of these headings and much more else besides.5

To know a great deal about what a person did is undoubtedly an advantage, but a mixed blessing too, especially if one has to explain deeds in context, but in brief. And Grainger? His own efforts at autobiography aside, what challenges do his biographers face, in addition to avoiding the traps which he himself ‘knowingly or otherwise set’?6

Primarily a composer and performer, he was endlessly interested in himself, those around him, world music, and the world of the imagination and ideas. He was against specialisation and for ‘all-roundedness’, and practised what he preached. To Malcolm Gillies and David Pear, he was one of the 20th century’s ‘outstanding carpe diem figures’; to John Bird, ‘an anarchist with a thousand bees in his bonnet’.7 His proverbial long and active life included over 3,000 concerts, compositions requiring Chandos Records 25 CDs to encompass, many thousands of letters and over half a million words of autobiographical writing. Then there are the numerous intertwined others, including his mother and his museum.

What to choose? For Arnold Schoenberg, nothing about a great man was irrelevant—even Mahler adjusting his necktie became of interest.8 Bird knew he had to discriminate, though he ‘typed the last full stop’ of his highly praised biography sad that he ‘had not been able to explore every recess of Grainger’s mind and life’, while knowing ‘His life is ... one to which no single work can possibly do justice.’9 For the Scholes edition of the Oxford companion to music, ‘Everything ... [Grainger] said, wrote, or did was different from what anyone had said, written, or done before ...’, a staggering appraisal recalling Rousseau’s self-assessment: ‘I am ... perhaps like no one in existence’.10

Here, then, is the core of the summarising problem. The champion of all-roundedness had mastered the decathlon. Though rightly linked to music, there were so many additional sides to Grainger, all interconnected and all, one might argue, important. In short, there was so much to choose from, and it was all relevant.

In biography, usually another hurdle looms when fame and action result in masses of documentation which are then preserved to the last laundry list.
‘From the midst of this unwieldy jumble, the biographer marshals the means to compose a form which is quite unlike any other’, wrote Marcel Schwob a century ago. Twenty years later, Strachey’s solution to the marshalling was to:

row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity.\footnote{11}

No scholarly biographer now would dare follow Strachey’s advice, although today, the ocean of material has greatly expanded and the need for judgement is even more necessary. Small wonder that, in the face of the vast family archive of generations of the Boyd family, Brenda Niall wrote of being ‘blessed and burdened’.\footnote{12}

Following his mother’s example, Grainger began early to record himself and those around him. Though not all his letters have survived, the result, when combined with his various museum projects, was a biographer’s goldmine.\footnote{13} Yet as Malcolm Gillies observed:

The problem has been, and to some degree remains, what to make of this breath-taking attempt to capture all aspects of a past life. The very extent of the collection is a measure of the extent of the problem of assigning significance and meaning to artefacts deliberately collected athematically over a long and fruitful life.\footnote{14}

Gillies was clearly alert to the implications: archiving is hardly innocent, least of all self-archiving. Indeed there was so much to Grainger’s layered and deliberate legacy that many volumes of careful assessment and winnowing were needed before a comprehensive life-and-works study could begin. Is then the reverse possible—a brief sketch ahead of, in place of, a new comprehensive biography?

To pursue the question, three modes of representation will be described, each bringing into sharp relief efforts to render Grainger into something digestible. The first concerns the extreme minimalism of one’s name, and the second, a single encapsulating sentence. Here we have only the results of inner struggles over relevance, intensified by space constraints. The third, however, the biographical essay commissioned for a work of national reference, describes an actual case study where surviving correspondence enables us to listen in to some of the dialogue between author and editor about choices and vision.

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The name chosen by parents, not to mention by disciples, history and the state, can be enormously significant. Names adopted by immigrants and refugees also tell a story, while a simple number, such as Nelson Mandela’s prison number 46664, can stand for a biography. True, sometimes a change is just a convenience: who has heard of Sigismund Schlomo Freud or Dundi Dods Artur Kösztler? But when people add a name, as Grainger did with Aldridge, a statement potentially as permanent and public as facial scarring is undoubtedly being made.

There is in fact a story embedded in Grainger’s names, though we learn about his given names more from him than existing biographers: George because of his mother’s ‘outstanding fondness of her brother (or because she thot I looked like him?)’, and Percy because John Grainger ‘came from a Northumbrian family of builders, architects & engineers’, and ‘because father wanted me to bear a type true Northumbrian name. (I call-to-mind my father telling me that Percy was linked up ((connected)) with the Earl Percy of Northumberland & that the name meant “Pierce-Eye”, one of the Northumbrian earls having had someone’s eyes struck out.)’

So ‘Grainger, George Percy’—the style of the Australian dictionary of biography—is correct, although similar dictionaries use ‘Grainger, (George) Percy (Aldridge)’. All thus differ from the names by which he was and is commonly known, Percy Grainger, and from Percy Aldridge Grainger, the formulation adopted in 1911 acknowledging his mother’s family name Aldridge, and the main reason, because George was dropped, we know him as Percy. While reviewing the Dictionary volume containing the Grainger entry, Barry Jones observed, ‘At times, listing characters under a formal or birth certificate name may cause some confusion—who is George Percy Grainger, especially as the subject always called himself Percy Aldridge Grainger?’ By then famous for pedantry, Jones’s was an unusual comment, and depending how strictly we read ‘always’, incorrect. As to confusion, it would seem to be widespread among editors, a quick sampling revealing every possible combination. Overwhelmingly, book publishers, museums and friends groups have preferred ‘Percy Grainger’ while biographical dictionaries and music publishers, particularly during Grainger’s lifetime, favoured ‘Percy Aldridge Grainger’.

The one-sentence label
In the standard biographical entry, after the naming comes the equivalent of speed-dating’s one-liner: the all-embracing lead sentence. Aside from dates of birth and death and parents’ names, it seems a label is expected. As if answering the question who and what was Grainger, the consensus is one or
more of: musician, composer, pianist, and/or performer. Sometimes to these is added folk song collector and/or conductor.

In the past decade, to these ‘ethnomusicologist’ and ‘ethnologist’ have started to appear, reflecting newer, broader understandings. If we included Grainger’s own ‘self-appointed role as Antipodean “over-soul”’ (genius), athletic exhibitionist, amateur sexologist, linguistic pioneer, or racial seer’, a complete list would approach 20 labels. More recent still is ‘archivist’, and as this article was being finalised, yet another appeared: ‘revolutionary’.¹⁹

National identity has also varied, with Australian, Australian-born and Australian-American the most common preferences. Grainger’s British associations are usually accorded second ranking, if mentioned at all in the opening sentences. When John Bird offered a 1,000-word biographical essay to the Dictionary of national biography in 1978, he was told it had decided ‘to exclude any non-British subjects’ and advised to send it to the Australian dictionary of biography. By the time he did, it had chosen Kay Dreyfus, a disappointment for Bird, compounded when in 2004 the new Oxford DNB included Grainger.²⁰

Beyond these minimal elements, typically the micro-biographer can afford one or two adjectives: Australia’s best-known composer, controversial Australian composer, a virtuoso performer, a musician of unusual breadth of vision, and so on.

By now the limits of the sentence are reached, or the writer abandons biography to mere opinion. Here too choices are required, the appearance of John Bird’s pioneering biography in 1976 offering awareness of Grainger a chance to mature. Reaction began shakily in Australia, The Bulletin’s reviewer praising it as ‘candid, learned, and excellent’ only to add ‘It establishes Grainger firmly as one of the weirdos of musical history and no one will need to explore his murky depths again.’²¹ That review had been added to a Grainger file started by the Australian dictionary of biography, one of whose editors, even without Bird, had concluded of Grainger’s museum that, after decades of neglect, it was finally being appreciated. ‘It may be’, he wrote, ‘that this man had genius—and a genius largely inspired by the virtues and potentialities of Australian civilization: a sobering thought.’²²

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On 5 May 1980, the Australian dictionary of biography (hereafter ADB), part of the Australian National University in Canberra,²³ asked Dr Kay Dreyfus to write the Grainger entry for volume nine, scheduled to appear in 1983.²⁴ It normally approached a leading scholar in the field, after taking relevant advice. Dreyfus was an obvious choice. She had a music doctorate, and as curator of the Grainger Museum at the University of Melbourne since 1974 possessed an
excellent knowledge of the sources. Doubtless too she had the strong endorsement of her manager, the University of Melbourne Archivist Frank Strahan, who was a member of the ADB Victorian Working Party.²⁵

Like the more recent Gillies and Pear project, deliberately starting with the preliminary volumes of groundwork and only then the biography, Dreyfus’s piece for the ADB was able to draw on scholarship elucidating the sources which had begun to appear in the 1970s. Titles included Teresa Balough’s *A complete catalogue of the works of Percy Grainger* (University of Western Australia, 1975) and Dreyfus’s own two guides, *Music by Percy Aldridge Grainger: Percy Grainger Music Collection part one* (Grainger Museum, 1978) and *Percy Grainger’s Kipling settings: A study of the manuscript sources* (University of Western Australia, 1980). By 1980, she had also begun researching what was to become *The farthest north of humanness: Letters of Percy Grainger 1901–14* (Macmillan, 1985).

There was more of course, largely carried by *Studies in Music* and the *Australian Journal of Music Education* produced from the Music Department of the University of Western Australia. But the actual state of Grainger studies in Australia when Dreyfus was starting to draft her 2,000 words was undeveloped. As published in 1983, the entry’s cited sources, the above titles aside, comprised some journal articles, selections of Grainger’s writing, and a couple of background texts like Roger Covell’s *Australia’s music* (Sun Books, 1967). From overseas, her key sources were *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians* and biographies by Thomas Slattery²⁶ and John Bird. And of course the museum’s collections, still largely uncatalogued.

The ADB style guide listed a dozen areas its biographers should cover, only two of which, ‘evaluation of his or her character’ and ‘critical assessment of his or her work or place in Australian history’, encouraged the writer beyond chronology and facts. It also advised that ‘Biographies should be fresh and independent, both in information and critical assessment. As the A.D.B. will be used for reference, readers will expect to find familiar detail and quotation, but, where the figure has been controversial, they will also look for some account of the main viewpoints.’²⁷

Most authors were allowed 500–700 words; only the most significant subjects, such as prime ministers, were allocated the maximum of 6,000. Dreyfus was set 2,000 words and by March 1981 had a draft just 100 words over the limit. The first reaction came a month later, from the chair of the Victorian Working Party, Professor John Poynter, a deputy vice-chancellor at the University of Melbourne, a noted historian and member of the Grainger Museum Board of Management. He told the ADB it was ‘Excellent’.²⁸
Pretty good, but …

The opinion which mattered was Geoffrey Serle’s, one of the ADB’s two general editors who (from the ADB file) clearly knew Dreyfus. Like her, he was a University of Melbourne graduate, and at the time was established as reader in history at Monash University. He too admired the draft, but aside from quibbles (e.g. against ‘concertise’) and factual queries (e.g. the value of the estate) flagged several areas of contention. In December 1981 Serle told Sally O’Neill from ADB’s editorial staff ‘it’s pretty good as it stands’, but asked her to ‘work in early on (relating to his father) that Percy kept his promise to his mother never to touch alcohol or tobacco. Some reference too might be made to his running and long-distance walking. Suggest ask K.D. to work in a reference to folk-song collecting 1905–09 ...’

Of Dreyfus herself, Serle requested, alluding to a previous conversation, ‘... a reference to his folk-song collecting’ and, regarding Grainger’s abstinence, proposed O’Neill’s words: ‘As a consequence of his father’s dissolute behaviour, Percy kept his promise to his mother never to touch alcohol (or tobacco)’. Serle also suggested she add later in the draft: ‘Throughout his life his sexual appetites had been diverse and highly abnormal; flagellism was one regular practice.’

In February 1982, Dreyfus sent a holding reply. She warned Serle some of his proposed additions were ‘a bit problematic’; they needed some thought or further research, because ‘I find I can’t dash it off in a trice …’ Early the following month she sent several pages of rebuttal, though acknowledging there were few substantive points in dispute. She asked what evidence suggested Grainger’s father was behind being teetotal, and baulked at the ‘sexual appetites’ sentence. Her alternative was, ‘The letters also document Grainger’s private absorption with what he called his “cruelty instincts”, instincts which, however he indulged them in fantasy, were tempered in reality by an intense and tender approach to human relationships.’

In mid-March, Serle responded. Bird was the source for the abstinence theory, but they would accept the father was ‘possibly partly’ the motivation. (By publication, even that had been dropped.)

As for Dreyfus’s ‘cruelty instincts’ sentence, Serle wrote:

I thought you had agreed that a blunt statement was required in this matter. I have no more liking than you dealing with it, but will you please consider my advice that you and we will only invite criticism if we dodge it? It would be a different matter if it were not already public knowledge. I am afraid your suggestion … would be seen as too coy without a more specific statement in addition. I am very sorry to persecute you on this matter but I am sure that we have to
be frank. I implore you to try broadly to incorporate, in one place or the other, our separate suggestions. How about working on the following? ‘The letters also document his diverse and highly abnormal sexual appetites, including flagellism. His “cruelty instincts”, however, were tempered by an intense and tender approach to human relationships.”

This was one edit too many for Dreyfus. On 31 March the frustration of shoe-horning a life story into an essay boiled over. She reverted to formal salutation and began ‘Let me tell you how I see it’:

In order to write the Grainger entry within the 2000-word limit given, I had first to decide what was and wasn’t possible. I suppose everyone feels partisan about their subject, but it does seem to me that Grainger was something of a challenge inasmuch as he lived a fairly event-filled life, did a lot of different things all with great enthusiasm and the maximum of publicity, and was a fairly complex personality. The hardest thing was to strike a balance between the general account and overview and the specifics.

The reason why I am having such difficulty accepting your interpolations is that they introduce specifics, and I say, if this one, why not that one? So for instance, if you wish to refer to Grainger’s abstinence (from alcohol and tobacco), why not mention his athleticism (quite spectacular) and vegetarianism? Especially as they’re all related?

If you wish to make a special reference to his folksong collecting, why not mention some of his other musicological and extra-musical activities, many of which were quite innovative and unusual? ... It is true that Grainger pioneered the use of the phonograph in England in the collecting of folksongs, and his collecting was a great personal stimulus. But is one sentence enough to do justice to this and all those other unspecified activities?

As for Grainger’s sexuality, she wrote:

... I’m afraid I would rather be accused of prudishness than of pandering to the current public obsession with this aspect, though I must confess that I did not consciously leave it out from my first writing. It probably didn’t occur to me as being part of Grainger’s claim to be listed in the Dictionary. I will not, cannot, say that Grainger’s sexual ‘appetites’ (do you know that he had an abstract
intellectual interest in the customs of different cultures which complemented his other ‘serious’ cross-cultural interests?) were ‘diverse’ (too unspecific: could mean anything) or ‘abnormal’ (which definition of normality are we using? If a clinical definition, then I am not equipped to apply it.)

It may be helpful to note that there is no reference to flagellation or sexuality in the Grainger entry in the new Groves dictionary. There is an oblique reference to his absorption with forms of violence (Grainger called it cruelty and I prefer his word), which gave me the idea for the sentence I gave you.

By now the letter had largely run its course, its take-it-or-leave-it undercurrent made explicit followed by a hint of a broader worry. Where Serle had feared ADB would ‘invite criticism if we dodge it’, Dreyfus’s disinclination to pander to public obsession was reinforced by practicalities: ‘I’m aware that to some extent I am inhibited by my official obligation to be discreet in this area ...’

Serle’s ‘Dear Kay’ answer in early April resolved the impasse, if not the issue:

So be it. There are several points in your letter of 31 March to which I should perhaps reply but there seems little point. It is a great pity that we could not have worked co-operatively to remedy the few obvious weaknesses in your otherwise excellent entry. No doubt the fault was largely mine. My worry about possible consequences remains.

Phone calls ensued. Both apologised, and a compromise was agreed.\(^{33}\) The ADB’s guideline, ‘Biographies should be fresh and independent ...’ was, regarding the latter aspect at least, quietly ignored. As published, the relevant sentence read, ‘The letters also document Grainger’s complex sexuality, his regular practice of flagellation, and his private absorption with what he called his “cruelty instincts”—which were tempered in reality by an intense and tender approach to human relationships.’\(^{34}\)

When volume nine appeared in 1983, only two of the reviews mentioned Grainger and both ignored the ‘f’ word. For the times, one sentence in 2,000 words, sitting awkwardly at the end of a paragraph, was just about right. Perhaps anything more would have drawn the accusation of ‘pandering to the current public obsession’; three years later, Marjorie Tipping would praise Eileen Dorum for similar restraint.\(^{35}\)
Against our growing knowledge of Grainger stands the need to have it presented in manageable chunks. But an overview is more than a summary, as David Tall put it in 1982, introducing a special issue of *Studies in Music*: ‘It demands the balancing of the importance of each strand and of their interrelationships and requires, implicitly or explicitly, appropriate criteria by which judgements are to be made. Depending on these criteria, widely differing conclusions are possible.’

Above all else, context shapes criteria. For serious scholars, biographers and museum curators, relevance and significance are what count. In applying them, prevailing research interests, as well as social, personal and other constraints, will be revealed. Grainger’s death a mere half-century ago means it is probably too soon to predict what will endure as constants, but on the evidence outlined above, three may be nominated.

First is the sheer scale of Grainger’s many-sidedness, which is compounded because his universe expands with each research question asked, project funded, thesis presented, composition reinterpreted, document catalogued and journal launched. Second, through choice of name and nationality, not even the briefest biographies are neutral statements. And lastly, compressing a life like Grainger’s is not easy to do and not easily done quickly. With considerable feeling, Kay Dreyfus explained that ‘The hardest thing was to strike a balance between the general account and overview and the specifics’. Inevitably what she and the *ADB* achieved in 1983 has dated, and is more referred to than formally cited: the fate of inclusion in a work of national reference. It endures, however, as a classic summation and marker in Grainger’s evolving after-life.

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This article has been independently peer-reviewed.
NOTES


8 Reported by Bird, Percy Grainger, p. xiv.

9 Bird, Percy Grainger, pp. xxi, xiv.


12 See Brenda Niall, ‘Life class’, Meanjin, vol. 62, no. 2, 2003, pp. 120–128 (120). Niall is one of the few contemporary Australian biographers to reflect on the nature of the craft. See also her inaugural Seymour Lecture in Biography, “Walking upon ashes”:


15 See Jane Caplan and John Torpey (eds), Documenting individual identity: The development of state practices in the modern world, Princeton University Press, 2001, though there is a vast literature underpinning this truism. As an unorthodox introduction to it, see Portuguese novelist José Saramago’s All the names, London: Harvill Press, 2000. As if to make the point, his surname should have been de Sousa, but his father’s nickname, ‘Saramago’, meaning wild radish, was inadvertently recorded when his birth was registered. The novel specially resonates with archivists, as Brien Brothman explains in his ‘Making up people: The state, records and bureaucracy in José Saramago’s All the names’, Archives and Manuscripts, vol. 30, no. 2, November 2002, pp. 112–128.

16 Percy Grainger, ‘John H. Grainger’ (1956) and ‘[George Percy]’ (1933), in Gillies, Pear and Carroll (eds), Self-portrait of Percy Grainger, pp. 15, 125. The editors footnote the quotation, naming the likely earl.


23 Conceived at the Australian National University in 1957, volume 1 was published in 1966; volume 18, which will complete the period 1981–1990, will be published in 2012. *ADB* has been available online since 2006. There is no published history of *ADB* but papers from a 2009 National Centre of Biography symposium ‘Between the
past and the future: *The Australian dictionary of biography*, marking the ADB’s 50th birthday, are to be published.

24 From the *ADB file on Grainger* held by the ANU Archives, ANUA 312, box 326, and the principal source for what follows.

25 Dreyfus was with the museum between 1974 and 1989, primarily as full-time curator in charge. For her employment details, see Grainger Museum (I thank Monica Syrette for her help confirming these) and the biographical cuttings file, National Library of Australia. Dreyfus’s doctorate was on Beethoven’s last five piano sonatas.


27 Copy in author’s possession. The style guide, little changed since the later 1950s, is available from *ADB*, June 2010.


31 Dreyfus was right to protest. From the start, the *ADB had misread Bird* (p. 7 of the 1976 edition; p. 8 of the third, 1998, edition). The father’s behaviour doubtless caused Rose to make her son promise abstinence, but the motivation to keep the promise had far more to do with his mother than his father.

32 What constituted Australian ‘public knowledge’ of Grainger’s less conventional interests is a further research subject separate from this paper. Interestingly, the *ADB* staff had added to its Grainger file reviews of the first edition of Bird’s biography; a large newspaper article by Max Harris, ‘The incredible Percy Grainger’ from the *Australian Magazine* (part of *The Australian* of 8–9 November 1980); and subsequent letters to the editor. One letter had protested that Harris’s gloating over ‘the unusual aspects of a much misunderstood man with the now trumped-up excuses of exposing a scandal reeks of the worst sensationalism ...’ The year Dreyfus’s *ADB* entry was published, Harris was to expand on his views in *The unknown great Australian and other psychological portraits*, Melbourne: Sun Books, 1983, pp. 58–69. Keith Dunstan’s *Ratbags* (Sydney: Golden Press, 1979) had already appeared and, despite its title, included a surprisingly knowledgeable chapter on Grainger (see pp. 232–250). Other generalist
writing then available, such as Covell’s *Australia’s music*, and *100 famous Australian lives* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1969), had ignored Grainger’s sexuality altogether.

33 The *ADB* file copy of Serle’s forlorn ‘So be it’ letter is annotated in his characteristic red biro: ‘20/4 Kay rang “to apologise”. Agreed to discuss further 26/4’, and below that: ‘26/4 agreed amendments made’. Serle was to experience many such negotiations, always displaying an ‘editorial temperament that was ever naturally cautious, carefully restrained and always well-mannered’. See Thompson, *The patrician and the bloke*, p. 251, and for the case used to illustrate, in which Melba’s ‘facelift’ was gently transmuted to ‘facial surgery’, see p. 252.


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