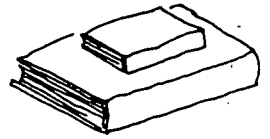


BOOK REVIEW



Mario Vargas Llosa

The Story Teller. Penquin Books. N.Y., N.Y. 1989. Paper. \$8.99. 246 pages.

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 professions 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 stories, 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 extinction 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 dangers, gathering and retelling them the stories of their heritage, and of other groups like them-

selves in other parts of the country. 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 university 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 Tuesday, 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



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