

Book Title: Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl**Author: Marguerite Secheyay****Publisher: Grune & Stratton, Inc.****Year: 1951****Type: Nonfiction****Book Review by Michelle Martinson****Graduate Student****University of St. Thomas**MicheleMartinson@spps.org

This informative and insightful book is divided into two sections, the first of which is written by a young woman with schizophrenia. This intelligent and articulate woman, Renee, is very descriptive and vivid in her explanation of what it is like to suffer from this disorder. The second section of this book is an interpretation of Renee's experience and of the disorder itself. In the interpretations, professionals provide their analysis of Renee's experiences using psychiatric language and theory.

Renee describes lucidly the beginning middle and end stages of her distortion of reality. She explains feelings of unreality that started for her at the young age of 10. Though she attempts valiantly to live with these distortions--and believes at first they are not real--her unreality becomes more intense and harmful. Renee's unreality takes the form of "the system." The system is taking control and Renee feels guilt when she does not mind it.

Through Renee's explanation of unreality and the system, I felt I truly understood her. Her unreality made strange sense to me. It gave me new respect for the human brain and its need to make sense even of unreal things.

Marguerite Secheyay was Renee's psychologist. Renee began to see her as the rock of her therapy and the way out of her distortions. By nurturing and re-creating Renee's ego, Secheyay brought her back to reality. The second section of the book explains this process at length.

In my opinion, the second section of the book is very intense in my opinion. The explanations of the reconstruction of the ego tied in very well with the first half of the book. Ms. Secheyay analyzed and helped explain the stages of Renee's fall into unreality as well as her comeback. However, I felt skeptical about the explanation of schizophrenia's roots as the breakdown of the ego. However, this might be expected given the fact that psychoanalytic therapy dominated psychiatric practice in the 1950s when this book was written. It was interesting for me to compare current understanding of schizophrenia with what little was known at that time.

I would definitely recommend this book. It is very well written and researched. If one wants to attempt to understand the human brain, autobiographies such as this one can provide great insight.