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## The Object Parade (Book Review)

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## ***The Object Parade*, by Dinah Lenney**

Book Review by Leona Vander Molen

Dinah Lenney's collection of essays entitled *The Object Parade* covers a wide array of topics, time, and of course, objects. Through large and small pieces of her life, Lenney explores her family relationships, careers of writing and acting, and past memories. *The Object Parade* is Lenney's second memoir and is composed of over thirty individual essays, each bringing with them an object and the memories attached. Her essays raise questions about what it means to grow up, succeed, fail, and even love.

The objects centering each piece range from the mole above Lenney's lip to real and metaphorical nests containing birds or her family. The essays themselves, often short in pages, are packed with small sensory scenes and reflections about the people and objects that helped Lenney grow and learn, as mother, an actor or simply as a person. Lenney utilizes various forms and points of view, inviting the reading into her own narrative of taking a bus to an audition or reading letter to her deceased father. The use of both first and second person develop Lenney's voice and involve the reader in the experiences of being a struggling young actor in New York, to mediating what was meant to be a joyous dinner party turned into a political debate. "Your job now, to correct him; you, the hostess, you, dying for a toothpick, trying to work the asparagus out from between your front teeth with your tongue before you open your mouth." Although the situation may strike as unrelatable, the desire to impress, contain and control are certainly not. In an essay centered on her own piano she recalls a fight with her daughter over lessons ending in tears and apologies "for bad tempers and ugly words." While in the essay following, Lenney introduces a scarf she knits during rehearsal of Hamlet as Gertrude with the line "Making out for money," bringing wit and the realism of acting to the conversation. Her essays touch on the topics of depression, adultery and loss while still acknowledging the humor in life by including moments like dreaming about a piano lesson where the main concern is a lack of shoes or writing to a coffee company because they stopped including the plastic scoops in the can.

The complexities of relationships between her mother, children and friends are illustrated through the object centering each piece, often providing a unique metaphor to the many challenges and joys we all face in a lifetime. Her essays include ample contemplation from Lenney, showing her own wishes, hope and failures through an optimistic and charismatic voice. Whether dealing with the heavy or light hearted, the therapy of a loved one or playing a reoccurring character on ER, Lenney captures attention with striking images and dynamic syntax such as the beginning of her chapter on birds, nests and her sister, "Still dark, the alarm not yet sound, that lumpy silhouette of a clock still comatose, when the bird band begins to tune up." She has achieved a relatable collection from the use of common to individualized objects and moments; which, though varied in format, remains focused and poignant in the messages it delivers. Not everyone has been destined to go to an open call audition in New York, but certainly we have all asked ourselves "What are the chances...what is this if not another sign?" as Lenney does in

her opening essay while walking in the "New York cold, the kind that creeps up through the pavement and into the soles of your shoes."

The seemingly insignificant become immense moments of transformation in Lenney's explorations of the objects she considers. The stories contend the different paths life offers and the constant struggle with growing up, whether as a child watching her mother dress for an evening out or as a mother sending her daughter off to college. Lenney's objects compose views within the memoir and show the beauty in the small, overlooked or simply mislaid things carried through life.