

Novel tracks violence in once-proud marriage

"Like China" by Varley O'Connor. (272 pp., William Morrow & Co., \$19.95).

In this thought-provoking novel, former Michiganian O'Connor has put together a story about loss, betrayal, growing up and the often-peculiar nature of love and relationships.

If that sounds like a lot for one novel, maybe it is. Maybe the whole thing gets a little unwieldy from time to time, maybe the plot feels too contrived and unlikely now and then.

But this book works anyway, simply because O'Connor's many-faceted, carefully wrought characters are absolutely compelling and because she paints such an exquisitely sensi-

live portrait of a sad and violent marriage.

KATHA PINNELL is a young ex-model whose world is coming apart, who seems at times to feel a vague, half-step away from reality. "It was as if she had moved far away to a place where everything was strange, to another country, like China maybe."

She hasn't really moved anywhere, though, just simply retreated from the city to the Hamptons, where she and her self-made husband, Tommy, have spent the last five summers.

Now, however, something is very, very wrong. Tommy has slowly changed from a man she loved and thought she knew to a sinister, often-abusive stranger, humiliating her in



book
break
**Victoria
Diaz**

public, threatening her, taunting her, one night breaking her arm when she stands between him and a bottle of vodka. Paralyzed with fear, she feels, in a sense, abandoned. The "real Tommy" seems to have disappeared.

Near the Pinnells, in an ugly little prison-like house, live three young brothers who have been abandoned. After their mother's death, their father has simply walked away, leav-

ing them to fend for themselves. They are trying desperately to keep this desertion a secret since, if it's discovered, they know they'll be sent away to one of "those homes."

THIS DEBUT novel is the story of what happens when Katha's path and that of the abandoned boys intersect.

It's difficult to illustrate here the marvelously complex nature of O'Connor's main characters. For sure, there are villains and heroes in "Like China," but nobody is painted in black and white.

Tommy Pinnell, though his behavior is monstrous, oddly never seems a monster at heart. He often appears vulnerable somehow, as if his chilling behavior were something strangely beyond himself (although

he is not "crazy"), perhaps the result of a childhood tainted with abuse. Remarkably seductive, he's fascinating as a cobra, and just about as deadly.

Katha, on the other hand, with her tendency to shut her eyes to the very real danger she is in, seems almost spineless at times.

It's hard at first to root for a heroine who doesn't appear to like herself enough to try to save her own skin. O'Connor's insightfulness casts a revealing light here, though, on why this battered young woman finds it so difficult to make the right decision, and then to act on it.

The brothers, in their own family unit, are by turns annoying, vulgar, cruel, fearful, funny, loving, awful, brave, whatever it is that boys are.

Big Dan, the eldest, torn between a strong sense of responsibility and a yearning to escape it, fights the temptation to follow in his father's footsteps and desert his younger brothers. Sam is sustained by his fantasies. Youngest brother, Peter, trying to make sense of what is happening around him, is in some ways more mature than either.

If you're looking for a book that offers neat, pat solutions to its characters' problems, this isn't it. Throughout, "Like China" raises more questions than it answers and, in fact, ends literally with a question mark.

It's worthwhile reading, though. No question about that.

Victoria Diaz is a book reviewer based in Livonia.

creative impressions

This column appears regularly. Send news items to: Creative Impressions, Creative Living, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

● ORCHID SHOW

Hey, orchid lovers. The Michigan Orchid Society's annual Palm Sunday show will be from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, March 23-24, at Laurel Park Place Mall, Six Mile just east of I-75, Livonia.

On hand will be 25 display areas and 12 dealers.

At 1, 3 and 5 p.m. each day, an orchidist will lead a tour of the show.

● DSO PRELUDES

Enjoy classical music and a luncheon to support the Detroit Symphony Orchestra Friday, March 22.

DSO double bass Stephen Molina and DSO pianist Robert Conway will perform a mini concert at Temple Beth El, 7400 Telegraph, Farmington Hills. A luncheon will be served at 12:30 p.m.

Tickets for this final 1991 Preludes West series are \$125 per person and may be ordered by mailing a check payable to: DSO Preludes West.

Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope and mail to: DSOH, Volunteer Council, 400 Buhl Building, 535 Griswold, Detroit, MI 48226. Or call 963-1006, ext. 286.

Selections to be performed by Molina and Conway include J. E. Gaillard, Sonata; Armand Russell, Chaconne; David Ellis, Sonata for Unaccompanied Double Bass; Max Bruch, Kol Nidrei; J.S. Bach, Sonata No. 2.

● VAAL OFFERINGS

The Visual Art Association of Livonia starts spring classes and workshops March 25.

Programs are held on weekdays and Saturdays in the Jefferson Center, Room 24, 9501 Henry Road, Livonia.

Classes will be offered in: creative approach to watercolor, still life in oil, drawing on the right side of the brain, independent study, and innovative watercolor techniques.

Workshops will be offered in: wet in wet flower, watercolor landscape, all media, realistic still life in watercolor, and monotypes.

Instructors are area art professionals: Audrey DiMarco, Jerrie Habsburg, Edie Joppich, Mary Jordan Ehlert, Marjorie Chelstorp, Anne Dase-Loveland, Lily Dudgeon.

For registration information, call Marge Masick: 464-6772. Class size is limited.

VAAL is dedicated to advancing the knowledge and appreciation of the creative arts by offering studio classes and twice-yearly exhibits, all open to the public.

VAAL is supported in part by the Livonia Arts Commission, the city of Livonia and the Livonia Cultural League.

VAAL membership, at \$20, is encouraged when you register for classes or workshops so you can take advantage of reduced tuition fees, the VAAL newsletter and reduced exhibit entry fees.

VAAL meets the third Thursday of September, October, February and April in the VAAL classroom. The next meeting is 17 p.m. April 18.

● DSO EVENTS

American conductor Hugh Wolff concludes two weeks of concerts with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra with a program that includes Schumann's Symphony No. 1 and the first DSO performance of composer Stephen Albert's RiverRun.

Violinist Gil Shahm completes the program with performances of Wieniawski's Violin Concerto No. 2 at 8 p.m. Thursday-Friday, March 21-22, and at 8:30 p.m. Saturday, March 23, in Orchestra Hall.

For tickets: 373-0700.

● AUTHOR SIGNING

Plymouth Township author John Vranicki will sign copies of his new book, "The Polish Trivia Book," 12:30-2:30 p.m. Saturday, March 23 at the Polish Art Center, 9539 Joseph Campau, Hamtramck. Call 874-2242.

● CRAFT SHOW

A craft show will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, March 23, at Franklin High School, 31000 Joy, between Merriman and Middlebelt, Livonia.

Admission is \$1. No strollers.

● BENEFIT AUCTION

New Morning School, a non-profit cooperative school, preschool through grade 8, in Plymouth, will hold its 15th annual auction at 5 p.m. Saturday, March 23, at the Holistic Cultural Center, 36375 Joy, Westland.

A live auction will be presented by Dan Stall, Inc. Items to be auctioned include a suite at the palace for 20 people to view the Moscow Circus, getaways to New York, Boston, Las

Vegas and Washington, D.C., a minicoat and the right to be a working guest on a sailboat in the Detroit to Mackinac race.

For auction tickets, call 420-3331. Hors d'oeuvres, an open bar, buffet dinner and late night snack will also be part of the evening. So will silent tables.

Established in 1973, New Morning School emphasizes individualized study, parental involvement, and student participation in learning.

● FURNITURE TALK

Eighteenth furniture reproductions will be the subject of an informal presentation give by Michael

Camp of Plymouth

A Plymouth furniture maker, he specializes in building a full line of authentic reproductions.

The talk will be at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 27, at Camp's workshop in Plymouth.

The event is sponsored by the Plymouth Community Arts Council. Call 455-5260 for reservations. There is no charge.

● CHANCE TO DANCE

The University Musical Society at the University of Michigan will collaborate with the Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theatre to present a "Chance to Dance" for sixth-eighth

graders

The hour-long program will be at 10 a.m. Monday, April 1, in the Power Center for the Performing Arts, Ann Arbor.

The society will provide 1,400 discounted tickets for students and chaperones. Middle school teacher should call Michael Kondziolka: 313-763-3100. Tickets are \$4 per student.

Designed for the uninitiated dance viewer, "Chance to Dance" has three

goals: to help young people understand an appreciation of dance as an art form, b) understand and appreciate the dancer's discipline and training and c) think of dance as a career choice.

The Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theatre, dedicated to creating and performing original choreography, will give an evening performance in the University Musical Society's Choice Series at 8 p.m. Tuesday, April 2. For tickets, call 313-763-TKTS.

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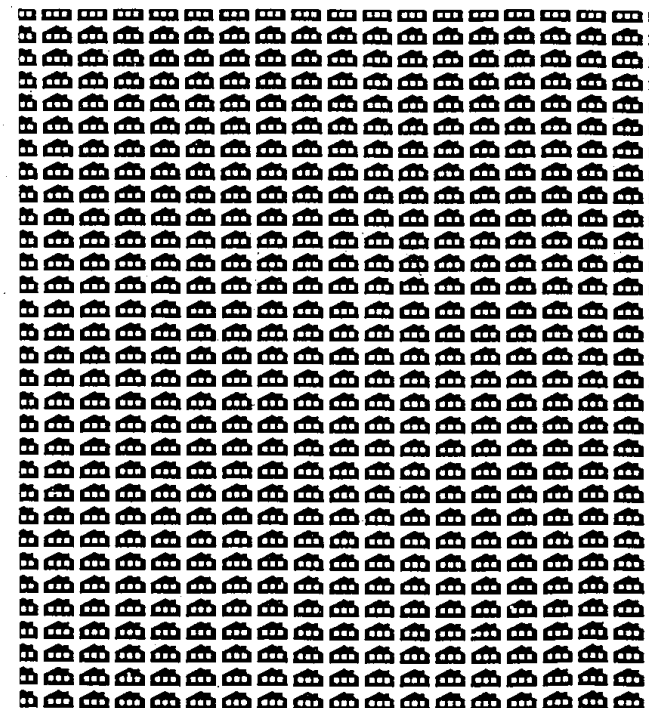
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Auction Date and Location: Thursday, April 12, 1991, 10:00 a.m. at the Northfield House, Inc., 12111 Northfield Road, Northfield, Ohio 44063

A 10% commission on the sale price will be paid to the auctioneer.

For further information, call (313) 674-0738

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