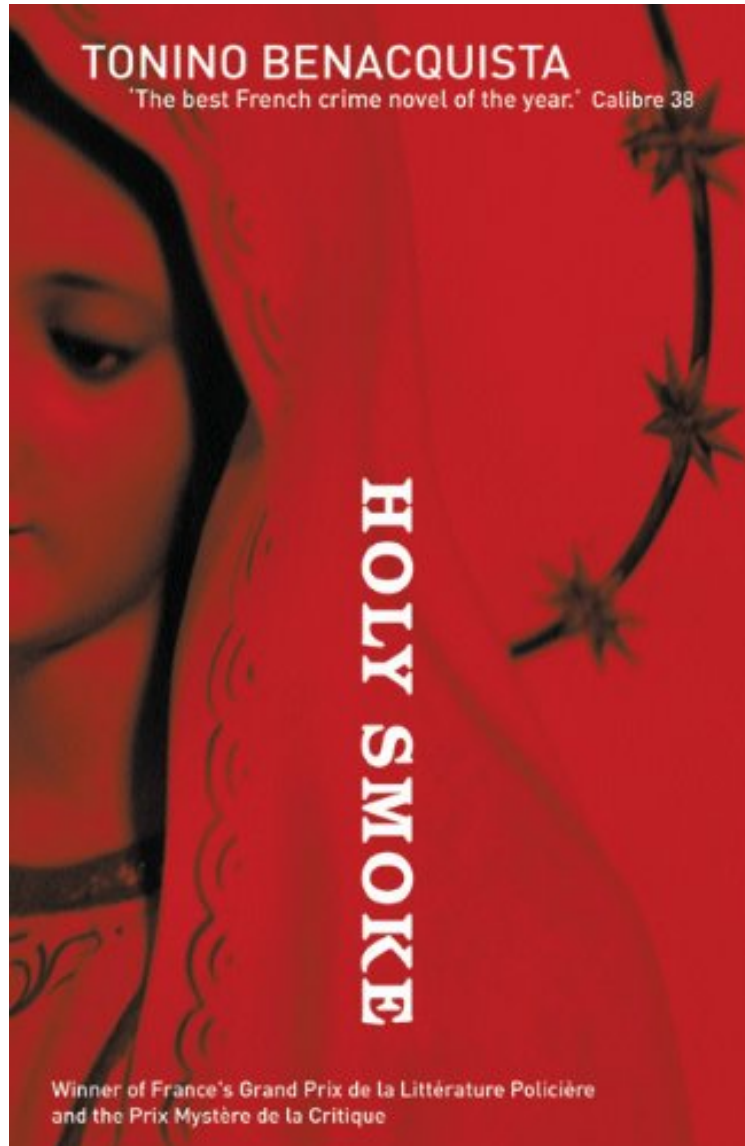


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Holy Smoke

Tonino Benacquista

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Tonino Benacquista : Holy Smoke before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Holy Smoke:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A schizophrenic indecisive character By Quentin Feduchin Several serious readers state that this book might represent a good example of black comedy. Well, yeah, but I found it irritating. In fact I went through the whole book irritated. I've read another two of his books, the first, The Family I found quite amusing especially having just seen the film. Indeed the film was great, quite off beat. The second that I

read was Framed, also fun. This version of Holy Smoke is translated from French by Adriana Hunter. As all of Benacquista's books are written in French, I wonder whether they truly lend themselves to good translation. Holy Smoke won prestigious awards for French writing yet I found it so annoying; who knows..I found the main character who is the narrator, quite irritating, indeed almost schizophrenic. He barely seemed to finish a thought before being in another thought, indeed without seeming to begin the thought! The character seemed to me to be shallow, cowardly and, most of the time, unwilling to complete his actions. The truth is I couldn't see anything in his life that he was truly interested in! This might appear a rather extraordinary opinion, but there, it was my impression. I think that as readers we need to identify with a character: if we can't, the story fizzles. Maybe Benacquista is an acquired taste. His writing certainly is, to this Anglo/Aussie reader quite off beat. That's usually welcome; and he develops somewhat unusual subject matter, which is also welcome. Don't be put off by what I write! There have to be good reasons for the awards he has won. Read his books for yourself: he's probably one of those authors you either love or hate. You might love him..1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Italy, Wine, Murder and Man's Search for Himself - a Winner

By stoicHoly Smoke is a terrific little (200-page) mystery that works on several levels. On its surface, the book is about the amusing adventures of a man who inherits a vineyard - and a world of problems. On another level, it is about someone in search of a home - a Frenchman of Italian descent who cannot escape his roots. It is a tribute to author Tonino Benacquista that the book succeeds on both levels. The novel opens with our hero, the Italian Frenchman Tonio Polsinelli, running into Dario, a friend from the neighborhood that Tonio left many years earlier. In fact, the reader learns that Tonio has spent his life trying to escape the old neighborhood and its Italian-immigrant residents. Tonio wants to be a "real" Frenchman and sums up his feelings on the old neighborhood in the following passage: "God, you suburbs are depressing. You've got nothing going for you. There you are with your eyes turned towards Paris and your arse towards the countryside. You can only ever be a compromise. You're boredom incarnate" (page 53). Tonio agrees to write a love letter to Dario's French girlfriend (because Dario's French is too poor for him to do it himself). When Dario is murdered, Tonio inherits the Italian vineyard that Dario has recently purchased. Fate, then, draws Tonio into Dario's world and back to Italy. Of course, Italy is the last place he wants to go. Even worse, the village in which he finds himself is his family's ancestral home. Once there, all sorts of misadventures ensue; Tonio eventually runs afoul of the mafia, the Vatican, and the townspeople. (Ironically, the townspeople now consider him to be French, which perhaps sums up the immigrant's dilemma of being stuck between cultures). Benacquista paces the story well, it never bogs down. He also interjects little bits of sardonic humor that sneak up on the reader. (Of one Italian-American gangster, Benacquista writes "He was amazed that you could get good pizza in Italy too, only not so good as at home). A subplot develops the "searching for roots" theme by tying Tonio's current search to his father's past in World War II Italy. Though the subplot meshes with the book's theme, it made things fit a little too neatly for my taste. I am ambivalent about Holy Smoke's final chapter. Benacquista could have omitted it with no loss, but he decided to end with a literary flourish. Perhaps it's a brilliant stroke, or perhaps it's another case of a writer not knowing when to quit - I'm still not sure. As a rule, I am skeptical of any mystery that aspires to be "more than a mystery." Most authors of such books seem to view mystery writing as "slumming" and - as a result - their books fail on both levels. Holy Smoke is a happy exception to that rule. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Unfinished Due to Lack of Interest

By Eric Juneau I gave it 50 pages, so it's not like I didn't try. I just wasn't interested enough to continue. It's written in French by an Italian guy, translated into English. So that's an obstacle right there. After that, I just didn't care about the characters enough. The main character is grumpy and friendless. He gets a vineyard and hates everybody. There, that's the story in a nutshell. When the main character got shot at and I didn't even notice, I knew that was the time to stop. I just couldn't see how the book could bring me back around to care.

"Boisterous black comedy . . . funny and goodhearted, with much incident and expert enthusiasm for sex, food and drink."—The Literary Review

"Much to enjoy in the clash of cultures and superstitions, even a tasty recipe for poisoning your friends with pasta. Detail like this places European crime writing on a par with its American counterpart."—Belfast Independent

Some favors simply cannot be refused. Tonio agrees to write a love letter for Dario, a low-rent Paris gigolo. When Dario is murdered, a single bullet to the head, Tonio finds he has been left a small vineyard near Naples. The wine is undrinkable, but an elaborate scam has been set up. The smell of easy money attracts the unwanted attentions of the Mafia and the Vatican and the unbridled hatred of the locals. Mafiosi aren't choir boys, and monsignors can be very much like Mafiosi. Winner of three mystery prizes in one year, including the Grand Prix de la Littérature Policrière and the Prix Mystère de la Critique. Tonino Benacquista, born in France of Italian immigrants, dropped out of film studies to finance his writing career. After being in turn a museum watchman, a train guard on the Paris-Rome line and a professional parasite on the Paris cocktail circuit, he is now a highly successful author of fiction and film scripts.

A terrific black comedy. A blasphemously funny satire of provincial Italian chicanery. -- New York Times, August 14, 2005

About the Author Benacquista, born in France of Italian immigrants, dropped out of film studies to finance his writing career. After being a museum night watchman, a train guard and a parasite on the Paris gallery opening and

cocktail circuit, he is now a successful author and screenwriter. Her work includes Catherine Millet's explicit autobiography, 'The sexual life of Catherine M' and Beigbeder's attack novel on advertising, '£9.99'. She also translated 'Death in the Dordogne' by Louis Sanders recently favourably reviewed by the NYT.