



Genie: A Scientific Tragedy

By Russ Rymer



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The compelling story of a young woman's emergence into the world after spending her first 13 years strapped to a chair, and her rescue and exploitation by scientists hoping to gain new insight into language acquisition.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Permanently strapped to a chair by her deranged father, Genie (a pseudonym) spent her entire childhood in the closed room of a virtually silent house in suburban California. When her nearly blind mother dragged her into a Los Angeles welfare office in 1970, the emaciated teenager could barely speak. Bounced back and forth between foster parents, institutions and her biological mother (her father fatally shot himself in 1970), Genie improved her linguistic skills but ultimately proved unable to master the rudiments of language. Basing this searing, tragic account on an article he wrote for the New Yorker, Rymer tells how linguists and psychologists, eager to test their theories, competed for access to Genie, who now lives in a home for retarded adults, hidden away from researchers by her mother. Rymer suggests that scientists and caretakers treated Genie as a "wild child" instead of giving her supportive therapy that might have enabled her to overcome the confining horrors of her childhood.

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From Library Journal

This is the true story of Genie, whose mentally unbalanced father tied her to a potty chair and left her alone in her room. Because of this abuse, Genie lacked language and social skills, and she thereby became a pawn in the great debate over language acquisition. Rymer here presents a fascinating look at a child's abuse and the failure of the scientific community to help her achieve some normalcy. Describing her history and the various tests and studies performed on her, he show how Genie ended up as just another case study. Unfortunately, scientists considered Genie a unique opportunity to study language skills and acquisition rather than a bewildered child who desperately needed help. Recommended for academic and larger public libraries.

- *Jennifer Langlois, Missouri Western State Coll. Lib., St. Joseph*

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From Kirkus Reviews

A compelling account by journalist Rymer (The New Yorker, The New York Times, etc.) of a modern-day "wild child" so deprived of human contact that when she was found at age 13 she was virtually without language--making her a prize subject for scientific study. From birth until she was discovered in 1970, "Genie" (a pseudonym) had been cruelly confined by her father to a small back room of her parents' house in California's San Gabriel Valley. Once found, she was cared for initially at a children's hospital and then transferred temporarily to the home of her teacher at the hospital's rehab center. Although the teacher applied to become Genie's foster parent, the social-services department that acted as the child's guardian refused consent, and for the next four years Genie lived in the home of David Rigler, chief psychologist of the hospital's psychiatric division. Scientists from various disciplines competed fiercely for access to the girl, among them linguists hoping to prove or disprove theories about how the human brain acquires language. The outcome was not a happy one for Genie. When Rigler's research grant ran out, the child moved back briefly with her mother and then into a series of inappropriate foster homes, eventually ending up in a home for retarded adults, out of the scientists' reach. Although Rymer never met Genie--who eventually disappeared--he tracked down and interviewed many of those most closely involved in caring for or studying her. Their versions of what happened and what went wrong vary, but that Genie was exploited is beyond doubt. Along the way, the author packs in a fair amount of information on linguistics and language development. An eye-opening account of science gone awry and a life gone amiss. -- *Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jodie Kahl:

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