

## **I Don't Believe You**

**John Ralph Tuccitto**

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*I Don't Believe You is provocative—part memoir, part treatise on mental illness and contemporary society.*

With dark humor, John Ralph Tuccitto's interlinked essays, gathered in *I Don't Believe You*, are about being a husband and father with mental illness and living in a society full of moral contradictions and ambiguities.

Eighteen essay-like, memoir-style chapters share Tuccitto's experiences with bipolar disorder, social anxiety, the modern workforce, and fatherhood. They also include topics like marijuana, gender constructs, and the differences between "truth" and "fact." Each could stand alone; read together, they paint a picture of a deep and tortured man who thinks about how he fits in, as well as about how American society takes advantage of and distorts human nature.

Though it is divided into two parts, there is nothing to distinguish one of the book's parts from the other; they follow the same themes and explore similar topics. Pencil sketches are included between some chapters, most featuring a man who is presumed to be Tuccitto. They contain disturbing imagery and match the atmosphere of the book on the whole. A repeating daisy motif butts against the book's frantic tone.

The proclaimed purpose of the book is to make the audience think by making them uncomfortable; in this, the work is successful. Controversial notions include notions of the "will to starve," used to parallel bodybuilders with the homeless in a problematic way. Discussions of contemporary politics stand to be divisive.

Working toward helpful and sound advice for overcoming depression and negative patterns of thinking (the book equates practicing positive thinking with taking caffeine to wake up in the morning) the book explains its rationales well. Still, the advice is out of place and causes an abrupt shift in tone.

Manic but loaded with intelligent turns of phrase, the text features distracting profanities to elevate its points. Witticisms and criticisms are abundant, and the book's punchy insights, like "innovation is an escape from the peace of familiarity," are surprising. Both its language and sentence structure are complex, precise, and smart. Logical exercises within chapters meander, and tangents and long-winded analogies are frequent. At times, meanings are muddled. Still, the strands of each argument converge at chapters' ends, and most entries are persuasive.

*I Don't Believe You* is part memoir, part treatise on mental illness and contemporary society. It is provocative, with disturbing yet poignant observations.

AIMÉE JODOIN (October 30, 2019)

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