

"Barnard: Students, 1950s" (Pamela Moore Remembered)

by Joseph Gerard Brennan

Excerpt (pp.175-176) of the book The Education Of A Prejudiced Man (Scribner, 1977) by Joseph Gerard Brennan, Moore's philosophy professor. From a chapter titled: "Barnard: Students, 1950s." (The Judy Jarvis referred to, nowadays an emeritus prof of philosophy at Tufts, was discussed in the pages immediately preceding.)

Pamela Moore '57 wrote novels, not philosophy. She too was a native New Yorker and as well-brushed as Judy Jarvis, whose first term as instructor coincided with Pamela's senior year at Barnard. But the younger writer came from a more WASPish background. She graduated from Rosemary Hall School (now gone coed with Choate), wore Brooks Brothers shirts, smoked Gauloises, and spoke somewhat theatrically in the accents of the privileged. Pamela had the art of successful self-dramatization, and with some right. At eighteen, she had published her first novel *Chocolates For Breakfast*, a chronicle of sad young love among the rich. Her heroine fights running battles with her divorced actress-mother, experiments with alcohol and wrist-cutting, has her pink Brooks Brothers shirt unbuttoned for the first time by a smooth Hollywood type. *Chocolates* hit the best-seller charts and was quickly reprinted in paperback and translated into eleven foreign languages.

Although Pamela majored in English rather than philosophy, she often came to our seminar room after class hours to listen to records from the departmental collection played on our high fidelity phonograph. The first time she appeared I was sitting alone in the deserted seminar room listening to a recording of a choral group singing a motet. It was Josquin Des Prez' *Misericordias Domini*, one of those masterworks of Renaissance polyphony of unearthly beauty, the kind that lifts us up above the urgency and venom of the world and bestows a few moments of tranquility.

An authoritative voice at the door broke the silence that followed the last cadence: "Only once before in my life have I heard music of such purity." I turned to see a smallish dark-haired student with a blue cigarette pack in her hand.

"When was that?"

"When I first heard the chorus of the Red Army!"

She came nearer, stared at me a moment, then said, "Do you know that you have a very Irish head?"

Friendly critics thought Pamela Moore was America's answer to Françoise Sagan. After graduation she tried to live up to the part by writing variations on *Bonjour Tristesse*, but didn't quite make it. When she wrote her last novel, *The Horsy Set*, she was living with her husband and nine-month-old baby in a Brooklyn Heights apartment. One day she laid down her writing, put the barrel of a .22-caliber rifle in her mouth, and pulled the trigger. A page of the diary beside her contained a reference to Ernest Hemingway's suicide. Pamela was twenty-seven when she died. I still have the record *Misericordias Domini*, but it's badly scratched.