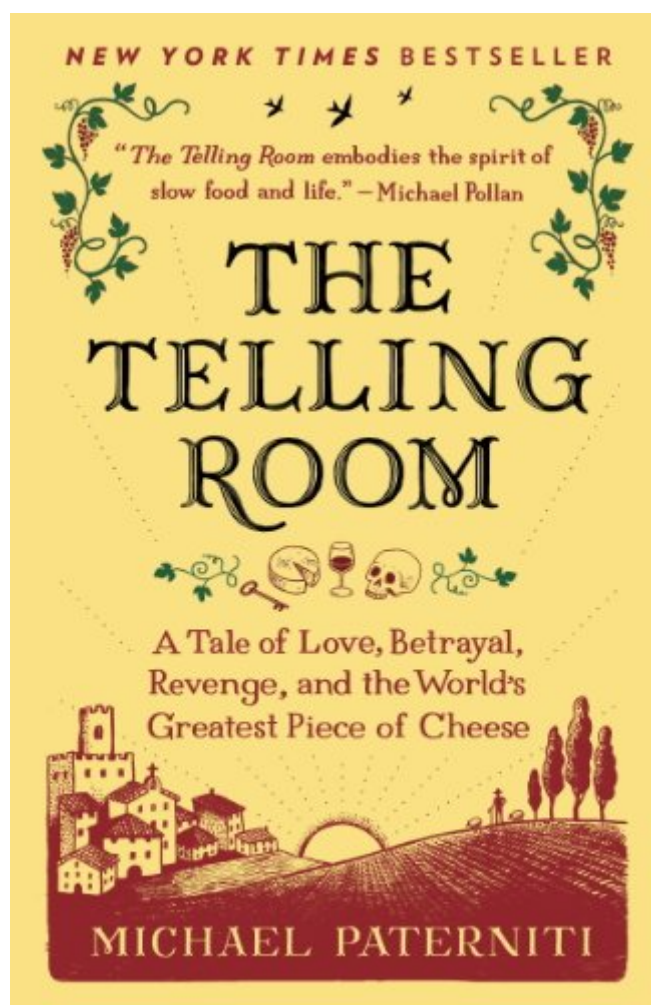


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The Telling Room: A Tale Of Love, Betrayal, Revenge, And The World's Greatest Piece Of Cheese



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
NAME ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY NPR
Entertainment Weekly Kirkus Reviews The Christian Science Monitor
In the picturesque village of Guzmán, Spain, in a cave dug into a hillside on the edge of town, an ancient door leads to a cramped limestone chamber known as “the telling room.” Containing nothing but a wooden table and two benches, this is where villagers have gathered for centuries to share their stories and secrets—usually accompanied by copious amounts of wine. It was here, in the summer of 2000, that Michael Paterniti found himself listening to a larger-than-life Spanish cheesemaker named Ambrosio Molinos de las Heras as he spun an odd and compelling tale about a piece of cheese. An unusual piece of cheese. Made from an old family recipe, Ambrosio’s cheese was reputed to be among the finest in the world, and was said to hold mystical qualities. Eating it, some claimed, conjured long-lost memories. But then, Ambrosio said, things had gone horribly wrong. . . . By the time the two men exited the telling room that evening, Paterniti was hooked. Soon he was fully embroiled in village life, relocating his young family to Guzmán in order to chase the truth about this cheese and explore the fairy tale-like place where the villagers conversed with farm animals, lived by an ancient Castilian code of honor, and made their wine and food by hand, from the grapes growing on a nearby hill and the flocks of sheep floating over the Meseta. What Paterniti ultimately discovers there in the highlands of Castile is nothing like the idyllic slow-food fable he first imagined. Instead, he’s sucked into the heart of an unfolding mystery, a blood feud that includes accusations of betrayal and theft, death threats, and a murder plot. As the village begins to spill its long-held secrets, Paterniti finds himself implicated in the very story he is writing. Equal parts mystery and memoir, travelogue and history, *The Telling Room* is an astonishing work of literary nonfiction by one of our most accomplished storytellers. A moving exploration of happiness, friendship, and betrayal, *The Telling Room* introduces us to Ambrosio Molinos de las Heras, an unforgettable real-life literary hero, while also holding a mirror up to the world, fully alive to the power of stories that define and sustain us. Praise for *The Telling Room* “Captivating . . . Paterniti’s writing sings, whether he’s talking about how food activates memory, or the joys of watching his children grow.” NPR “A gorgeous and impassioned monument to the art and mystery of storytelling, *The Telling Room* is rich, funny, humane, devastating, and beautiful. It made me want to applaud, it made me want to cry, it made me want to move to Spain. Michael Paterniti is a genius.” Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat, Pray, Love* “Unforgettable . . . a must-read for all who think of Spain as magical,

who consider cheese as the ultimate gift of love, who love stories of betrayal, despair, revenge and redemption. [The Wall Street Journal](#) "The Telling Room embodies the spirit of slow food and life." [Michael Pollan](#) "Elegant, strange, funny, and insightful, The Telling Room is a marvelous tale and a joyful read, a trip into a world peopled by some of the most remarkable characters and, yes, cheese in memory." [Susan Orlean](#), author of *The Orchid Thief* From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

This really is not a book about cheese. Nor is it really a travelog of Spain. Nor is it an autobiography of the author. What it IS, is an old fashioned beautifully told story, in the best tradition of story tellers, who weave the tale in their own unique way to make the story theirs, even if it is based in fact, especially if it is a re-telling of an old story. It is a printed version of an oral history, the kind of tale best told late at night, maybe curled up in front of a fire, a glass of brandy..or two..at hand, a tale within a tale within a tale; maybe a moral there somewhere, or a lesson learned, or a theory tested. I

started the book late at night, a mistake, as I could not stop reading until the very end, sometime in the pre-dawn light of a new day. And I was sorry that it was over, the spell broken. I highly recommend it!

Read this if you have time this summer! A leisurely read would be great. It's not about the cheese. (But, then again, it is. Have a hunk handy to nibble on.) It's not about the cheese maker, Ambrosio. (But, then, it is.) It's not about Paterniti, the author. (But, it certainly is!) It's about Castilian life. It's about an author's life and life style. It's about a friendship (the author's and Ambrosio's) that becomes tantamount to love. (It's also about two best friends in Guzman, Spain. Ambrosio and his boyhood friend, Julian.) Well, it's about the nature of friendship. It's about seeing the world through another's eyes for, in actuality, Guzman (population 80) is not a gorgeous tourist destination. But, it becomes more beautiful with each telling and with each of the author's visits there. The book is peopled with a grand cast of characters, who don't seem like "characters". We get to know the townspeople, Paterniti's children, etc. We live the story! What about the betrayal, the revenge? It's all there. Yes, there are myriad digressions. But, they are not really digressions. The digressions become the story. Paterniti tells us that storytelling here with all its retelling by various people, with all its digressing, is really a Castilian thing. We get story upon story--each one adding to our enjoyment. A big part of this story is that Paterniti had trouble finishing this book. It's as if he didn't want to complete it because his life in Castile would then be over. And, he'd know (perhaps) if Ambrosio was really betrayed, deceived. This is a big book masquerading as a tale of cheese and as a search for justice. Not entirely, though, of course. It's really about life and the things we value in life. Lest you think that this is too philosophical, it's not--but it could be--if you wanted it to be. It's full of savoring and humor and strange turns of plot. Five plus stars if I could.

It has a potentially great story. But after slogging it out to 44%, I decided I just hate the writing too much to continue. Too many misplaced/misused descriptors, endless footnotes that could more simply be incorporated into storyline without being disruptive for very little purpose. Also, having made the shift from high end corporate world to simple life in the country, I just found the wow, look at me and how cool this all is, I have found that not everyone lives a crazy warp-speed life that seems to pervade this book a little hard to take. Haven't checked, but I suspect the move, physically and spiritually, will NOT have been a permanent one for the author. Sorry, love Zingerman's and their catalogue and their cheeses, and am big on back to the land and eating your view and all, but this was like someone from a hip cable program's take on it all ...

After traveling in Spain this past summer, I somehow stumbled upon this book on while trying to find something to read about Spain and "relive and reminisce" about my wonderful month over there with my family. The title of the book and description sounded far too good to pass up and certainly didn't disappoint. Paterniti does some great "investigative" journalism, taking his family and young child to Spain to explore Paramo de Guzman, the "world's most expensive" cheese. Paterniti's interest wasn't random, he had worked at a gourmet food store in Ann Arbor during college writing descriptive articles about some of the eclectic products from around the world that the store stocked. As he was beginning his journalistic career, he thought back to this cheese and decided to explore what made it so special and expensive. This begins his journey to Spain and the town of Guzman and the entertaining origins of the cheese, the bitter feud that broke up a deep seated friendship and left the cheese a shadow of its former self under new ownership. While the book can meander at times, it is in a way emblematic of the journey that Paterniti ultimately found himself on to tell this story and move beyond biased connection to Ambrosio Molinos, founder of the cheese, to a more dispassionate journalist seeking the truth. Much like Paterniti's journey, the book started out strong, hit a valley in the beginning and reached its peak at the end.

It's hard not to be enticed by the title of this book. It's a playful title that generates a good deal of intrigue. But more than that, I was drawn to read something of substance from a great magazine writer in Michael Paterniti. Unfortunately, I have to say this book let me down. Yes, the story full of fascinating and fun characters, worthy of existing in print, but I found I lacked the stamina to stick with the narrative crafted by Paterniti. He is meandering, takes excessive detours and floods the pages with footnotes. As others have said, I started with momentum and excitement, only to put the book aside a couple chapters in. That said, if you're even remotely interested, it's worth sticking with until the end. Even though I largely skimmed the middle of the book, I loved Part III to the finish. It seems like he catches his stride at this point, and turns more insightful and honest and leaves you with a lump in your throat and fullness in your heart.

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