The Changed Jaguar

THE TIME OF THE HERO. By Mario Vargas Llosa. Translated by Lysander Kemp from the Spanish, "La ciudad y los perros," 409 pp. New York: Grove Press, \$5.95.

By HARRY SYLVESTER

HERE are institutions which impose their own stylized acture and quality upon structure novels about them as inevitably as a magnet imposes its field of attraction upon iron filings. The young Peruvian novelist,
Mario Vargas Lloss, has not
been able to escape such pattermination this needs about terning in this novel about a famed military school in Lima.

But, through the exercise of a remarkable talent, he has been with a hard able to imbue it able to impue it with surface reality. He turns out also to be moralist; more remarkable still, he does not engage his moralism in fashionable confrontations but in the realm of the individual and his actions.

His publishers seek some-what desperately on the jacket of the book to find a social meaning here and the condem-nation of a society; but apart from the implied criticism of some of the officials at the of the o school, Va school, Vargas is concerned less with society than with growth and change in the inconcerned dividual and the mystery of how these are accomplished. In this he knows better than to knows bett ific. Rather specific. he adumbe special. reasier ne same-brates, so that the silences en-closing each significant gesture or event become cumulatively more eloquent than the happen-ings themselves. This is partic-ularly the case with one of his figures called the Jaguar, violent student with a criminal background unknown to the school. A less likely character for even a relative moral rehabilitation would not be easy to find.

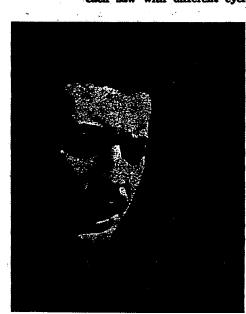
During a a field exercise employing ammunition, impulse Jaguar kills the weak-

MR. SYLVESTER is the author of "A Golden Girl," a novel with a

in his class. The school's orities carry out an inling ling in his class, The school's authorities carry out an investigation which turns into a whitewash, but another student is certain that he knows the killer. The student is aided by a young lieutenant on the faculty, but they find the system more than they can buck and more than they can buck and are forced to withdraw their charges. The Jaguar has, of course, denied has guilt. Later, after he is beaten by a group of students not for his suspected act but because he was erro-neously thought to have been the one who betrayed the stu-dents' clandestine activities, the change begins in him.

This is somewhat heroic medicine, but what Vargas is saying is that through having another's point of view forced (breaking the upon him (breaking crustation his petty criminal past had formed), the Jaguar must take a perspective from which he begins to see anew. In his first rush of guilt he confesses the killing to the lieutenant who realizes because e of a more subtle change in himself that it is too late for the confession to accomplish anything except the punishment of the changed Jaguar. That the latter becomes a bank clerk on grad-uation is one of the book's ambecomes usation is one of the biguities; as with other many writers. Vargas functions on the than a single level of the epigraph from Sartre would seem to imply that the values of some of the book's events are those of existentialism.

Curiously, Vargas does less well by the physical environ-ment than when he is engaged with the character subtleties of win the character subtleties of his people. Perhaps having grown up in Lima, the author finds the environment all too familiar. But he sees a mostly gray city, even when it is not hidden under the garda (which the otherwise recollect towards. the otherwise excellent transla-tion persists in calling fog), whereas a young American wo-man saw Lima as a "slightly Indianized Paris." But then each saw with different eyes.



Mario Vargas Llosa