BOOK REVIEW

Mario Vargas Llosa

The Story Teller. Penguin

There are some stories
worth telling over and over, and
there are some books worth
reading over and over. For me,
The Story Teller is such a book.
Anyone in the helping profes-
sions interested in the power of
narratives, and how they might
be used to help people, will find
this a mysterious, absorbing and
fascinating fictional account of
innocence and greed.

There are universal sto-
ries, which all cultures tell in
their own ways. How the world
was created is one such story.
How the world was saved by
some heroic act is another. The
Story Teller deals with the tragic
universal story of the conquering
of one's native land, by a group
with a powerful technology, a
group that usually destroys
what it has conquered.

The setting is Peru, could
be anywhere. The time is now,
could be yesterday or tomorrow.
The indigenous populations are
being driven deeper into the
jungles by developers and gold
seekers. They are at risk of ex-
tinction and loss of all cultural
heritage. Travelers, returning
from the depths of the jungle,
begin to tell stories of a red-
headed man who wanders from
small village to village, warning
the people of the coming dan-
gers, gathering and retelling
them the stories of their heritage,
and of other groups like them-
selves in other parts of the coun-
try. Is this merely an attempt to
help maintain their culture, or is
there more at stake? People in the
city begin to wonder about this
stranger who is living with, and
being accepted by the native
population, as one of them.

The writer, an old friend,
recognizes the red headed man
from a picture brought back by
a traveler, and recalls his past.
The story revolves around the
uncovering of this man, a univer-
sity educated anthropologist,
who has been able to transform
himself out of the modern mode
to live and contribute to people
who were there long before the
invaders, or his own ancestors.
We learn of the myths, traditions,
and the mysteries of these tribes.
Their belief systems and why
they do the "strange" things they
do. We learn about these people's
closeness and dependency on
nature for survival. We learn
how the educated class, from
where the story teller emerged,
is shaken by his acts, and sees
him both a hero and a threat. If
we want to, we can learn how
close to the mark this book was,
by the New York Times of Tues-
day, December 12, 1995. The
headline read:

"In Peru, a Fight for
Fresh Air. U.S.-Owned Smelter
Makes Residents Ill and Angry."

By Paul Abels,
Book Editor