

Orr case revision defended

In his comment in *Campus Review* Mar 11-17, Dr Brian Martin claims of my book, *Gross Moral Turpitude*, that "Pybus says Orr was guilty of having sex with one of his students and hence deserved to be sacked". This statement is either a complete misreading of the book or misinterpretation.

Dr Martin has on several occasions publicly claimed to have read my book, but his utterances seem to betray no sign that this is the case. If he had read the book he would know that I argue, with documentation, that Orr was guilty of four serious charges of misconduct in 1956 for which he was dismissed. The Supreme Court and the High Court upheld the university's right to summary dismissal in relation to one specific charge, that of using his position to seduce a young female student. I also make it clear than in so far as that sexual relationship was consensual, the consent was gained through improper use of the professor's position, a point reiterated at length by the judge of the Supreme Court.

I don't know how many times I have to clarify this point to Dr Martin or why he appears to insist on publicly misrepresenting my book and myself. He persists in his arguments about Orr's challenging the administration of the university and helping to instigate a Royal Commission as the real cause of his dismissal, yet he

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produces no evidence for this, except to repeat the received mythology which has grown up around the late professor. Really all he can offer is that "there were many academics who had sex with their students and who were also inadequate as academics but few of them had also been involved in challenging their administration." And Dr Martin accuses me of being simplistic!

The point is that Orr had serious complaints made against him by two colleagues and a male and female student. I presume Dr Martin does not wish to give any credence to the scurrilous attacks on the integrity of these staff and students and suggest that the university administration procured these complaints for purposes of intellectual suppression.

As a concerned academic I am sure Dr Martin would appreciate that the persistence of this cruel and unwarranted attack on the integrity of Professor Townsley, Dr Milanov, Edwin Tanner and Suzanne Kemp has been a source of bitter pain to them all and to their families. If he does not understand that much, then he has not read my book.

It may well be that lots of academics were having sex with

their students in 1956 — I'd be the last to deny that, but were they also abusing and tormenting their staff, harassing their colleagues, offering bribes of academic honours to talented students in return for professional favours? And were these academics also the subject of a serious complaint about such behaviour? Professor Orr wasn't just an "inadequate academic" he was a professional disgrace who had a reputation for totally unprofessional conduct long before he toyed with academic politics at the troubled University of Tasmania, as is quite apparent from the documentation cited in my book which Dr Martin seems not to have noticed.

Finally might I say that the issue of consensual sex in unequal power relationships is a very vexed one, nowhere more so than on campus. My book invites readers to consider the possibility that Orr's behaviour — encouraging a naive 18 year old student to visit his room at night and talking to her about her personal life, preaching to her the importance of living by one's feelings, taking her for late night drives, giving her presents, ridiculing her parent's morality and values — constituted a form of harassment. Certainly Suzanne came to think so, having been traumatised by her relationship with him. "He is mad" is what she said "and I was too".

**Dr Cassandra Pybus
Hobart**

Not really far apart on Orr case

Cassandra Pybus in her book *Gross Moral Turpitude* writes on page 214 that "in the Orr case, thirty-five years ago, it was almost universally accepted, and reiterated by professional organisations, that an academic who seduced a student should be dismissed. He did. He was. If his academic supporters thought that such a penalty was unreasonable they should have publicly said so..."

From this and other passages in the book, I inferred that Dr Pybus thought that the penalty was reasonable and hence stated: "Pybus says Orr was guilty of having sex with one of his students and hence deserved to be sacked," (*Campus* March 11-17). Yet she says (*Campus* March 25-31) that this statement is a complete misreading or misinterpretation of her book.

However, it seems from her letter that the real complaint is that I disagree with some of her interpretations. In other words, she seems to assume that her interpretation of the Orr case is the only possible one and that anyone who disagrees with it must be misreading her book — or have not read it all!

Actually, there is much in common in our positions. We agree that

a romantic and/or sexual relationship between an academic and a student is often an abuse of power, that the evidence that Orr abused his power in this case is overwhelming and that Orr was an inadequate academic in other ways. But we do differ on a few points.

Dr Pybus argues that Orr was such a "professional disgrace" that, due to his own shortcomings, he deserved to be dismissed. She has few criticisms of University of Tasmania administrators except that they appointed Orr in the first place.

I suggested the interpretation that Orr, precisely because of his deficiencies, provided a convenient target for an administration predisposed to attack those who challenged it and helped instigate a royal commission into it.

In other words, Orr could have been both guilty and suppressed. Pybus does not acknowledge this position, which is different from the simple pro-Orr case she castigates in her book and letter.

A study of the literature on suppression of dissent shows that sinners as well as saints may be subject to suppression. Naturally, it is much easier to oppose suppression of the latter than of the former.

My view is that there were and are quite a number of academics

just as incompetent, corrupt, unscrupulous and lecherous as Orr, but who have not been dismissed. Dr Pybus provides evidence that Orr was bad but no evidence that he was uniquely bad.

Dr Pybus defends her use of the term "sexual harassment" applied to Orr's sexual relations with his student. She is entitled to make her own definitions, but in terms of the standard usage in law and university procedures, sexual harassment is the wrong term. Dr Pybus does not cite a single source from the voluminous literature on sexual harassment. Nor did she contact me concerning the University of Wollongong's initiatives concerning problems with staff-student sex, although she would have read about them well before her book went to press.

Dr Pybus does not acknowledge that we agree that Orr's behaviour, whatever it may be called, involved an abuse of trust and should be condemned. I hope that she also agrees with me that "it is important for universities to have and, more importantly, to uniformly enforce policies to deal with sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual relations".

Brian Martin
University of Wollongong