

GUIDED READING: THE RECEPTION OF MIGUEL ÁNGEL ASTURIAS'S NOVEL IN ROMANIA DURING THE 1960S–1970S

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Abstract This article examines the controlled reception of *The President* by Miguel Ángel Asturias in Romania during the 1960s–1970s. It argues that the novel was not only accepted but ideologically mediated through translation, paratexts, and literary criticism. While early reception privileged its political dimension, later interpretations incorporated aesthetic and symbolic complexity. The study highlights how institutional frameworks shaped interpretive boundaries, allowing multiple readings while privileging those aligned with official discourse. Asturias's case illustrates how Latin American literature functioned simultaneously as aesthetic expression and ideological resource within a controlled cultural system.

Keywords Controlled reception, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Latin American literature, ideological mediation, dictator novel.

In the 1960s, Latin American literature experienced unprecedented international expansion, becoming a global literary phenomenon. Driven by the success of authors associated with the Latin American Boom,¹ these works gradually entered the East European literary market despite their geographic and cultural distance. This circulation was not simply the result of cultural openness, but of a complex process of selection and mediation in which aesthetic and ideological criteria intersected. Critical studies have shown that, within the socialist bloc, Latin American literature functioned not only as an aesthetic phenomenon but also as an ideological resource supporting a

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¹ The *Latin American Boom* refers to the group of writers who, beginning in the 1960s, achieved unprecedented global circulation, contributing to the consolidation of Latin American literature within the universal canon through narrative innovation, thematic complexity, and formal experimentation. Among the most representative figures are Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, and Mario Vargas Llosa. Although their works predate the 1960s, this wave also intensified the translation and dissemination of authors such as Miguel Ángel Asturias and Alejo Carpentier.

broader vision of political and economic inequalities. Works addressing dictatorship, oppression, and exploitation were therefore particularly relevant, as they could be integrated into a discourse compatible with dominant ideology.

The situation in communist Romania during the 1960s reflects this ambivalence. After 1964, a relative cultural liberalization allowed greater access to world literature and a diversification of translations. However, this openness remained strictly controlled through editorial, critical, and ideological mechanisms regulating both circulation and interpretation. Cultural control operated not only through prohibition but also through the organization of meaning and the establishment of legitimate reading frameworks. This can be described as a form of controlled reception, in which selection, translation, and interpretation are mediated by institutions that limit interpretive plurality. Literary texts were not simply transferred into a new cultural space, but re-signified through the emphasis on socially and politically compatible elements and the attenuation of others.

Building on these premises, this article analyses the reception of *The President* by Miguel Ángel Asturias in the 1960s–1970s. It argues that the work was not only accepted but ideologically filtered through institutional and discursive mechanisms that oriented its interpretation toward official discourse. Asturias thus becomes emblematic of how Latin American literature was integrated into Romanian culture, not as a purely aesthetic expression, but as a mediated form balancing cultural openness and ideological control.

Romania in the 1960s and the Controlled Circulation of the Dictator Novel

The 1960s marked in Romania a period of relative cultural liberalization, characterized by a reconfiguration of the relationship between literary production and ideological control. After the rigid Stalinist decade dominated by socialist realism and strict institutional regulation, cultural policy shifted toward more flexible forms of control. This did not mean its disappearance, but its recalibration. Instead of purely prohibitive censorship, more subtle mechanisms emerged, based on selection, guidance, and interpretive mediation.

Within this context, the opening toward foreign literatures became a key instrument of cultural policy. It responded both to the need to diversify the domestic literary field and to a strategy of symbolic legitimation, through which the regime positioned itself within an international cultural circuit. However, this openness remained highly selective. Priority was given to literatures from regions considered “peripheral” to the capitalist West, which could be more easily integrated into an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial discourse.

This openness operated through clear ideological selection. Only texts compatible with acceptable interpretive frameworks were translated and published. Aesthetic criteria persisted but were subordinated to broader political considerations. As Cristian Vasile notes, censorship mechanisms aimed not only to eliminate “dangerous” content, but to shape cultural discourse in line with state ideology.

Within this framework, literature was not imported as an autonomous form, but as a cultural object whose meanings were reconfigured through ideological mediation. This process

operated through selection and contextualization, including prefaces, editorial framing, and critical discourse, which oriented reading toward ideologically acceptable interpretations.

Thus, the liberalization of the 1960s should be understood not as a reduction of control, but as its transformation. Control became more flexible, operating through selective inclusion and guided interpretation. The circulation of foreign literature was therefore the result of a negotiation between aesthetic openness and ideological stabilization, defining the specificity of the Romanian cultural field. This dynamic of selection and ideological mediation becomes clearer when situated within the broader framework of Cold War literary circulation. In the 1960s, Latin American literature expanded not only in the West but also in socialist countries, where it was read through a specific ideological lens. Beyond Romania's partial distancing from the Soviet sphere, this circulation was facilitated by major political transformations in Latin America, particularly the Cuban Revolution and the international rise of Latin American literature.

From a historical perspective, this expansion is closely linked to the establishment of the regime led by Fidel Castro and the promotion of a new ideological orientation. The new political power in Havana mobilized literature to denounce imperialism and capitalism, shaping a cultural field in which ideology played a central role. As a result, Latin American works became especially attractive to socialist regimes, as they could be interpreted as expressions of colonialism, economic dependency, and political oppression, and integrated into anti-imperialist discourse without conflicting with dominant ideology.

In the Romanian context, this explains how the work of Miguel Ángel Asturias could be perceived both as an innovative aesthetic form and as ideologically compatible. Its circulation was not simply the result of cultural openness, but of a configuration in which selection, translation, and interpretation were closely intertwined.

Miguel Ángel Asturias and Ideological Compatibility

The analysis of the circulation and reception of foreign literature in 1960s Romania shows that its integration was not the result of simple cultural openness, but of a process of selection and institutional mediation. Acceptance depended not only on aesthetic value, but also on the ideological potential of texts and their compatibility with dominant interpretive frameworks. Literature was thus not merely translated, but reconfigured through paratexts, critical discourse, and cultural institutions that shaped meaning and limited interpretive ambiguity. Within this framework, the question of "compatibility" emerges: how could an author associated with magical realism and the dictator novel become acceptable within a system oriented toward interpretive control?

The novel *The President* by Miguel Ángel Asturias provides a paradigmatic case. Published in 1946 and later consecrated by the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1967, the work offers a complex representation of dictatorship, centred on political terror, alienation, and dehumanization.

Its reception follows a logic of ideological compatibility, explaining both its early translation² and Asturias's visibility in Romania. He thus represents a case of an author whose work was valued both for its aesthetic qualities and its ideological usefulness.

A key factor is the political dimension of his work. *The President* constructs a critique of dictatorship that, although not tied to a specific historical context, can be readily integrated into an anti-imperialist discourse. The dictator appears as a figure of institutionalized violence associated with Latin America, allowing for a condemnation of external authoritarianism without reference to the Romanian communist regime³. This "externalization" of tyranny constitutes a crucial condition of the text's acceptability. Such acceptability may also have been facilitated by the ideological vocabulary of the period, in which dictatorship was commonly understood as a feature of external or historical authoritarian regimes rather than as a category applicable to the socialist system itself.

The political critique in *The President* is not expressed through transparent realism, but through narrative strategies that amplify ambiguity, such as fragmentation, temporal distortion, and the blending of real and imaginary elements characteristic of magical realism. This formal opacity prevents the message from stabilizing into a single meaning, allowing divergent interpretations. The translation of Asturias's novel should therefore be understood not simply as linguistic transfer, but as cultural and ideological mediation. In a controlled publishing system, translation actively shapes meaning through selection, adaptation, and contextualization. The choice of text, timing of publication, and editorial framing guide interpretation and privilege certain interpretations. The critique of dictatorship is thus reframed as anti-imperialist discourse, while the aesthetic dimension is sometimes subordinated to political reading. Yet, this stabilization remains incomplete: ambiguity is not eliminated, but managed, producing a balance between interpretive openness and ideological control.

Another factor in the compatibility of Miguel Ángel Asturias is his international symbolic capital. His global recognition, consolidated by the Nobel Prize in Literature, gave him a degree of legitimacy that extended beyond strictly ideological frameworks. His inclusion in the Romanian cultural circuit thus represents not only a political choice, but also a claim to cultural legitimacy.

Asturias's compatibility with the ideological horizon of the socialist regimes was also facilitated by his public profile. Although he was not a member of the Communist Party, Asturias consistently positioned himself within the sphere of the Latin American democratic left, speaking out against dictatorships, external economic domination, and various forms of imperialism. These political

² The first Romanian translation of the novel was published in 1960 by the State Publishing House for Literature and Art (Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă) in a translation by Paul Alexandru Georgescu. A second edition followed in 1964, published by the Publishing House for Literature (Editura pentru Literatură).

³Ilinca Ilian argues that a possible explanation for the absence of censorship in the case of this novel lies in "the fact that the authorities denied any form of dictatorship in Romania, while accepting the presence of this phenomenon in other countries, especially 'exotic' ones." Ilinca Ilian, "Destinul literaturii latino-americane în România regimului comunist (1948-1989)," *Philologica Jassyensia* (Iași, 2019): 168.

commitments contributed to his favourable reception in the socialist bloc. The award of the Lenin Peace Prize in 1966 further confirmed the prestige he enjoyed within the socialist cultural sphere.

Official visits and public presence further reinforced his status. Together with other left-wing intellectuals such as Rafael Alberti and Pablo Neruda, Asturias maintained close relations with cultural institutions in socialist countries, including Romania. These forms of circulation were part of a broader strategy of international cultural positioning. Asturias was not merely a participant in these exchanges, but also an active mediator of Romanian culture in the Spanish-speaking world. Following his visits to Romania, he contributed to the dissemination of Romanian literature abroad through publications such as *Rumania. Su nueva imagen (Prosa y poesía)* (1964) and the anthology *Antología de la prosa rumana* (1967), which he selected and translated.

This dual positioning produces a specific form of ideological readability: the text functions both as a prestigious literary work and as an ideologically compatible discourse. Its formal ambiguity is crucial, allowing relative autonomy while facilitating controlled interpretation.

Compatibility, therefore, should be understood not as simple adaptation to ideology, but as a negotiation between textual structure and institutional interpretation. Asturias's work operates in an intermediate space where meaning remains both open and directed. This explains both its circulation in 1960s Romania and its relevance for analysing the relationship between magical realism and ideological control. Asturias thus appears not merely as a translated author, but as part of an institutionalized cultural circuit in which literature mediates between political spaces, stabilizing both reception and interpretation.

The Orientation of Reading: From Prefaces to Subsequent Critical Interpretations

The novel *The President* belongs to the category of Latin American dictator novels, a thematic field perceived as one of the "indigenous themes of Latin American literature."⁴ This observation by Roberto González Echevarría is significant, given that nowhere else in the world have so many dictatorial regimes existed within such a short period of time as on the Latin America. This narrative form, grounded in the concept of *caudillismo*,⁵ explores the relationship between power, dictatorship, and writing, elements which, in the South American context, intensify the condition of permanent crisis characteristic of the region.

Asturias's novel offers a complex representation of the mechanisms of authoritarian power and of their effects on both the individual and society. Inspired by the political realities of

⁴ Roberto González Echevarría, *The Voice of the Masters: Writing and Authority in Modern Latin American Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 65. Original text: "temele indigene ale literaturii latino-americane."

⁵ The term *caudillo* was used to designate the figure of Latin American military dictators. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first Latin American movements for independence took place, leading to political instability and the persistence of armed conflicts over an extended period. This context enabled the rise to power of figures who imposed regimes based on control over state institutions and, above all, over the population, through the establishment of a condition of permanent oppression.

early twentieth-century Guatemala, the text constructs the figure of a despotic ruler whose diffuse yet omnipotent presence organizes a universe dominated by fear, violence, and arbitrariness. The narrative follows both the functioning of the repressive apparatus and the progressive degradation of human relationships in a context in which terror becomes a social norm. Beyond its realist dimension, the novel also offers a reflection on the alienation and dehumanization produced by absolute power, articulating a broad critique of dictatorship as a system. Through this construction, Miguel Ángel Asturias does not merely seek to document a specific historical reality, but to convey a message of universal value, aimed at denouncing the abuse of power and affirming the necessity of an ethical consciousness capable of resisting oppression.

Within a cultural system in which access to literature is institutionally regulated, paratext does not function as a simple explanatory addition, but as an active mechanism in the production of meaning. Through it, a specific horizon of expectations is established, indicating legitimate interpretive directions and implicitly limiting the range of possible readings. Thus, the structural ambiguity of the text is not eliminated, but accompanied by a discourse that seeks to stabilize it by anchoring it within a system of ideologically acceptable meanings.

In the case of the reception of Miguel Ángel Asturias in Romania, this function of paratext becomes particularly visible. The critical discourse accompanying the translation of *The President* tends to privilege the political dimension of the work, interpreting it in terms of a critique of dictatorship associated with exploitation and imperial domination. This reading is not explicitly imposed as the only possible one, but is presented as the most legitimate and relevant, thereby guiding the reception of the text. However, this stabilization remains partial. The structural ambiguity of the novel cannot be fully absorbed by paratextual discourse, and a plurality of readings continues to exist, even if some of them are marginalized. In this sense, the process of reception appears as a negotiation between the openness of the text and the institutional effort to regulate its interpretation.

A first concrete level of this guided reception can be identified even before the publication of the Romanian translation of the novel, in the article signed by Paul B. Marian and published in 1959 in issue no. 15 of the journal *Luceafărul*, which prefigures the interpretive framework within which the work of Miguel Ángel Asturias will be received. Particularly significant in this regard is the very title of the article (*The President. A Typical Novel of Latin American Dictatorships*), which functions as an initial interpretive filter. Through the use of the term “typical,” the text performs, already at the level of the title, a generalization that transforms the novel into a representative example of a political phenomenon and directs the reading toward its social dimension. The article serves not merely as a presentation of a foreign author, but as an act of ideological framing of the work, establishing in advance the criteria through which it will be understood. Literature is implicitly defined in terms of a social and political function, and its value is measured by its capacity to reflect and denounce concrete historical realities.

The critical discourse rests on a strongly ideological representation of the Latin American context, described not as a plural cultural space, but as a territory dominated by relations of exploitation. Formulations such as the claim that “most countries in this region [...] have been

transformed into semi-colonies of North American imperialism”⁶ do not serve merely an informative role, but establish a rigid interpretive grid in which any literary work becomes the expression of these power relations. In this way, historical reality is already interpreted before the literary text itself is analysed, and Asturias’s novel is placed within a predetermined explanatory framework.

Within this framework, the novel *The President* is valued almost exclusively for its capacity for political demystification. The author is praised for his ability to capture the “atmosphere of terror of dictatorships [...] in which crime and violence reach the point of absurdity,”⁷ which indicates a clear preference for the referential dimension of the work. The emphasis falls on its social content and, on its capacity, to expose oppressive mechanisms, while its formal complexity is not explored as such, but is implicitly subordinated to this function. Ambiguity does not appear as an aesthetic problem, but is neutralized through its interpretation as a reflection of a distorted historical reality.

Moreover, the article reduces literature to the status of a symbolic document of an era. The novel is not analysed as an autonomous system of meanings, but as a fictional rendering of a reality already known and interpreted. This perspective implies a unidirectional relationship between reality and text: literature becomes a mirror or illustration, rather than a space for the production of meaning. Consequently, the aesthetic dimension is legitimized only insofar as it contributes to intensifying the effect of social truth. At the same time, the critical discourse implicitly introduces a hierarchy of literary values, in which works are evaluated according to their degree of engagement. Miguel Ángel Asturias is valued because he transcends what are perceived as superficial representations and offers an “authentic” image of dictatorship, which suggests the existence of a normative criterion: valuable literature is that which reveals the mechanisms of oppression and aligns itself with a critical perspective on social reality. This hierarchy is not explicitly formulated as doctrine, but operates as a tacit principle of selection and evaluation.

Another important aspect is the tendency to integrate the work into a broader narrative of historical struggle. References to imperialism and economic domination do not remain at a merely contextual level, but become the key to interpreting the literary text. Thus, the novel is read as part of a collective process of political consciousness and resistance, and literature acquires an implicitly mobilizing function. At the same time, this emphasis on the critique of imperialism and the mechanisms of capitalist exploitation corresponds to ideological coordinates compatible with the official discourse of the period, which facilitates the integration of the work into a legitimate interpretive framework. In this sense, the political dimension of the novel not only orients its reading, but also enables its acceptance and circulation within the Romanian cultural space. Although the article does not explicitly formulate a theory of committed art, its overall

⁶ Paul B. Marian, “Domnul Președinte. Un roman tipic pentru dictaturile din America Latină,” *Luceafărul*, no. 15 (1959): 19. Original text: “majoritatea țărilor din această regiune [...] au fost transformate în semicolonii ale imperialismului nord-american.”

⁷ Ibid. Original text: “atmosfera de groază a dictaturilor [...] în care crima și violența ating absurdul.”

argument suggests that the role of literature is to contribute to the understanding and, indirectly, to the transformation of social reality.

Through these mechanisms, the article authored by Paul B. Marian achieves an initial stabilization of meaning, reducing the novel's polysemic potential and directing its interpretation along a specific trajectory. The structural ambiguity of the text is not explicitly denied, but is absorbed into a discourse that explains and justifies it ideologically. In this sense, the article is not merely a precursor to later prefaces, but an essential stage in the formation of a horizon of reception in which literature is interpreted primarily as a social and political discourse.

The interpretive frameworks outlined in this article do not remain isolated, but are taken up and further developed in the paratextual discourse accompanying the Romanian editions of the novel. The analysis of the prefaces from 1960 and 1964, as well as of subsequent critical interventions, contributes to the consolidation of a coherent and ideologically oriented reading framework. The preface to the 1960 Romanian edition of the novel, signed by Petre Iosif, offers a revealing example of the way in which textual ambiguity is mediated and ideologically oriented in the process of reception. Far from functioning as a mere explanatory apparatus, this paratextual discourse acts as a genuine interpretive intervention, anticipating and guiding the reading process, reducing the range of possible meanings, and integrating the text into a coherent ideological framework.

From its very opening, the preface explicitly defines the function of translated literature, asserting that the publication of a foreign work in Romanian entails "the fulfilment of an educational task of great responsibility."⁸ This formulation immediately establishes a reading framework in which literature is not conceived as an autonomous aesthetic form, but as a pedagogical and ideological instrument. Translation thus becomes an act with a formative function, oriented toward shaping the reader's consciousness, and the literary text is implicitly subordinated to an external purpose.

Within this context, Latin America is discursively constructed not as a space of aesthetic experimentation or autonomous cultural complexity, but as a privileged site of the geopolitical conflict between imperialism and the struggle for liberation. The preface insists on the "unexplored" character of Latin America for the Romanian public, suggesting that access to this reality is mediated through the "progressive" literature of authors such as Jorge Amado⁹ and Pablo Neruda. This selection is not neutral, but configures an implicit canon in which Latin American literature is valued insofar as it can be read through a political lens, as an expression of an anti-imperialist consciousness.

⁸ Petre Iosif, preface to Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Domnul Președinte* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 1960), V. Original text: "împlinirea unei sarcini educative de mare răspundere."

⁹ The mention of Jorge Amado is not incidental, as from as early as 1948 he had become one of the most widely translated writers from the South American space. A supporter of the Communist Party, the constant publication of his novels was due to the way in which his work adhered to the principles of socialist realism.

The discourse becomes explicitly ideological through recurring formulas such as “North American imperialism,” “agents of Wall Street,” and references to “the United Fruit Company,” which frame Latin America as a system of economic exploitation and political domination. Within this framework, Miguel Ángel Asturias’s novel is presented not as an open work, but as a document of historical reality, described as “the unveiling of this essential aspect of socio-political reality.”¹⁰ This places the text within a regime of controlled interpretation, where ambiguity is preemptively neutralized.

A key moment in this stabilization is the redefinition of the novel’s aesthetic. Despite its fragmentary and ambiguous nature, it is framed as “realism,” allowing its integration into a system that privileges direct representation of social reality. At the same time, affiliations with modernism or surrealism are rejected as “decadent,” marginalizing the formal dimension in favour of an ideologically coherent reading.

The figure of the dictator undergoes a similar stabilization. While textually diffuse and ambiguous, the President is redefined as a “type” or “prototype” of the caudillo, reducing complexity and turning him into a transparent symbol of political oppression. Ambiguity is thus contained within a clear ideological framework. Biographical mediation further reinforces this reading. The preface constructs Asturias as a politically engaged author, whose work derives from lived experience and anti-imperialist commitment. References to events such as the Guatemalan intervention or figures like Jacobo Árbenz anchor the text historically, presenting biography as a key to its “correct” interpretation.

Overall, the 1960 preface stabilizes meaning by overlaying the text’s ambiguity with a dominant interpretive framework. It does not exclude alternative readings, but marginalizes them, positioning paratext as a link between textual openness and ideological control.

The 1964 preface by Paul Alexandru Georgescu constitutes a more systematic intervention. Moving beyond introductory commentary, it constructs a coherent historical, aesthetic, and political framework that explicitly defines literature as an expression of social solidarity and collective struggle. Within this model, the aesthetic is subordinated to ethical and political functions, and Asturias’s work is read for the clarity of its social message rather than its ambiguity. This approach is later theorized in *Arta narativă a lui Miguel Ángel Asturias* (1971), where literature is consistently interpreted through its social and cognitive functions.

A central element of the 1964 preface is the construction of a teleological history of Latin American literature, presented as a continuous process of social awareness and political commitment. From early denunciations of colonialism, exemplified by Bartolomé de las Casas, to independence literature and the indigenist novel, this narrative suggests a necessary evolution toward increasingly politically engaged forms. Within this framework, Miguel Ángel Asturias is positioned as the culmination of this trajectory, reducing aesthetic diversity to a single legitimate path oriented toward social protest and collective consciousness. This perspective functions as an

¹⁰ Petre Iosif, preface to Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Domnul Președinte*, VI. Original text: “Domnul Președinte [...] dezvăluirea acestui aspect esențial al realității social-politice.”

instrument of ideological legitimation, integrating the novel into a retrospectively constructed tradition that confirms its political value.

The preface also insists on a direct link between Asturias's life and his work, presenting the latter as the product of decisive historical and personal experience. The author is presented less as an autonomous creator than as someone shaped by his social and cultural environment. His childhood, "spent largely among elderly Indigenous people, in whose stories [...] resounded the echoes of ancient and miraculous Mayan folklore,"¹¹ is seen as the foundation of his imagination. This experience explains the presence of myth, orality, and a particular relationship with nature, where "a profound interpenetration is established between human beings and their environment."¹²

At the same time, the experience of political repression is presented as decisive for the critical dimension of the work. The reference to dictatorship is essential: "in order to render the hideous face of such a tyrant [...] Miguel Ángel Asturias needed ten years."¹³ This statement suggests that the novel is not merely a fictional construction, but the result of an accumulation of real experiences, artistically mediated. Consequently, literature is interpreted as a form of testimony and reaction to reality, which tends to subordinate aesthetic autonomy to a documentary and social function. However, in his later reflections, the critic nuances this relationship, arguing that the work is not a direct transposition of reality, but the result of a mediated and complex relation, thereby introducing a degree of autonomy that the 1964 preface tends to reduce.

A relevant aspect is the way in which the preface manages the aesthetic dimension of the novel. Unlike reductive approaches, the critical discourse does not reject the poetic, mythic, or expressive character of the text, but reinterprets it in terms of an expanded realism, in which the imaginary and the symbolic become means of intensifying social reality. Poetic language, the presence of myth, and the vitality of nature are not regarded as autonomous manifestations of a purely aesthetic form, but as expressions of a specific historical reality marked by violence, inequality, and social tension. In this sense, the preface proposes a synthesis between realism and poetry, yet one in which the aesthetic dimension remains subordinated to an ideological function.

The stylistic complexity of Asturias's work is acknowledged, yet it is consistently reinterpreted through the lens of its social function. Poetic language, mythic imagery, and narrative techniques are not regarded as ends in themselves, but as means of intensifying the critical message. Explicitly, the critic states that "the vitalization of nature and poetic language are not an obstacle to social critique,"¹⁴ but, on the contrary, contribute to its articulation.

¹¹ Paul Alexandru Georgescu preface to Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Domnul Președinte* (Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1964), IX. Original text: "petrecută mai ales printre bătrânii indieni, în ale căror povești [...] răsunau ecorile străvechiului și miraculosului folclor maya."

¹² *Ibid.*, XI. Original text: "între om și mediul înconjurător se stabilește o adâncă compenetrație."

¹³ *Ibid.*, IX. Original text: "pentru a reda chipul hidos al unui astfel de tiran [...] Miguel Ángel Asturias va avea nevoie de 10 ani."

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XI. Original text: "vitalizarea naturii și limbajul poetic nu sînt însă o piedică în calea criticii sociale."

The description of tropical nature functions as a device of contrast: its luxuriant beauty highlights “the misery of the deceived and dispossessed man,”¹⁵ thereby intensifying the sense of social injustice. At the same time, specific artistic techniques are identified (“repetition—at times litany, at times leitmotif [...] the voluptuous use of onomatopoeia”¹⁶), demonstrating the author’s stylistic refinement. However, these devices are valued not for their formal originality, but for their effectiveness in conveying the message.

The mythic and folkloric dimension is reinterpreted through a realist lens. Although rooted in Mayan tradition, it is not treated as escapism, but as a means of expressing the “truths of Latin America.” The aesthetic is thus integrated into a broader framework in which the cognitive and social functions of art take precedence, thereby diminishing artistic autonomy. The critical discourse also adopts a pronounced polemical tone, directed against aestheticism and “art for art’s sake.” Escapism, formalism, and cosmopolitanism are criticized as signs of an artificial literature detached from social reality. In contrast, the preface affirms the need for a literature grounded in collective experience and oriented toward social transformation. This opposition between “authentic” and “false” literature reinforces its normative character and limits alternative interpretations.

At the same time, a stronger geopolitical dimension is introduced compared to the 1960 preface, through emphasis on imperialism and economic exploitation. References to foreign monopolies extend the critique of dictatorship into a broader condemnation of global capitalism, integrating the work into a discourse on both national and international oppression.

Compared to the 1960 version, the 1964 preface retains the same interpretive directions but develops them in a more coherent and systematic form. While the earlier text was introductory and moderate, this one constitutes a mature critical discourse with greater ideological explicitness. The integration of aesthetic analysis, expanded historical framing, and a more polemical tone signal a shift toward a more programmatic approach.

The 1964 preface thus functions as a consolidated ideological paratext. It not only guides the reading of *The President*, but reconfigures its meaning through external criteria. By combining historical, biographical, and aesthetic arguments, it turns Asturias’s work into an emblem of committed literature while limiting its semantic openness.

The critical discourse in the literary journals of the period takes up and further develops the dominant interpretive directions, contributing to the consolidation of a dominant reading. Although references to the novel by Miguel Ángel Asturias appear as early as the first years following the publication of its Romanian translation, these remain, in general, analytically limited, consisting mainly of brief presentations and reiterations of already stabilized interpretive directions, without offering significant analytical contributions. The critical discourse of this stage is largely schematic and ideologically oriented, privileging the political dimension of the work at the expense of an in-depth aesthetic or structural analysis. For this reason, the present analysis

¹⁵ Ibid. Original text: “mizeria omului înșelat și jefuit.”

¹⁶ Ibid., XVII. Original text: “repetiția - când litanie, când leitmotiv [...] folosirea cu voluptate a onomatopoeilor.”

focuses on two articles published in 1967, considered among the most relevant critical interventions of the decade, as they mark a more nuanced stage in the reception of Asturias's work and offer a more elaborate perspective on the novel, partially overcoming the limitations of earlier critical discourse.

In May 1967, Claudia Samoilă published in *Contemporanul* the article *Asturias: Myth and Reality*, a relevant example of how Romanian criticism began to move beyond strictly ideological readings without abandoning them. The study proposes a complex interpretation structured around the relationship between myth and reality, where aesthetic and political dimensions coexist in a relatively balanced manner. A key element is the emphasis on artistic specificity. Samoilă evokes the sensory and poetic quality of Asturias's writing, comparing it to "a drink, an intoxicating juice of exotic plants."¹⁷ This metaphor signals a clear valorisation of the aesthetic dimension, presenting prose as capable of creating a compelling universe where poetic forms merge with reality. Unlike earlier rigid criticism, literature is no longer reduced to denunciation, but approached as complex artistic expression.

The central concept is the synthesis of myth and reality, described as the coexistence of "myth and reality, miracle and documentary authenticity, hallucination and striking brute fact."¹⁸ This highlights the hybrid and polyphonic character of Asturias's writing and marks a shift toward formal and symbolic analysis. Literature becomes a space where different layers of reality intersect, anticipating more sophisticated interpretations of the 1970s. At the same time, the article retains a recognizable ideological dimension. Miguel Ángel Asturias is described as having "denounced the intervention [...] of imperialism in the economy and politics of his country,"¹⁹ positioning his work within a discourse of history, oppression, and social struggle. This framing helps explain its compatibility with the Romanian context.

The reading of *The President* is particularly revealing. The novel is interpreted through its depiction of dictatorship, including the "traumas caused by military terrorism"²⁰ and the normalization of fear as a social condition. While continuing the 1960s emphasis on political oppression, this analysis expands the framework to include symbolic and psychological dimensions.

An important aspect of the article is the integration of the work into a broader cultural and historical context. The author discusses the relationship between Asturias's literature and Indigenous traditions, emphasizing the importance of a heritage of beliefs, myths, and legends, and their role in shaping a specific cultural identity. At the same time, emphasis is placed on the historical dimension, on the "systematic destruction of indigenous culture [...] as a result of foreign

¹⁷ Claudia Samoilă, "Asturias: mit și realitate," *Contemporanul*, no. 18 (1967): 3. Original text: "o băutură, un suc îmbătător al plantelor exotice."

¹⁸ Ibid. Original text: "mit și realitate, miracol și autenticitate documentară, halucinație și faptul brut izbitor."

¹⁹ Ibid. Original text: "denunțat intervenția [...] imperialismului în economia și politica țării sale."

²⁰ Ibid. Original text: "traumatismele pricinuite de terorismul militar."

domination,”²¹ which maintains the reading within a framework compatible with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist discourse.

The article also highlights the complexity of narrative techniques, referring to the alternation of planes, the use of symbols, and the “polyphonic” character of the work. This observation indicates a growing concern with the internal structure of the text and with the ways in which meaning is constructed, representing an important step toward a more sophisticated form of criticism. Literature is thus analysed not only as a reflection of reality, but also as an autonomous system of meanings.

Overall, the analysis illustrates a transitional stage in the reception of Asturias’s work. On the one hand, it maintains the ideological framework characteristic of the period, through its emphasis on the critique of imperialism and the social dimension of the work. On the other hand, it reveals an opening toward aesthetic and symbolic analysis, anticipating the developments of literary criticism in the 1970s. This dual orientation confirms that reception is not a uniform process, but a negotiated one, in which the aesthetic and the ideological coexist and mutually influence one another.

In the autumn of the same year, Francisc Păcurariu published in issue no. 11 of *Steaua* an article on Miguel Ángel Asturias in the context of the Nobel Prize in Literature. While earlier criticism emphasized political engagement, here international recognition becomes the main marker of value. The Nobel Prize is presented as confirmation of artistic merit, signalling a shift toward aesthetic evaluation. However, this shift does not exclude the political dimension, but integrates it into a broader framework in which literature expresses cultural and historical identity. Asturias’s work is thus seen as embodying both the “Latin American spirit” and Indigenous cultural traditions, combining aesthetic and ideological perspectives.

Despite this nuance, the explanation for the work’s acceptance remains tied to its social and political relevance. The article highlights Asturias’s political engagement, presenting his writing as driven by social concerns and defining literature as a form of intervention, with novels seen as “documents of social truth” capable of mobilizing moral forces. References to collective suffering reinforce this reading, aligning the work with anti-capitalist discourse and maintaining its compatibility with official ideology.

At the same time, the interpretive framework expands compared to earlier articles. The text emphasizes the complexity and originality of Asturias’s work, treating it as a coherent artistic whole. This signals a partial shift toward formal analysis, with increased attention to style and narrative construction, and a relative openness to aesthetic criteria.

This openness, however, does not imply a separation of the aesthetic from the social, but rather their integration within a unified vision. The article explicitly underscores that the “predominantly poetic character [...] is intertwined with a vivid rootedness in the real problems of social existence,”²² confirming the persistence of a perspective in which artistic value is inseparable

²¹ Ibid. Original text: “distrugerii sistematice a culturii autohtone [...] ca urmare a dominației străine.”

²² Francisc Păcurariu, “Miguel Angel Asturias,” *Steaua*, no. 11 (1967): 36. Original text: “caracterul predominant

from social relevance. In this sense, the aesthetic does not become autonomous, but continues to function in relation to the ideological dimension.

An important element of novelty is the explicit affirmation of the aesthetic criterion as a legitimate principle of evaluation. The text insists that abandoning the aesthetic criterion is not acceptable, suggesting a partial departure from the ideological reductionism of earlier receptions. Nevertheless, this recovery of the aesthetic does not lead to a fully autonomous reading, but is integrated into a discourse that continues to privilege the social function of literature.

Despite this nuance, certain constants of controlled reception remain evident. Literature continues to be interpreted as the expression of social and historical realities, with emphasis placed on the collective dimension and the political relevance of the work. At the same time, any parallels with Romanian reality are carefully avoided, with dictatorship and forms of oppression being confined exclusively to the Latin American context. Moreover, the work of Miguel Ángel Asturias is integrated into a broader cultural discourse, being used to indirectly validate the orientations of contemporary Romanian literature. In this sense, the article states that the writer's international recognition constitutes "a confirmation of the correctness of our creators' orientation toward the sources [...] of the popular spirit,"²³ thus transforming the case of Asturias into an argument for internal legitimation.

Although a maturation of critical discourse is clearly visible, this opening remains limited, as interpretation continues to be shaped by the ideological demands of the period, confirming the persistence of a model of controlled reception, albeit adapted to a more sophisticated critical discourse. In contrast to the critical discourse of the early 1960s, characterized by rigid ideological dominance, this article proposes a more balanced evaluation of the work, in which the aesthetic dimension becomes more visible, without the reading fully detaching itself from the broader ideological framework of the time.

The evolution between these two critical moments analysed reflects not a rupture, but a gradual transformation of interpretive discourse, in which the ideological rigidity of the 1960s is attenuated by a stronger emphasis on the aesthetic dimension. This tendency becomes more pronounced in the 1970s, when the reception of Miguel Ángel Asturias unfolds within a more diversified critical context. Without breaking from the ideological framework, criticism shifts toward the artistic complexity of the work and its integration into world literature.

This development marks a process of critical maturation, in which interpretation is no longer strictly subordinated to a political grid, but seeks to balance aesthetic and social dimensions within existing ideological limits. The reception of Asturias's work thus becomes more nuanced, incorporating both formal analysis and theoretical reflection.

A key example is the 1970 article by Andrei Ionescu, *Miguel Ángel Asturias: Reality, Between the Tangible and the Dreamlike*, published in *România literară*. Unlike the predominantly

poetic [...] este împletit cu o vie înrădăcinare în problematica reală a existenței sociale."

²³ Ibid., 37. Original text: "o confirmare a justeței orientării creatorilor noștri spre sursele [...] spiritului popular."

ideological readings of the 1960s, this study foregrounds aesthetic, cultural, and theoretical concerns, reflecting a more mature critical approach. The work is no longer reduced to its political function, but examined in relation to artistic innovation and broader literary developments.

A significant shift concerns the author's status. Whereas earlier legitimacy relied on political engagement, Asturias is now positioned within a wider literary movement, described as a "pioneer" of the Latin American novel. His international recognition, reflected in the "impressive dissemination" of his work, becomes a central criterion of value. Legitimacy thus shifts from ideological to aesthetic and literary-historical grounds, establishing Asturias not only as a committed writer, but as a key innovator of the modern novel. At the same time, the ideological compatibility of the work does not disappear, but is reformulated in a more subtle manner. The article emphasizes the historical and social dimension of the work, noting that in Asturias's writing one finds the "systematic destruction of indigenous Maya culture as a result of foreign domination."²⁴ This formulation maintains the work within a framework compatible with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist discourse, without resorting to the explicitly ideological terminology of the previous decade. Thus, criticism no longer operates through direct political labels, but preserves an interpretive grid that allows the work to be integrated into an acceptable ideological framework, implicitly helping to explain why it could circulate freely within the Romanian cultural space.

The most important shift, however, occurs at the level of aesthetic analysis. The article assigns a central place to language and narrative construction, presenting Asturias as an innovator of literary expression, since he "created a specifically American language in syntax and imagery, a poetic-narrative structure."²⁵ The emphasis thus falls on writing techniques, on the organization of discourse, and on the text's capacity to generate multiple meanings, marking a clear departure from the reductive readings of the 1960s. Literature is no longer understood exclusively as an instrument of denunciation, but as a complex form of artistic creation.

This orientation is reinforced by the introduction of the concept of dual reality, which becomes a core interpretive principle of the work. The text emphasizes the existence of two realities, one tangible and the other dreamlike, indicating an approach oriented toward the symbolic and imaginary dimensions of literature. Asturias's work is thus interpreted as a space of interference between different planes of reality, opening the possibility of a more complex reading that goes beyond strictly social or political determinations.

In the same vein, the article devotes particular attention to the creative process and to the role of language. The author's reflections on writing, defined as an almost musical act ("writing is akin to music [...] if it sounds right, I keep it; if not, I rework it"²⁶), as well as on the generative function of language, underscore the importance of form and the materiality of literary expression. This type of approach is absent from earlier critical discourse and indicates a paradigm shift, in which literature is valued as an act of autonomous creation, not merely as a reflection of social reality.

²⁴ Andrei Ionescu, "Miguel Angel Asturias: Realitate, între palpabil și vis," *România literară*, no. 26 (1970): 20. Original text: "distrugerea sistematică a culturii autohtone maya ca urmare a dominației străine."

²⁵ Ibid. Original text: "a creat un limbaj specific american ca sintaxă și imagini, o structură poetic-narativă."

²⁶ Ibid. Original text: "scrisul este înrudit cu muzica [...] dacă sună bine o las; dacă nu, o refac."

Another defining element is the integration of Miguel Ángel Asturias's work into a broader international literary context. The article asserts that the Latin American novel represents a global epic phenomenon, thus situating the author's work within a comparative, worldwide framework. This opening toward world literature contributes to consolidating his canonical status and reflects a broader tendency toward the diversification of the cultural horizon in Romania during the 1970s.

Despite this diversification, certain constants of controlled reception persist. The social dimension remains central, and interpretation continues to avoid parallels with Romanian reality. Rather than exploring the universal political implications of dictatorship, criticism confines them to a specific cultural and historical framework. Ideological control thus becomes less visible, embedded within a more sophisticated discourse. In this context, the 1970 article *Miguel Ángel Asturias and the Human Condition* by Paul Alexandru Georgescu, published in *Steaua*, consolidates a new analytical model centred on literature as a reflection on the human condition.

From the outset, the article situates itself within a broad conceptual framework, drawing on modern Western authors such as Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett. It outlines an existential paradigm in which the human being is condemned not historically, but ontologically, associated with absurdity and alienation. In contrast, Miguel Ángel Asturias is presented as offering an affirmative vision of existence, defined by the possibility of fulfilment and transcendence. This shift moves the analysis from a political to a philosophical register, placing the work in dialogue with broader concerns of modernity.

A central aspect is the dual conception of the human condition, articulated between historical and ontological dimensions. Asturias "begins" from a broad historical framework but "rises" to the ontological plane, combining social grounding with reflection on existential meaning. This dual movement explains how the work remains both ideologically relevant and aesthetically significant. At the level of social representation, the article retains elements of ideological reading. It emphasizes oppression and power structures, describing in *The President* "a monstrous system" based on terror, or elsewhere "economic exploitation pushed to enslavement and misery."²⁷ Such formulations maintain the work within a framework compatible with official ideology, where literature functions as a critique of social oppression. Even within this more sophisticated approach, the political dimension remains an important interpretive reference point.

The article moves beyond a reductive reading by introducing an anthropological and axiological perspective. The human condition is defined not as a given, but as a process: "the human condition is not given, but created through effort and continuous transcendence."²⁸ This shift repositions literature from a reflection of social reality to a space for exploring existential possibilities. In this sense, Miguel Ángel Asturias's work is valued for articulating the tension between determination and freedom, constraint and aspiration.

²⁷ Paul Alexandru Georgescu "Miguel Angel Asturias și condiția umană," *Steaua*, no. 9 (1970): 11. Original text: "exploatarea economică împinsă până la înrobire și mizerie."

²⁸ Ibid. Original text: "condiția umană nu este dată, ci creată prin efort și depășire continuă."

Another key aspect is the relationship between the individual and history. While the realist novels depict the loss of humanity through violence and oppression, this is counterbalanced by values such as freedom, dignity, and hope. As the critic notes, “opposition to inhuman circumstances” arises from the necessity of freedom and human dignity, framing literature as a space for affirming universal values.

Equally important is the emphasis on the imaginative and symbolic dimension, through which Asturias transcends the strictly historical plane. Here, the human condition is explored in terms of aspiration, myth, and the search for meaning. Dream and artistic creation are presented as ways of overcoming social constraints, restoring existential balance. This perspective reflects a growing interest in aesthetic and symbolic analysis, largely absent in the 1960s.

At the same time, Paul Alexandru Georgescu introduces an ethical and collective dimension, suggesting that fulfilment depends on community rather than isolation. This view aligns both with Asturias’s themes and with broader ideological orientations of the period, maintaining points of convergence with official discourse.

The article published in *Steaua* reflects a mature stage of reception, integrating social, philosophical, and aesthetic analysis. While moving beyond the ideological rigidity of the 1960s, it retains a more subtle form of ideological control through thematic selection and interpretive framing.

Overall, the reception of Miguel Ángel Asturias in 1960s–1970s Romania can be described as a gradual diversification of critical discourse along two main directions. In the 1960s, interpretation was dominated by an ideological reading that valued the work as a denunciation of dictatorship and integrated it into an anti-imperialist framework. Around 1970, a second direction emerged, marked by greater attention to aesthetic and theoretical dimensions, combining formal analysis, philosophical reflection, and social relevance without fully abandoning ideology.

Reception also included interviews published during Asturias’s visits to Romanian People’s Republic, which helped consolidate his public image within an institutionalized cultural circuit. After his death in 1974, commemorative texts marked a shift from interpretation to symbolic consecration, emphasizing cultural proximity and personal connection. The political dimension persisted but became more diffuse, absorbed into a broader symbolic discourse in which literature functioned as cultural mediation.

Although editorial interest continued, including the 1978 Romanian translation of *Men of Maize* by Liliana Pleșa Iacob, critical visibility declined. As cultural policy shifted, criticism became more sporadic and less analytical, and Asturias gradually lost centrality in literary debates. Only after the fall of communism was his work reassessed more freely, allowing both aesthetic and political dimensions to be examined, including parallels with Romanian authoritarianism that had previously remained implicit.

The reception of *The President* thus illustrates a specific model of integrating foreign literature into an ideologized system, where acceptance operates through subtle forms of control. Asturias’s work was actively valued for its compatibility with official discourse, without entirely losing its aesthetic complexity.

Reception should therefore be understood not as simple ideological filtering, but as mediation, in which institutions, criticism, and paratext shape meaning and stabilize interpretation. The shift from political readings in the 1960s to more nuanced approaches in the 1970s, followed by symbolic consecration, shows that meaning is continuously negotiated between openness and constraint.

Asturias's case is thus emblematic of how Latin American literature circulated in communist Romania: not as an entirely autonomous expression, but as a form of cultural discourse shaped by systems of production and control, where ambiguity is managed rather than eliminated.