POSTMODERN REALITY

(The Time of the Hero)

A voluminous body of criticism has developed around the once-controversial, now classic novel, The Time of the Hero (1962) by Vargas Llosa. The great literary explosion was produced in 1962, when still a 26 year old Vargas Llosa received the Biblioteca Breve Prize from the Barcelona publishing house of Seix Barral. With that prize, Vargas Llosa as well Seix Barral Publishers suddenly became popular in the entire Spanish-speaking world and The Time of the Hero caused the whole continent to talk.

In 1962 when he completed the novel, which was destined to be a sensation in Spain, Vargas Llosa was only twenty-six years of age, nine years younger than Garcia Marquez, who was almost completely unheard at the time, almost a decade younger than the instigator of the Boom - the Mexican Carlos Fuentes, and more than two decades younger than the Argentinean Julio Cortazar. By 1969, when the Boom was beginning to fragment, Vargas Llosa had written three major novels in seven years. None of them showed even the slightest sign of having been written in haste. This first novel The Time of the Hero, was years ahead of his Spanish contemporaries. Although it is his first novel, the technical skill,
daring, and innovation displayed in telling the story was so captivating that
it became the focus of critical praise and attention.

The novel is set in Leoncio Prado Military School in the 1950s of Lima, Peru and focuses on the experience of a group of adolescent cadets. The plot seems rather simple and straightforward. The main action of the novel begins when four cadets (Alberto Fernandez also known as ‘the Poet’, Porfirio Cava, Boa, and Jaguar) known as ‘The Circle’ throw dice in the barracks bathroom at the Leoncio Prado Military School. They formed a self-defense group ‘The Circle’ to protect themselves from the savage initiation rites of the older cadets. Their dice game will determine who among them will have to steal the questions for an upcoming chemistry examination from a locked classroom. Cava loses the game and must steal the test. During the theft, he accidentally breaks a window and the entire school is punished when the theft is discovered by the military officers. Unable to identify the culprit of the robbery, the school authorities confine all the cadets to the barracks. They lose the weekend privileges too. The cadets are to stay there until the culprit comes forward to take responsibility for the crime. A cadet, Ricardo Arana who is nicknamed ‘Slave’, finds this unbearable, as he wants to meet his girlfriend Teresa. In order to resolve the problem, he secretly squeals on Cava to the school officials to get a pass. Cava is suspended from the academy, and Jaguar
suspects that someone has betrayed them and vows revenge on the unknown “squealer”.

A few days later during a combat training exercise, Ricardo is shot in the head from behind and dies. The school officials conclude that the death is accidental, stating that he shot himself with his own weapon. Alberto, Ricardo’s only friend, suspects that the shooting was not accidental and tells Lieutenant Gamboa of his suspicion that Jaguar killed Ricardo. He also tells Gamboa about other illicit cadet activities on the campus, namely the countless thefts, fights, drinking, smoking, and escapes without leave, etc. Gamboa is shocked and feels morally obligated to investigate the allegations. Although several other serious offenses committed by the students are discovered, school officials decide that, in the best interests of the institution’s reputation, no investigation should be conducted. Alberto was blackmailed into silence when the school officials discover the pornographic stories written by him for the other cadets in exchange for cigarettes and money. Alberto and Jaguar were placed in a cell where they fight viciously. When they return to the barracks, the other cadets think Jaguar is responsible for the shakedown that has resulted in heavy punishment for all of them. Jaguar does nothing to admit or deny his guilt; his code of honor forbids him from “snitching” on another person. Finally, Jaguar admits to Lieutenant Gamboa that he did shoot Ricardo, but
by this point, it is too late. Gamboa was transferred to an undesirable location because of his quest for the truth. By dropping his accusations, Alberto is permitted to graduate and returns to civilian life. As the novel ends, Jaguar goes unpunished, marries his love Teresa and becomes a bank clerk.

Interwoven with this central story of the cadets in the academy, there are other stories that reveal the past of the four principal characters. Told at different times and places by different narrators, these fragmented stories are presented alternately in various chapters throughout part 1 and 2. Part 1 narrates the incidents that lead to the death of Ricardo, and part 2 tells of the consequences of the death. The narrative of Ricardo’s death alternate with the lives of the three boys before entering the school and the three years of their lives as cadets. For example, a sequence about the theft of the exam is followed by the description of childhood of one of the protagonists, followed by a recount of an event that occurred during one of the cadet’s outings to the city before the theft. The use of such narrative segments, flashback, and several narrators make the novel an adventure in technique.

In the epilogue, three events are narrated. First, Jaguar admits to Gamboa that he did shoot Ricardo Arana. Second, by withdrawing his accusations, Alberto is permitted to graduate and return to civilian life.
Third, Jaguar also goes free, marries Teresa and becomes a lowly bank clerk. The suggestion of course is that, Leoncio Prado helped prepare its former students to enter a society that unfortunately is governed by the same set of failed values that they encountered as cadets. Vargas Llosa seems to indicate that, commitment in Peruvian society is lacking at multiple levels. Critics have correctly viewed the novel’s fictional world as a microcosm of Peruvian society. The novel portrays an unjust hierarchical society in which all social relationships operate on the basis of dominance.

The story of 'The Circle’ is narrated in a cinematic fashion. The novel progresses at great speed. Introductions are avoided. This mode of narration was totally new in Spanish America, and it won the novel an immediate place among other contemporary novels. The novel is concretely based in Peruvian reality. It gave a highly critical but convincing portrayal of the Peruvian military. In a lecture “The genesis of the Time of the Hero” (1971), Llosa pointed out that his novel described: “the tragedies of a broader reality, the reality of my country, Peruvian reality”.

The Time of the Hero is arguably the most important Spanish American novel on adolescence. Vargas Llosa transformed his own experiences in the Leoncio Prado military school to create a corrupt social milieu. His parents were separated before his birth, and shortly after he
was born, his mother moved with the infant to Bolivia. After ten years in Bolivia, his mother reconciled with his father and took her son back to Peru, to reunite the family in Lima. Disturbed by his twelve-year old son’s literary efforts, Vargas Llosa’s father enrolled him in the Leoncio Prado Military School in an attempt to change his direction. In Luis Harss & Barbara Dohmann’s *Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin-American writers* (1967), Llosa recollects his experiences:

He thought the Leoncio Prado would make a man of me. For me it was like discovering Hell — an unknown reality, the opposite side of life. It marked me to the core. At home nobody had ever raised a finger to me. In school we were kicked around. (353)

At issue was Vargas Llosa’s incipient literary creativity. His father had found out that he was writing poems and feared for his future, as in those days a poet is doomed to die of hunger. He feared for his ‘manhood’ too; because the belief that poets are homosexual was still very widespread. Llosa recalls his years of experience as a cadet and its relationship to literature in his *A Passion for Peru* (1983): “To protect me from these dangers he decided that the perfect antidote was Leoncio Prado Military School” (99). Vargas Llosa hated the school and left after three years to spend his last year in a civilian high school. Inspired by his experience at
the Leoncio Prado, he set the action for his first novel, *The Time of the Hero*, in that very environment. His two years (1950 to 1952) stay in the Leoncio Prado military academy were designed to mould him into a man, since his father was not pleased with his growing interest in becoming a writer. He began to write his account of his dog's life there (the Spanish title means 'The City and the Dogs'—a slang word for the cadets) shortly after leaving. Llosa speaks of all his work as the product of personal experience, and to this extent, *The Time of the Hero* undoubtedly began as revenge. Ever since he was in the Leoncio Prado, he wanted to write about it: “It was an outlet for my revolt against the Leoncio Prado. Also something hidden. Because in school one didn't dare show any sign of that” (99). He used to write when he was in Piura, his grandparents and uncles thought it was cute and applauded him for it. But when his father discovered that inclination in him, he was frightened. He thought something was seriously wrong.

The military environment was a survival of the fittest situation designed to prepare the cadets for their successful entry into the real world. Students from all segments of Peruvian society were brought together with their diverse values. Llosa reacted negatively to the socialization process and graphically described some of its shortcomings in this novel. He did
not finish the program of study at the academy but returned to Piura to complete the final phase of his education.

Although the story should not be taken as autobiography, Llosa's time at Leoncio Prado did prepare him in many ways to write this novel. Many of the characters, for example, are composites of individuals that he actually knew. The students and faculty of the academy reflect a microcosm of the larger Peruvian society. In that sense, the novel becomes a harsh condemnation not only of a military academy, but of a failed society governed not by truth and honor, but rather by opportunism, degradation, and corruption.

Vargas Llosa is concerned with criticizing Peruvian institutions. He fictionalizes the method by which a society prepares its youth to enter the adult realm. Its primary responsibility is to instill into the cadets values prevalent in the larger society. Hence lying, cheating, and even murder are condoned insofar as they facilitate the socialization process and assure the individual of advancement. He insists that his novels were about an intrinsically unjust society, laden with hypocrisy, criminality, and exploitation; but he was equally adamant in insisting that his literary motivations were personal rather than political. In a lecture he says, "The truth is that, in writing that novel The Time of the Hero, in writing stories
or anything else, I had never intended to address social, political or moral problems."

Upon publication in 1963, this groundbreaking book ignited immediate critical attention in the Spanish world, and created an immediate sensation. The novel won the prestigious Biblioteca Breve prize, a Spanish literary award that previously had never been given to a Latin American author. In particular, critics applauded Llosa’s daring structural experimentation. Despite the immediate success of the novel, some Peruvians took offense at the work’s unflattering image of their country. It was clearly an allegorical attack on both the academy and the larger Peruvian culture, and military leaders in Peru condemned the novel. No author had previously applied such critical realism so efficiently to Latin American society through the medium of the novel. At the academy, school officials who were deeply offended by the scandals described in the novel, ceremoniously bought and burned more than 1,000 copies of the novel. Nevertheless, the book-burning act sealed his celebrity, made the novel an acclaimed best-seller, and set the stage for a very successful career. Outside Peru, the novel was well received. But some Peruvian readers, especially residents of Lima, were aghast to find a street map of their capital city along with a photograph of Leoncio Prado Academy in the very first edition of the novel. These two visuals along with the vividly
portrayed cheating scandal that comprises the central narrative sequence of the novel, were perceived as a brash insult to the institution, which exists till today. Some said that the novel was the work of a degenerate mind, and another, claimed that Vargas Llosa had undoubtedly been paid by Ecuador to undermine the prestige of the Peruvian army.

A more significant response, however, was the immediate critical praise from reviewers and Latin American writers. The novel was lauded for its clever use of slang and taboo vocabulary, and for its complex narrative strategies. The fact that Jaguar is one of the narrators is not revealed till the end. A critic, J. J. Armas Marcelo in *World Literature Today, Volume 52* (1978), applauds the secret narratives of the novel during which the reader is uncertain as to who is speaking. Marcelo writes, "This functionality of the concept of secrecy in the formal structure of the novel constitutes, without a doubt, one of the fundamental characteristics and, at the same time, one of the most outstanding stylistic features of *The Time of the Hero*" (70). The novel presents itself to the reader as a box of secrets. The minor and the major questions involve both a moral questioning and a puzzle to be solved. One critic in the mid-1960s views Vargas Llosa as a cynic, who fails to propose an alternative to the painful and sordid reality presented. Rather, the only hope offered in the novel is through the individual’s own moral conscience.
Rilda L. Baker in an article titled *Of how to be and what to see while you are being: The Readers Performance in The Time of the Hero* considers: “Of all the novels published in Latin America since 1960 – during the period called the ‘Boom’ – no work that I know of has engendered more observable reactions than Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The Time of the Hero*” (3).

Vargas Llosa was closely associated with Sebastian Salazar Bondy, who nurtured and promoted his early literary career. When Bondy read the novel in manuscript form, he exhorted his younger friend to publish it immediately because of its revolutionary significance. He writes in an unpublished letter to Vargas Llosa: “Your novel captures the contradictions of the underdeveloped, deformed and unbearable society we live in, but things will explode, in fact, they are already exploding. This is why you should not wait much longer to publish your novel”.

What brought *The Time of the Hero* huge critical success, and caused it to be hailed by Donoso as one of the first novels to put the Boom on the map, was the strikingly original narrative technique. Abandoning linear plot-structure, Vargas Llosa rotates the narrative voice among sundry characters, interweaves past and present, and shifts the scene from inside to outside the Academy. The reader cannot be passive. The reader has to be alert and ready to work at making connections.

By reading Faulkner I learned that form could be a character in a novel and sometimes the most important character – that is, organization of the perspective of the narration, the use of different narrators, the withholding of some information from the reader to create ambiguity. I was fascinated with this extraordinary mastering of the structure of a fictional work. I suppose this is also visible in my first novel. (51)

Gerald Martin in *The Cambridge Companion to Mario Vargas Llosa* (2012), edited by Efrain Kristal and John King, observes that the text was invisibly structured through a ghostly architecture built on essentially Faulknerian techniques. The four main concepts in this connection are:

- Communicating vessels - A technique through which realities from different times and places are first juxtaposed and then merged.

- Chinese boxes - The technique of narrating one story within another, or within a frame.

- Hidden data - The technique of withholding information and releasing it at the most dramatically appropriate moment, a
modernist technique that demands assiduous reader participation and turns all novels into detective stories.

- Qualitative leap- A technique through which a narrative achieves a level of intensity that seems suddenly to burst it through to another dimension of reality.

The first two techniques determine the entire conception and structure of Vargas Llosa’s second novel, *The Green House*. The last two methods are used throughout Vargas Llosa’s fiction. The technique that fits-in best to *The Time of the Hero* is the technique of ‘hidden data’ as it has a detective outlook. The novel is a murder mystery and also a detective story which revolves around the death of Ricardo. Gerald Martin further comments: “However, as in all Vargas Llosa’s works, which are always about something altogether different, there is no solution to the mystery and no satisfactory answers to any of the questions”. (27)

The novel impressed the reader because of its vitality and its use of sophisticated literary technique. Vargas Llosa uses two strategies to complicate his narrative: making a key fact ambiguous - the novel never reveals whether Ricardo was actually murdered or killed accidentally - and concealing the identity of a central character in certain sections of the novel to achieve a surprising effect when he is later identified. In the last
One critic has noted certain resemblances between this novel and the detective story format. The plot contains the flavor of a detective story. Pieces of important information are withheld from the reader, making the plot more strikingly similar to a puzzle. In fact this novel is best viewed as a riddle or puzzle, which received mixed responses from critics. Luis Harss regards it as bothersome and questions the effectiveness. He further asserts that, “Vargas Llosa has the bad habit of withholding vital information”. (355)

Frederic Jameson in his book *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) opines that postmodern reality is radically fragmented, discontinuous and multiple. Critics say that the plot structure seems at first disturbingly fragmented and lacks in relevant connections and significant relationships among the parts. The complex nature of the narrative point of view in the novel can be understood by concentrating on the four principal narrators – Alberto, Ricardo, Jaguar and Boa. Each narratorial point of view is fragmented. The stories of each character develop chronologically, beginning with the early moments in their lives in the first chapter and ending with the most recent events in the epilogue.
The structure of the novel is recognizable through the fragmented presentation of multiple points of view. The novel is divided into two parts and each part is divided into eight chapters. Each chapter is broken down into short segments. The epilogue contains three scenes. On the whole, eighty-two segments make up the novel and they alternate between the past and the present, between the school and the city, between the cadets and the neighbors, between the school’s military codes and the social norms of the society, between victims and victimizers, etc. No doubt, the reader gets confused with broken segments, trying to identify the narrator of certain segments and it’s only towards the end, one gets an idea of all the events. Haiqing Sun in Michael David Sollars’ *The Facts on File Companion to the World Novel: 1900 to the Present* (2008) rightly contends that: “Readers are challenged and invited to participate in a game of detection when multiple characters’ stories within a large span of time and space are broken into pieces and carried through the narration of a school examination and a military exercise” (814). The lead segment deals with the theft of the exam and reveals certain descriptive aspects. It is in this segment certain social differences among the cadets pervade, which sets the stage for the rest of the novel. The next segment narrates a moment in the remote childhood past of Ricardo, when he and his mother move to Lima. The third segment begins with a first person narration by Alberto, who is on guard-duty on the night of the theft. He imagines writing love
letters and lurid stories for other cadets in exchange for money or cigarettes. Then he meets Ricardo, The Slave, who is also on guard duty. When Alberto asks him why he lets everyone treat him like a slave, Ricardo says he does what he wants. Alberto suggests him: “but you are a soldier here whether you like it or not. And the big thing in the army is to be real tough, to have guts, see what I mean? Screw them first before they screw you.” (23)

This is one of the major themes of the novel. The cadets are supposed to learn the law of the jungle by applying the theory of the survival of the fittest. Alberto further says to Ricardo: “if you don’t defend yourself tooth and claw they jump on you. That’s the law of the jungle” (24). The fourth segment deals with Alberto’s past in the present tense. The fifth segment of the first chapter is narrated from the collective point of view of several cadets who are involved in sexual activities with animals. For example, a strange relationship develops between Boa and Skimpy, a stray dog living in the barracks. Dick Gerdes in *Mario Vargas Llosa* (1985) feels: “The apparently unrelated segments, which are so abruptly juxtaposed to one another, create violent contrasts throughout the novel” (41). Boa’s most secret emotions and crude feelings of passion, sex and violence are revealed. In this way, Boa’s point of view brings out reality in the military school. Thus the structure of the novel is
recognizable through the fragmented presentation of multiple points of view.

The underlying psychological basis of the novel is Freudian. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was a great admirer of Darwin. He owned and made use of Darwin's major evolutionary writings. Freud went beyond Darwin, to arrive at the belief that, man is influenced greatly by psychological factors and not just by social and material conditions. Jeffrey S. Nevid broadly analyses Freud's 'Psychodynamic perspective' in his book *Psychology: Concepts and Applications* (2009). He stresses on Freud's psychoanalytical theory. The central idea underlying Freud's theory of personality is the belief that, dynamic struggle takes place within the human psyche between unconscious forces. James Brown in his book *Freud and the Post-Freudians* (1966), provides a compelling account of Freud's basic concepts of psychoanalytic theory. According to Freud's theory of psychology:

There were, it was postulated, two great vital drives – the drive for self preservation and the drive toward procreation (preservation of the species). The former presented no great difficulty to the individual since it was not ordinarily thwarted for any prolonged period of time. The latter, however, to which Freud gave the name libido or sexual energy, was
frequently blocked from overt expression by the repressing forces of civilization. (20)

Both the channeling of sexual energy and the desire for self preservation are prominent factors, which determine human relations in The Time of the Hero. The first year cadets are put in a situation where they have to survive the various hazing, beating and abuses of the older students. Later they are taught how to outwit each other and the officials. The underlying attitude in the Leoncio Prado is that, if the cadets can survive in this environment, society at large will not be an obstacle for them. For most of the cadets, self preservation is not a problem except for the weaker ones like Ricardo. The idea of machismo is imposed upon the cadets by parents, society, and peers. The result is a preoccupation with sex, manhood, etc. The cadets show constant desire to know woman through sexual contests, thus becoming a man.

In the novel, the characters are forced to recognize the importance of sex in their psychological make-up as individuals. Alberto has the model of his father to emulate. The military school succeeded in transforming Alberto as his father had expected. The boys are sent to the Leoncio Prado Academy, so that they may become men and be molded into good citizens. By the end of the novel, Alberto is determined to follow the footsteps of his father. The school experience has turned Alberto into a replica of his
father. Alberto lies about his sexual activities. He does not hesitate to betray his friend Ricardo for Teresa. When Ricardo is confined, he asks Alberto to deliver a message to Teresa. Alberto delivers the message, takes her to the movies, lies to Ricardo on his return, refuses to write letters for him and claims Teresa as his own. Of course, Ricardo is not aware of this.

In the case of Ricardo, the psychological pressures of sex and machismo lead to his destruction. The idea of manhood is imposed upon him at an early age. There are strong Oedipus complex feelings as seen in the attachment to his mother and the hatred he has on his father. After numerous conflicts, his father insists that he should enter the Leoncio Prado and become a man. In the academy, his thoughts and fantasies about Teresa make it unbearable for him to remain confined. He subsequently commits a defiant act of survival by disclosing the cadets’ secrets to the authorities in exchange for a few moments with Teresa. He realized that he is losing the important battle of self preservation. In a sense, he is rebelling because of the negative image he has of himself, his desire to be a man. Jeffrey S. Nevid in *Psychology: Concepts and Applications* (2009) quotes: “To live in an ordered society, Freud maintained, humans need to control their primitive sexual and aggressive impulses. In other words, humans need to channel their sexual and aggressive instincts in socially appropriate ways so as to live harmoniously with one another”. (480)
Sex, manhood, and self-esteem are the major preoccupations of Ricardo during his brief existence. He mistakenly trusted his friend Alberto. The two basic Freudian psychological determinants which form the basis of the novel – the drives for self-preservation and to some extent, procreation, converge on the character of Ricardo, which makes life unbearable for him. Thus, it can be understood in Freudian terms that, man is influenced greatly by psychological factors and not just by social and material conditions; and that there is individual response to given situations.

One of the most prominent issues in the novel is the recurring theme of masculinity, which is a part of life for the cadets at the Leoncio Prado academy. As the cadets joke with each other, they constantly challenge each other's masculinity and sexuality. For Llosa, Peruvian society tends to exalt masculinity and male chauvinism. The story centers on the agonizing crossing of boys into manhood. As the boys leave home – the realm of the mother – they must make their way to the privileged site of machismo. Llosa manages to disclose the violence of the academy. The main characters, who are adolescents, represent a cross-section of Peruvian society. They simultaneously propagate and suffer the cruel violence and rituals of daily life in the school. Violence anchors the world of his adolescent characters. Llosa believes that, in the society he depicts,
violence is at root of all human relations.

In depicting the military academy, Llosa highlights its dual sidedness. The most powerful is the most macho, and the most macho is the one who succeeds in escaping from the school. To escape is a ritual whereby the bravest sneaks out and returns without being caught. The goal of such a cadet in going against is, to situate himself in a position of superiority over the students and the guardians of the institution. Escape, therefore according to Robert Richmond Ellis in *The Inscription of Masculinity and Whiteness in the Autobiography of Mario Vargas Llosa* (1996), “is not a gesture of freedom but instead a reconfiguration of power” (228). Jaguar appears to beat the system by adopting a macho front. But he has committed a serious crime by killing Ricardo in order to gain revenge. He feels that Ricardo trampled ‘The Circle’s code’ to squeal on Cava in order to get a pass. He appears truly surprised when he met Alberto in the jail: “The Slave accused the peasant?... I didn’t know he squealed on Cava. It’s a good thing he’s dead. All squealers ought to be dead” (363). He admits finally that he is wrong. At the end, he states that he understands Ricardo’s actions better: “but that morning I saw him right in front of me, with his head up, so I aimed and fired. I wanted to get revenge for the section, Sir. How could I know the rest were worse than he was”? (386)
Alberto demonstrates his masculinity not by using physical force but by writing love letters, though he has never been sexually involved with women. When Ricardo was confined in the barracks, he begins to go out with Teresa. Their relationship is secret, mysterious and finally a failure. Alberto, by revealing the cadet who is responsible for the death of Ricardo, gives importance to friendship and is loyal to the code of honour. Even Jaguar, for whom squealing is a serious crime in The Circle’s code, understands that Alberto broke the code because of his friendship for Ricardo.

In the novel, the Leoncio Prado military academy instills the value system of hombria into the cadets to achieve dominance of others through force and aggressive activity. The rules of the game are simple. Jaguar, the prototype of male aggression, expresses it this way: “everybody is out to “screw” the other guy, and he who lets himself be “screwed” is ruined. He further says: “If they didn’t fuck around with me it’s because I’m more of a man. It’s not my fault” (42). Jaguar is “more of a man” because he never cracks; he remains closed and is always the one who “opens”, never leaving him self open. Opposite to Jaguar is the Slave, the one who is open and who pays for it with his life. When Jaguar was kept in jail, he insists on the notion that, unlike Ricardo, even if he knew, he would not squeal because of his spirit of loyalty toward his fellow cadets. This he calls his
code of honour. Jaguar cannot believe that his classmates consider him an informer, but he is not willing to accuse Alberto, the real culprit. He keeps quiet because, exposing Alberto would make him a squealer, and that would betray his own code of behavior. Impressed by the bravery of the Jaguar, Alberto offers him his friendship and volunteers to save his friend’s reputation by confessing to the murder of Ricardo. Jaguar rebuffs him with contempt: “I don’t want to be your friend” the Jaguar said. “You’re a rotten squealer and you make me vomit. Get out” (287). Finally Jaguar is set free, Alberto is made to retract his accusations, and the whole incident is officially declared a deplorable accident.

In fact, many of the cadets are in the academy, as a result of the masculine values of their fathers. Just after Ricardo is shot, Alberto talks with Ricardo's father outside the infirmary. Arana's father describes his motivation for sending Ricardo to the academy: “It did him good, it changed him, it made a man out of him” (211). He goes on to say, “His mother thinks I'm to blame, that's a woman for you.... But I've got a clear conscience, absolutely clear. I wanted him to be a man” (212). Alberto thinks back to a conversation with his own father about enrolling at the academy. “It's for your own good”, his father told him; “They'll make a man out of you. They'll give you a strong body, a strong personality” (215). As if to prove his own masculinity, Alberto's father has numerous
girlfriends even though he is married. Almost every night he comes home late, or fails to come home at all. When Alberto tells his neighborhood friends about a fight his parents had over his father's indiscretions, one of the friends says, “He's a killer, all right. He's got rafts of women” (221). Instead of being disappointed in this behavior, Alberto's friends admire Alberto's father for his proficiency as an adulterer. With such an attitude prevalent at the highest level of the school's leadership, the cadets are doomed to the same codes of masculinity that have been taught to their fathers and destined also to pass them on to their own sons.

The best definition of masculine values in the novel appears during a discussion between the officers of the Leoncio Prado. Gamboa is an outstanding example of how Llosa interprets the Peruvian military mentality. While the military academy is allegedly teaching “discipline, morality, and labor” to the cadets, what they learn are bribery, corruption, brutality, and the code of silence. Gamboa is the only member of the school who has been faithful to his own code of behavior. When he decided to pursue the truth in Ricardo's case, he looked at the captain in the eyes and said: “if its’ true they killed that boy, if it’s true about the liquor and the sale of exams and the rest, I feel I’ve got a duty, Captain. I feel it’s my duty to find out if there’s any truth in that story”. (286)
When he demands severe punishments and an investigation of Ricardo's death, the captain is less anxious to take action. He tells Gamboa, "We'll have to punish them for the liquor and the exams. But remember, the first thing you learn in the army is to be a man. And what do men do? They smoke, they drink, they gamble..." (310). He continues, telling Gamboa, "The cadets all know they get expelled if they're discovered.... But the smart ones don't get caught. If they're going to be men, they have to take chances, they have to use their wits" (310). At the Leoncio Prado, the cadets certainly do learn to become men according to Garrido's definition. Outside educational and military training, the cadets occupy much of their time with sex, drinking, gambling, and fighting- the very values that appear in Garrido's assessment of typical masculine behavior. When Gamboa suggests that he will make better men of them by teaching them discipline and honesty, Garrido tells him, "You talk like a religious fanatic. Do you want to wreck your career?" (311). Finally Gamboa realizes that his superiors and his colleagues are more interested in their reputation than in the rules and regulations of the military institution. When he is handed a written confession by Jaguar, he tears it up, saying 'The army doesn't want to hear another word about it. It would be easier to bring Arana back to life than to convince the army it's made an error" (387). The novel brings out how certain institutions contribute to this kind of situation through encouraging hypocrisy and self-interest.
The novel describes adolescents in a Peruvian military school striving to survive in a hostile and violent environment. The characters appear free to make choices. The epigraph taken from Sartre in the novel seems justified by the boys’ stories: “We play the part of heroes because we’re cowards, the part of saints because we’re wicked: we play the killer’s role because we’re dying to murder our fellow man: we play at being because we’re liars from the moment we’re born” (1). The aptness of this quotation is made patent by the author’s perspective on adolescents growing up in a corrupt adult world in which they are obligated to play tragic games in order to survive. Perhaps the best example of the coward in the guise of the valorous knight, the liar in the guise of the honest man, is Alberto. Alberto is assumed by many to be the hero in the story because he had simulated the courage to denounce the murder and accuse Jaguar of it. Llosa seems to send the message that Peruvian society does not subscribe to the overt excelling of man, despite their capacities for being heroic. Marvin A. Lewis aptly sums up in his book, *From Lima to Leticia* (1983): “As a result, Vargas Llosa’s fictional representation of Peru appears unable to support a positive hero because of socially prevailing adverse values and the fact that humans are made of both positive and negative characteristics”. (26)
The Time of the Hero was an astonishing novel in the sense that it violated every reading code, trampled on all the narrative norms, and it triumphantly inaugurated a new reading pact between author and reader. It revealed that the very institutions in charge of forging and guarding the ethical constructs were in fact, the most efficient machines of corruption and denial. The plot structure of the novel provides a kind of devastating mirror in which the corruption of the military school reflects the corruption of the larger society.

The Peruvian historical context is perhaps more important for Vargas Llosa's work than the literary tradition. Throughout modern Peru's history, corruption has been a constant factor. Its effect on Peru would become one of Vargas Llosa's greatest inspirations for writing. For Llosa, much of the corruption stems from the prevalent masculine values in the country. He considers this as a destructive force. He also condemns Peru's middle class, blaming them for many of the country's problems. He describes Peru's middle-class in Luis Harss & Barbara Dohmann's Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin-American writers (1967) as “the worst thing under the sun: an absolutely noxious class, infected with prejudices, ignorant, and hypocritical” (2). He realized early that he wanted to attempt to cure some of Peru's problems through his writing. In his A Passion for Peru (1983) he recollects: “I had discovered, in my last year of
high school, that the country had severe social problems. I wanted to be identified with the poor and to be part of a revolution that would bring justice to Peru”. (107)

In the novel, Lieutenant Gamboa comments on Peru's problems. He believes that the military should be exempted from the problems: “Why is our country the way it is? Lack of discipline. Lack of order. The only part of it that stays strong and healthy is the army, because of its structure, its organization” (286). Despite Gamboa's belief in the army, it becomes apparent that the army is corrupt in its own right, when Captain Garrido told Gamboa in an amiable voice, to stop his search for truth in the death of Ricardo: “A clean conscience might help you get into heaven, but it won't help your career” (324). Gamboa finally realizes this after his reassignment to a remote military outpost. In the novel, injustice goes unpunished and virtue unrewarded, underscoring the author's belief that Peru's society is in desperate need of moral improvement.

As one critic has aptly pointed out, Vargas Llosa's novels are profoundly discontented visions of Peru. It is not surprising that Vargas Llosa states his vision of his task as a writer in Peru as follows in Marcha (Montevideo) in 1971): “Literature in general and the novel in particular are expressions of discontent. Their social usefulness lies principally in the fact that they remind people that the world is always wrong, that life
should always change” (31). By showing a socialization process defined by corruption, Llosa condemns the very foundations of modern society in general and Peruvian society in particular. Although Llosa would write other works about adolescent coming of age, it is this novel, *The Time of the Hero* that stands out as the masterpiece of the Latin American bildungsroman.

The novel is a brutal portrayal of living conditions in Peru, especially Lima. Vargas Llosa describes his introduction to the city: “I went to Lima for the first time when I was just growing out of childhood. I hated the city from the beginning because of the unhappiness I felt there. My parents had been separated and then reconciled after ten years” (10). Teresa in the novel says, “Lima is the most corrupt city in the world” (107). Most of the action takes place at the Leoncio Prado military school, a microcosm of Peruvian society. Only the fittest – either the strong or the clever will survive. “screw or get screwed” is the basic concept ruling behavior. Cheating, fighting, theft, and murder seems to be the daily life activity in the school. The ultimate goal of the academy is to transform the boys into men, disciplined and loyal machos, and train them to represent and defend the honor of the nation. But there is lack of honor in the environment filled with hypocrisy and injustice. The cadets are named as dogs because of their condition of life and the nature of their behavior.
Their behavior reflects the life of Lima which is known as dogs’ existence. Few critical opinions expressed shock over the coarse language used in the novel. Few commented that some words are perfectly suited to the subject. But the language used in the novel serves to depict the Peruvians and their environment.

Joel Hancock in a Latin American Literary Review “Animalization and Chiaroscuro Techniques: Descriptive Language in La ciudad y los perros (The City and the Dogs)” observes that a curious phenomenon occurs in this context: “true animals are portrayed as human beings, sensitive and intelligent persons” (41). This paradox serves to accentuate the beastly life of the cadets. Though few in number, animals portrayed in the novel are kind and noble, and differ significantly from their supposedly superior masters. The school mascot, for example, the enigmatic Vicuna, is intelligent and alert. She has adapted well to her environment by discovering techniques for survival when she is confined. It was this Vicuna which made Cava shiver when he was crossing the officers’ quarters to steal the chemistry paper. Two and a half years ago, when he came to Lima to finish school, he was amazed to find that creature from the mountains wandering calmly among the gray, weather-beaten walls of the Leoncio Prado Military Academy. He wondered as who had brought the vicuna to the Academy: “The cadets used him as a target, but the
Vicuna hardly paid any attention when the stones hit him. He simply walked away from the boys with a look of utter indifference” (6). The vicuna is described in human terms; her eyes, for example, are sweet and timid with gentle stare, a characteristic absent in the school’s human population.

The basic opinion of the novel is that Peruvian society is a jungle of animals fighting for existence. The cadets are portrayed as savage animals. Of course many of the characters have nicknames suggesting animals: Jaguar, Boa, Pirana, Gallo, Mono, etc., described as physically resembling the creature. Cava is from the mountains of Peru and other cadets come from the coastal regions. The school contains a racial mixture of whites, blacks, Indians and mestizos. The principal ethnic groups in Peru are the Indians, Hispanicized mestizos (of mixed Spanish and Indian blood), and whites. Whites are the elite of Peruvian society. Their claim to social superiority comes not only from their control of the country's resources but also from their heritage of aristocracy. Mestizos are also sometimes called criollos. This ambiguous terminology reflects the ambiguity of ethnic group membership in Peru. To say someone is white is to attribute elite status to that person. To call someone a mestizo is to assign him or her to the middle or lower class. Despite this distinction, mestizos and whites
share similar legal status and both have traditionally held power over the Indian majority.

Various ethnic distinctions of Peru appear throughout the novel, and the Leoncio Prado academy seems to mirror the prejudices of the country as a whole. At the school, the Indians are considered “peasants” and are stigmatized with countless negative stereotypes. When Boa thinks about Cava's suspension from the school, several of these stereotypes emerge. He muses that “the peasants have bad luck, something's always happening to them.... The peasants are kind of stupid.... It's good luck not to be born a peasant” (173). Later, Boa thinks about Cava again: “That poor peasant Cava, he's had a bad time... now he'll go back to the mountains and won't ever study again, he'll just stay up there with the Indians and the llamas, he'll just be a stupid field hand” (218). These stereotypes are common throughout Peru, as reflected in the Peruvian expression that The Indian is the animal closest to man.

The very portrayal of the cadets as savage animals makes Llosa to think of a different title for the novel. A literal translation of the Spanish title La ciudad y los perros reads The City and the Dogs. It suggests a relation between the cadets of the academy and the city of Lima where the school is located. The action takes place in Lima, the capital city of Peru, and the “dogs” is a derogatory name given to first-year cadets in the
military school. Llosa entitled the novel *The Imposters* and provisionally used another title *The Abode of the Hero*: which is close to the English version. He debated at length about the title of the novel with the editors and publishers. Initially the novel was to be called *The Hero’s Dwelling*. Later it was changed to *The Imposters*. Finally the Spanish edition was published with the title *La ciudad y los perros* (*The City and the Dogs*) which subtly establishes the basic narrative format of the novel as the incidents in the novel occur in the city of Lima or at the academy.

But the English version of the title *The Time of the Hero*, chosen by Llosa’s editor is not as apt as the original Spanish title. Indeed Llosa prefers the original Spanish title *The City and the Dogs* which is very apt. He says:

My novel *La ciudad y los perros* was given the English title - *The Time of the Hero*. I must say I did not like it because The Time of the Hero does not give the same ideas as the original title. But the title was chosen by my publisher. When I suggested The City and the Dogs, he said that that the title was not at all catchy; and so we gave the novel a more catchy title.

Modern literature, according to Northrop Frye in his *Historical Criticism: A Theory of Modes* (1957) is classified as basically ironic and it
is clear that the modern artist expresses a very pessimistic view of the human condition. This is precisely the attitude of Vargas Llosa in the novel. For Llosa, irony becomes a method for examining the contradictory situations encountered in the Peruvian experience. In most of his novels, Llosa uses dramatic irony to enhance suspense. John Brushwood is correct in stating that:

> Although it is completely 'modern' in technique, plot development is the basis of the experience of this work. That is to say, Vargas Llosa creates a world, presents a problem, develops interesting characters, and works out a climax and denouement that hold his readers in suspense. (34)

He has been criticized for using this device in Teresa’s affair. Teresa is the girl friend of Ricardo, Alberto and Jaguar at various points in the novel. Their relationship is presented in a mode of presentation which involves the withholding of information or say, suspense. Though Alberto and Ricardo are friends, Alberto takes advantage of Ricardo’s naivete. Ricardo fails to realize that Alberto betrays him and claims that Teresa belongs to her. Ricardo is portrayed as a helpless victim of an ironic situation. Alberto takes advantage of Ricardo’s confinement and he along with Teresa head for the movies. Ricardo didn’t even suspect that Alberto is betraying him. Ricardo is the victim of the other cadets. He is overtly victimized as he
was shot dead by one of his fellow cadet. He is the one who receives the punishment of his fellow cadets and finally makes the supreme sacrifice for all of their guilt. He is victimized without knowledge of the fact that he is victimized in the case of Teresa. So in a sense, he is victimized both overtly and without knowledge of the fact that he is victimized. Jaguar is the exact opposite of Ricardo in the manner of presentation. It is the intention of Llosa to develop the character of Jaguar in such a way as to show a complete change of personality. Even the unpredictable Jaguar finds his place in the society. The fact that the confessed murderer adjusts more readily to society than any of the other cadets is also ironic.

The work was acclaimed as starting point for both the writer’s professional life and the Boom in Latin American literature, and has since been examined from many critical perspectives. The novel gained international recognition as it has been translated into almost dozen languages and established Vargas Llosa as one of the most promising writers of his generation.

The novel is a revelation. Llosa criticizes the Peruvian society because he sincerely wants change and is prepared to work for it. He feels that writers, whether they knew it or not, seek to avenge themselves on their families, society, life and God himself; they feel compelled to expose, exhibit themselves for the sake of their critical mission. Thus, he conveyed
many of the most important experiences of his life unashamedly into the subject matter of his fiction. He did this most notoriously in the case of his novel, *The Time of the Hero*, in which the military academy is mercilessly depicted under its own name and with all its most secret details exposed and revealed.

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