

Foreword to Jan Smitowicz (2017), *Rebel Hell: Disabled Vegan Goes to Prison*. CreateSpace.

You are about to read [or so the book's author hopes] an extraordinary memoir by an extraordinary man. First, I'd like to briefly relay how I came to know Jan Smitowicz.

In my role as Distinguished Professor and Chair of Psychology at Oakland University [Rochester, Michigan], I have for the past several years organized an international two-day conference that brings together smart people from around the world to talk about a broad and unsettled area of work within my own field of evolutionary psychology. These conferences have featured the brightest minds in the social, behavioral, and life sciences, but also some of the most gifted fiction and non-fiction writers, both within and outside of academia. Our past conferences include "The Evolution of Violence," "The Evolution of Sex-uality," and "The Evolution of Morality." Our most recent conference, held in the spring of 2016, addressed "The Evolution of Psychopathology." By the fall of 2015 I had locked in most of our panelists, but had yet to find a novelist that fit well with the conference theme, a novelist whose work incorporated elements of psychopathology.

Over the past several years I have become deeply interested in anti-natalism, despite having six children myself, and despite the fact that reproduction generates the grist for the mill of natural selection. In 2010, I read David Benatar's *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* and, after some soul-searching, found his arguments deeply convincing and equally unsettling. Fast forward a few years to the fall of 2015. I stumbled upon a podcast featuring an interview with David Benatar. This particular episode of "The Species Barrier" featured three interviewees, each of whom was struggling in their own medium with issues of anti-natalism. David Benatar provided an academic philosopher's perspective. The Norwegian rapper Mistro provided a musician's perspective on how one might address issues of anti-natalism. And then there was Jan. The podcast hosts had invited him on to offer a novelist's perspective—how might one incorporate social justice concerns, including anti-natalism, into the plot and characters of a novel?

Jan had recently published his debut novel *Orange Rain*. I understood from the interview that Jan incorporated anti-natalist ideas into the characters and plot in a book that sounded fascinating. I liked Jan's brutally honest but deeply empathic responses to the interviewers' questions. Within a few days I had purchased and read the novel. And what a novel! I knew Jan would be an ideal panelist for our upcoming conference—a novelist whose work incorporated themes of psychopathology into the plot and characters.

Plus, I liked his edginess. Academics need more edginess in their lives—especially academics that attend fancy conferences.

I reached out to Jan and extended an invite. He leapt at the chance to join us, and I am so grateful for it: Jan's uniquely stylized perspective as a panelist helped make this one of our most enjoyable and stimulating conferences; moreover, his talk on anti-natalism and how he incorporates such important themes into his writing was a highlight of the conference! [Jan's

stellar talk, as well as other panelists', are available at www.oakland.edu/psychology/conference/

When he visited Oakland University, Jan was adamant: If I liked *Orange Rain*, I'd *really* enjoy his prison memoir-in-progress. I was pleasantly surprised when he asked me to write the Foreword. Which you—Dear Reader, as Jan would say—are now [presumably] reading. After receiving the “Januscript,” I devoured it in just a couple days. Not out of obligation, either—I simply couldn't put the book down!

It soon became clear that *Rebel Hell: Disabled Vegan Goes to Prison* is a stunning masterpiece. The content is certainly remarkable—a vegan, disabled young man's harrowing experiences during a two-year imprisonment in Illinois for trafficking marijuana. Also remarkable—in fact, singularly unique among the memoirs I have read—is Jan's unequaled stylistic panache; his beautifully crafted, outrageously candid, deeply empathic, and often uproariously funny narrative voice. He reveals the immense trauma of life in the “Prison Vortex” with incredible clarity. Even more substantial, however, is how he managed to engender the sense that I now know this man on a thorough and deeply personal level. I suffered when he suffered. Feared when he feared. And I was overjoyed when he triumphed.

Despite the dreadful circumstances, Jan somehow unearths humor in the very darkest places—and does so throughout. On many occasions, I found myself laughing right alongside him amid some of the most outrageously frustrating situations imaginable. His multifarious depictions of endless struggle against prison doctors hell-bent on decreasing or discontinuing his very necessary pain medications are equal parts hilarious and soul-withering. Oh—and then there are his disturbing, disgusting, but above all *entertaining* accounts of frequent physical-psychological degradation he was forced to endure with the . . . well, let's just say the *seedier* aspects of prison life. Leaving the narration of those sordid details to the man who must forever live with them.

Rebel Hell: Disabled Vegan Goes to Prison is a memoir—a *story*—like no other.

Todd Shackelford
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