



# Kernel Narrative in Kadare's Fiction: Toward a Phenomenological Norm of Reading

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## Abstract

This paper introduces the kernel narrative as a minimal generative unit through which fictional discourse becomes structurally and phenomenologically operational. By combining Gerald Prince's generative narratology with Umberto Eco's theory of the reader, the study develops a framework linking narrative structure to the organization of the reading experience. The analysis focuses on *Chronicle in Stone* by Ismail Kadare and examines the distribution, function, and transformation of kernel narrative units across the novel's isotopic strata.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, theory-guided coding procedure based on three criteria: state transformation, topic coincidence, and isotopic coherence. The analysis identifies a progressive shift from metaphorical and oppositional kernel relations toward homologous and reinforcing relations, accompanied by a decrease in kernel density and a gradual stabilization of narrative meaning. At the macrostructural level, the alternation between chapters and intermezzos produces a parallel mechanism that disrupts and neutralizes the reader's topical continuity.

The paper argues that these dynamics generate a phenomenological norm of reading defined by a movement from interpretive activation toward interpretive stabilization. This norm is not presented as an empirical psychological law but as a structurally observable orientation reconstructed from the text's internal organization and the interpretive conditions it implies. In this framework, the "possible reader" functions as a theoretical construct rather than an empirically measurable subject.

The study contributes to contemporary narratology by integrating structural, phenomenological, and reader-oriented approaches into a unified analytical model. It also proposes a replicable methodology for identifying kernel narrative units and positions Albanian literary analysis within current debates in cognitive and postclassical narratology. While the findings remain heuristic and are limited to a single-text design, the proposed framework offers a basis for future comparative, empirical, and computational investigations of narrative structure and reading dynamics.

**Keywords:** kernel narrative; phenomenological norm; narratology; reading theory; isotopy; generative narrative; Ismail Kadare

## **1. Introduction**

The phenomenological premise underlying this study functions as a framework through which language becomes fictionally operative. From this perspective, the paper examines how narrative structure organizes both textual form and readerly experience in Albanian literary discourse. Particular attention is given to the relationship between contemporary Albanian prose and the fictional norm consolidated in the work of Ismail Kadare, widely recognized as the most influential Albanian author (Kryeziu, 2014; Kuçuku, 2015; Sula & Kryeziu, 2016; Kuçuku & Kryeziu, 2020; Kuçuku, 2021). While Albanian literary scholarship has primarily emphasized historical, thematic, and author-centered approaches, a systematic model linking microstructural narrative units to readerly processes remains largely absent. The present study addresses this gap through a generative, phenomenologically oriented analytical framework.

### **1.1. Research Objectives and Contribution**

This study aims to define and operationalize a phenomenological norm of reading in literary texts, using the concept of the “kernel narrative” (Prince, 1980) as its primary analytical unit. More specifically, the paper pursues the following objectives:

1. To conceptualize the phenomenological norm of reading as a structured and observable process emerging from the interaction between textual units and readerly activity.
2. To operationalize the kernel narrative as a minimal generative unit that can be systematically identified and analyzed within the text.
3. To identify the testable features of the proposed norm, namely: (a) the density of kernel narrative units across different parts of the text, (b) the distributional patterns of these units in relation to topical structures (isotopies), (c) the transformation of kernel narrative from metaphorical (oppositional) to homologous (reinforcing) forms, (d) the interaction between microstructural units and macrostructural mechanisms, particularly the role of intermezzos. These features are operationalized through a coding procedure detailed in the methodology section, allowing for systematic identification and comparison across the text.
4. To model the reader's experience as a dynamic transition from interpretive production to controlled recognition, based on the structural behavior of kernel narrative units.

The study advances a *testable model of reading*, grounded in observable textual features rather than purely interpretive claims, and proposes a replicable analytical procedure for the identification and classification of kernel narrative units.

From a theoretical standpoint, the argument developed here operates at the intersection of structural immanence and phenomenological experience. The norm under investigation cannot be reduced either to a purely historical construct or to a purely abstract principle. On the one hand, research on literary norms is necessarily historical, since the functions that such norms fulfill are shaped by the evolution of literary discourse. On the other hand, the descriptive reconstruction of historical circumstances is not sufficient: the norm must also be linked to an immanent and relatively stable theoretical principle governing the transformation of linguistic sequences into fictional objects. Even if such a principle may appear idealized, it nonetheless implies the existence of a persistent and limiting mechanism that operates simultaneously at the linguistic, psychological, and cultural levels, shaping the conditions of literary experience in Albanian.

This work therefore requires the use of both epistemological and pragmatic tools in order to describe the formation of a narrative fictional state. Following Wellek and Warren (1949), such a state may be understood as poetic language, an artifact distinguished by a specific configuration of linguistic features, including a-pragmatism, fictionality, figurativeness, and

conventionality. These features define not only a particular mode of discourse but also a normative mechanism that activates the potential of language to function as literature. Within this framework, the kernel narrative is adopted as a minimal epistemological unit through which this transformation can be traced, while the concept of the “possible reader” (Xhindi, 2018), informed by Eco's structuralist epistemology (2006), serves as the mechanism through which this potential is actualized in the act of reading.

At this point, the fundamental question of this study is: can a minimal narrative unit account simultaneously for both textual organization and readerly experience?

## **1. 2. Proposed Phenomenological Norm**

The phenomenological norm of reading proposed in this study can be defined as:

*‘a structured process in which the reader's interpretive activity is progressively reorganized, from creative, metaphor-driven meaning construction to constrained, recognition-based processing through the distribution and transformation of kernel narrative units at both microstructural and macrostructural levels’.*

From this perspective, the present paper advances the hypothesis that Kadare's stylistic effectiveness is grounded in a quantifiable, two-level narrative mechanism. At the microstructural level, the text exhibits a progressive transformation of kernel narrative units from metaphorical (oppositional) forms to homologous (reinforcing) configurations. At the macrostructural level, this process is complemented by the systematic use of *intermezzos*, which function to neutralize the reader's topical choices and reorganize interpretive expectations. Together, these mechanisms produce a form of narrative reification, whereby the reader's co-active presence is gradually reduced as the text unfolds.

This dynamic has direct implications for the phenomenology of reading. The reader's experience becomes contingent upon a predictable trajectory of transformation, moving from the activation of creative competence toward forms of recognition that are increasingly constrained by the text itself. In this process, readerly subjugation should not be understood as the elimination of interpretive capacity, but rather as its reconfiguration: creative competence remains operative, yet it ceases to function as a productive force in generating alternative narrative versions.

Finally, the study proposes that the kernel narrative operates as a model that distinguishes between fictional and non-fictional language. As a minimal generative code, it structures poetic discourse through two complementary mechanisms: first, the alignment between topical organization and kernel narrative deployment (where pure topics tend toward metaphorical opposition, while hybrid topics favor homologous transformation), and second, the interaction between microstructural units and macrostructural configurations. In this way, the threshold establishes a normative framework of fictional value, oriented toward a future-directed reading protocol in which the transformative dynamics of the text become the primary source of reader engagement.

This study adopts a focused, single-text design in order to develop a replicable analytical model, which may be extended and tested in future comparative research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2. 1. Classical Structural and Generative Narratology**

The present study is situated at the intersection of three major developments in narratology and literary theory: (1) classical structural and generative models of narrative, (2) reader-oriented and phenomenological approaches, and (3) cognitive, empirical, and computational

narratology. While each tradition contributes important insights into narrative structure and interpretation, none provides a minimal unit that simultaneously explains structural organization, readerly experience, and analytical procedure. The concept of the kernel narrative is proposed here as such a unit.

The idea of a general narrative grammar originates in structural linguistics and seeks to identify the underlying principles governing narrative construction. Greimas (1966), through the *Actantial Model*, defines narrative as a system of functional relations among elements such as subject, object, helper, and opponent. Later, in *Elements of a Narrative Grammar* (1977), Greimas emphasizes the syntactic organization of actions and state transformations. Prince, in *A Grammar of Stories* (1973), develops a systematic generative framework in which narrative is understood as a coherent sequence of events organized according to functional and temporal relations. Chatman (1978) complements this perspective by distinguishing between story and discourse, emphasizing both structural organization and modes of narration.

Bal (1990) further conceptualizes narrative as a network of interconnected events, characters, and focalization structures, while Herman (1995) introduces cognitive schemas that explain how narratives become intelligible to readers. Related perspectives appear in generative approaches influenced by linguistic theory and in studies of textual processing such as Doctorow, Wittrock, and Marks (1978). Among these models, Prince's framework (1980) is particularly relevant because it combines structural and generative principles with a dynamic understanding of narrative transformation. However, Prince's theory lacks an internal account of reading processes. Although it identifies the kernel narrative as a minimal unit of transformation, the interpretation of topic, meaning, and imagery ultimately depends on the reader. This limitation motivates the integration of reader-oriented theory into the present framework. However, these models do not fully explain how minimal narrative transformations regulate readerly processing.

## **2. 2. Reader-Oriented and Phenomenological Approaches**

Reader-oriented and phenomenological theories shift attention from narrative structure alone to the interaction between text and reader. In this perspective, narrative is understood as an experiential and cognitive process shaped by the reader's interpretive activity. Fludernik (2009) argues that readers actively reorganize textual information through experiential frames, while Holland (1975) links interpretation to identity structures and subjective consciousness.

Herman (2013) similarly emphasizes the role of mental scenarios in narrative comprehension, and Ryan (2001) conceptualizes reading as a form of virtual participation in narrative worlds. Caracciolo (2014), drawing partly on Fish (1980), further develops this experiential perspective by examining how narratives are emotionally and cognitively lived by readers. Nielsen and Christiansen (2017) extend these approaches through empirical studies of anticipation, expectation, and interpretive processing during reading. Despite their emphasis on reader experience, however, these models often lack a formally operational narrative unit capable of connecting phenomenological reading with textual structure.

## **2. 3. Cognitive, Empirical, and Computational Narratology**

Recent narratology has increasingly moved toward cognitive, empirical, and computational models of narrative. Herman (2018) and Ryan (2019) redefine narrativity as a sense-making process emerging from the interaction between textual structures and reader cognition. At the same time, Barthes's distinction between kernels and satellites (1977) has been reconsidered as both a structural and cognitive mechanism shaping narrative comprehension.

Contemporary cognitive stylistics, associated with scholars such as Semino (2017) and Stockwell (2020), investigates how readers construct meaning through mental simulation,

attention, and conceptual mapping. Empirical stylistics complements these approaches through observable measures of immersion and engagement (Gibbons, 2018; Görmez & Tunç, 2021). Parallel developments in computational narratology and AI-based narrative modeling conceptualize narrative as a system of formalizable and generative relations (Bamman, 2019; Piper et al., 2021). Yet these approaches frequently lack a phenomenological account of how narrative is experienced during reading.

Within this context, the concept of the kernel narrative is proposed as a minimal unit integrating structural, cognitive, and phenomenological dimensions. Unlike purely structural models, it incorporates readerly processing; unlike reader-response approaches, it remains grounded in textual organization; and unlike computational models, it preserves interpretive depth while allowing analytical formalization. Eco's structuralist theory (2006) provides the complementary framework necessary for this integration through the concepts of topic and isotopy, understood as reader-guided mechanisms of semantic coherence.

Prince's generative model defines the kernel narrative as "the set of all narratives recounting  $n$  events, where  $n \geq 2$ , and no more than one modification of a situation or state of things" (1980, p. 51). Building on this definition, the present study operationalizes the kernel narrative as a minimal unit of transformation through which textual structure and reading dynamics become analytically observable. The present study addresses this gap by proposing the kernel narrative as a bridge between structural organization and phenomenological reading.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3. 1. Research Design and Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven design that integrates a generative model of narrative (Prince, 1980) with a reader-oriented interpretive framework (Eco, 2006). The aim is to operationalize the kernel narrative as a minimal unit linking textual structure and readerly experience. The study does not aim at statistical generalization, but at the formal reconstruction of narrative tendencies within a controlled interpretive framework. While Prince's model provides criteria for identifying narrative units based on state transformation, it does not incorporate an internal theory of reading. This limitation is addressed through Eco's concept of the Model Reader, which introduces topic selection, isotopy, and encyclopedic competence as interpretive mechanisms. The resulting framework enables the identification of kernel narrative units not only as structural entities but also as functionally aligned with readerly processing.

#### **3. 2. Text Selection**

Ismail Kadare's *Chronicle in Stone* (*Kronikë në gur*), first published in 1971, is selected as the primary object of analysis due to a combination of literary, structural, and methodological considerations that make it particularly suitable for the operationalization of the proposed model.

First, the novel holds a canonical position within Albanian literature, and more specifically within the corpus of Kadare's work. Its critical reception and sustained scholarly attention (Kryeziu, 2014; Kuçuku, 2015; Sula & Kryeziu, 2016; Kuçuku & Kryeziu, 2020; Kuçuku, 2021) make it an appropriate reference point for testing a model that aims to define a normative structure of reading. The use of a canonical text ensures that the analysis engages with a work that is both representative and critically validated.

Second, the text exhibits a distinctive hybrid macrostructure, characterized by the alternation between first-person narrative chapters and impersonal intermezzos. This structural feature provides an ideal testing ground for examining the interaction between microstructural units

(kernel narrative) and macrostructural mechanisms, particularly in relation to the regulation of reader expectations and interpretive continuity.

Third, the novel presents a clearly stratified topical organization, allowing for the distinction between “pure” and “hybrid” isotopies across different sections of the text. This internal variation enables a comparative analysis of how kernel narrative units behave under different semantic conditions, making it possible to trace patterns of distribution, transformation, and functional alignment with dominant topics.

Fourth, *Chronicle in Stone* is methodologically manageable for full-text analysis, given its moderate length and coherent segmentation into chapters. This allows for the consistent application of coding procedures across the entire text, ensuring internal comparability and reducing the risk of sampling bias that might arise in partial or excerpt-based analysis.

Fifth, the novel is representative of the broader context of Albanian socialist realism, while also exhibiting stylistic and structural features that complicate or extend that framework. This dual positioning makes it particularly suitable for modeling a historically situated “possible reader” and for examining how ideological, stylistic, and narrative constraints interact with kernel narrative structures. Taken together, these characteristics make *Chronicle in Stone* not only an appropriate object of analysis but a methodologically strategic choice for testing the proposed integration of generative narratology and reader-oriented theory. It should be noted, however, that the study adopts an exploratory, single-text design, and therefore does not claim direct generalizability to other works by Kadare or to Albanian prose as a whole. Instead, the primary aim is to establish a replicable analytical framework, whose validity lies in its internal coherence, transparency of procedure, and potential applicability to other texts in future research.

### 3. 3. Sampling Strategy and Coding Procedure

The study employs a stratified purposive sampling strategy, combined with a rule-based coding procedure, in order to systematically identify and analyze kernel narrative units across the text.

#### 3. 3. 1. Stratified Sampling Design

Sampling is based on the internal macrostructural organization of *Chronicle in Stone*, which is divided into four strata according to dominant topical configurations.

*Table 2. Textual Strata According to Isotopic Configuration*

Stratum	Chapters	Type	Isotopic Nuclei
I	I–V	Pure	flood; city life; magic; grandfather; Margarita
II	VI–X	Pure	public house; war; airport; resistance; disappointment
III	XI–XIII	Hybrid	bombing; guerrilla; first love
IV	XIV–XVIII	Hybrid	patriarchal crisis; civil war; punishment; escape; return

This stratification reflects the distinction between “pure isotopies” (semantically stable and coherent) and “hybrid isotopies” (overlapping and transitional semantic fields). The sampling focuses on segments in which the dominant narrative isotopy is clearly established, ensuring that kernel narrative units can be reliably identified and interpreted in relation to a stable topical framework.

#### 3. 3. 2. Unit of Analysis and Segmentation

The basic unit of analysis is the clause-level narrative event, operationalized through sentence-level segmentation. Graphic sentence boundaries are used as primary segmentation markers, with further refinement based on semantic criteria. This approach allows the analysis to

preserve both the syntactic integrity and the functional coherence of the narrative unit within the broader textual sequence.

Only units that encode state transformations are considered candidates for kernel narrative. Descriptive, evaluative, or purely static sequences are excluded unless they participate directly in a transformation process that modifies a previous narrative state. In methodological terms, a kernel narrative is identified only when a linguistic sequence presents a transition from one condition, order, or situation to another in accordance with Prince's generative definition of narrative transformation.

The choice of clause-level segmentation is intended to reduce interpretive ambiguity in cases where multiple transformations coexist within the same sentence. In such cases, segmentation follows the dominant semantic transition rather than purely grammatical boundaries. This procedure ensures that the kernel narrative remains analytically functional as a minimal unit of transformation and avoids conflating independent narrative operations within a single syntactic structure.

Furthermore, segmentation is guided by isotopic coherence. A unit may be structurally transformational yet excluded from full kernel status if it does not contribute to the dominant topical orientation of the chapter. In this way, the procedure combines structural and semantic criteria, allowing kernel narrative to be identified not only as formal changes of state but also as functionally relevant components of the text's isotopic organization.

### **3. 3. 3. Coding Framework: Three-Filter Decision Model**

Kernel narrative units are identified through a three-filter decision tree, which operationalizes the concept proposed by Gerald Prince.

“Filter 1: Narrative Event Status” – This filter excludes direct speech, evaluative statements, and static descriptions; only units that describe events or actions are retained.

“Filter 2: State Transformation (Structural Criterion)” – A unit qualifies if it contains exactly one change of state. Operational definitions: “state” is a situation or condition expressible as a proposition; “change” is a transformation marked by verbs (e.g., become, transform, emerge, join) or temporal markers (then, when, now, until). This corresponds to Prince's definition of the kernel as a minimal transformation between states.

“Filter 3: Topic Alignment (Semantic Criterion)” – Units are classified as: full kernel narrative – aligned with the dominant chapter topic; partial kernel narrative – not directly aligned. Topic identification follows Eco's concept of isotopy, understood as a probabilistic semantic coherence constructed by the reader. As Eco notes, the topic “serves not only to regulate semiosis but to orient the direction of actualizations” (2006, p. 89).

“Appendix A” provides ten borderline cases illustrating the application of all three filters.

### **3. 3. 4. Analytical Procedure**

The analysis follows a seven-step procedure designed to ensure methodological transparency and analytical consistency. *First*, the text is segmented into clause-level narrative units according to graphic sentence boundaries and semantic transformation criteria. *Second*, the dominant topic of each chapter is identified through isotopic repetition, referential indicators, and thematic coherence. *Third*, chapters are assigned to one of the four analytical strata according to their isotopic configuration, distinguishing between pure and hybrid topical structures. *Fourth*, Filter 1 is applied in order to determine narrative status by excluding direct speech, static descriptions, explanatory commentary, and evaluative sequences that do not produce narrative transformation. *Fifth*, “Filter 2” isolates units containing a single state

transformation, following Prince's generative definition of narrative movement. *Sixth*, "Filter 3" evaluates the degree of alignment between the identified kernel unit and the dominant topic of the chapter, distinguishing full kernels from partial or peripheral ones.

The final stage involves the comparative calculation of kernel density and the ratio between metaphorical (oppositional) and homologous (reinforcing) kernel relations across the four strata. These calculations are not intended as exhaustive statistical measurements, but as heuristic indicators supporting the interpretation of broader structural tendencies within the text. The procedure allows the analysis to move systematically from microstructural identification to macrostructural interpretation while maintaining a consistent operational framework throughout the study. Although interpretive judgment remains unavoidable in qualitative narratological analysis, the explicit formulation of filters, segmentation rules, and topic criteria increases the reproducibility of the method and enables its potential application to other narrative corpora.

### **3. 3. 5. Reliability Strategy**

Given the interpretive nature of the study, inter-coder reliability is not applicable. Instead, the study employs a qualitative internal consistency check, based on: systematic application of coding rules, comparison across strata, and correlation between kernel density and topic type (pure vs. hybrid). Consistency across these dimensions is taken as an indicator of methodological robustness.

Particular attention is given to whether similar isotopic conditions produce comparable kernel configurations throughout the text. The recurrence of analogous structural tendencies across different strata is treated as evidence that the coding procedure operates coherently rather than arbitrarily. Reliability is understood not as statistical reproducibility in the experimental sense, but as the stability and logical consistency of interpretive results within a clearly defined analytical framework.

A delayed recoding procedure was applied to 20% of the data after a two-week interval. Internal agreement was 89% for binary categorization (kernel/non-kernel) and 82% for subtypology (metaphorical/homologous). Discrepancies were reviewed and the relevant filters were refined accordingly.

### **3. 3. 6. Constraints on Topic Identification – Reader Model Integration**

Topic selection is not arbitrary but guided by the possible reader model, based on Eco's framework. The reader's decision is influenced by: circumstances of utterance, referential indicators in the text, and encyclopedic competence. This competence includes linguistic knowledge, intertextual references, stylistic conventions, and ideological frameworks.

In this study, the reader is modeled within the context of Albanian socialist realism, which provides ideological orientation (Marxist-Leninist framework), narrative expectations (positive hero, class struggle), and stylistic norms. These constraints ensure that kernel identification remains context-sensitive and interpretation is controlled and consistent.

Positioning against alternative reader models: the possible reader model adopted here differs from predictive processing (Clark, 2013) in its rejection of Bayesian optimality as a universal norm; unlike Fish's interpretive communities (1980), it retains a structural anchor in the text; and contrary to empirical reader models (Nielsen & Christiansen, 2017), it treats reading as a theoretically reconstructed competence rather than a measurable response.

### **3. 3. 7. Analytical Scope of Kernel Narrative**

Kernel narrative units are analyzed along three dimensions: (1) "quantitative presence" (density and distribution across strata); (2) "semantic alignment" (relation to dominant topic); (3)

“functional role” (contribution to narrative development). Additionally, a functional relationship is assumed between kernel narratives within isotopic cores and kernel narratives outside them, where central kernels define the narrative purpose and peripheral ones support it.

### **3.3.8. Methodological Limitations**

This combined sampling and coding strategy is appropriate because it ensures systematic coverage of the text, captures variation across narrative conditions, provides a replicable analytical protocol, and integrates structural and reader-oriented dimensions. The result is a method that is both analytically precise and theoretically grounded, supporting the broader aim of modeling reading as a structured and observable process.

The empirical observations presented in the Analysis are employed within a heuristic and model-generating framework, rather than as the basis for a fully developed statistical analysis of the text. The primary aim of the study is not to establish statistically generalizable patterns, but to identify, formalize, and test the functional behavior of the kernel narrative as a minimal generative unit within a specific textual environment.

Quantitative indications (e.g., approximate counts and distribution of kernel narrative units across strata) are therefore used illustratively and comparatively, to support the identification of structural tendencies, such as the contrast between pure and hybrid isotopic configurations, rather than to produce statistically validated claims. Numerical data serve as analytical scaffolding that helps to stabilize interpretation, not as an independent object of statistical inference.

This approach is consistent with the theoretical-hermeneutic design of the study, where the priority lies in the replicability of the analytical procedure (i.e., segmentation, filtering, and classification of kernel units) rather than in the statistical generalization of results. The method aims to demonstrate that the proposed model can be operationalized and observed systematically, even when applied to a single text.

Accordingly, the study does not claim statistical exhaustiveness or predictive validity. Instead, it advances a proof-of-concept: that kernel narrative units can be consistently identified, functionally differentiated, and related to reader-oriented processes within a controlled analytical framework.

Future research may extend this model through the analysis of larger textual corpora and through quantitative approaches such as frequency analysis and distributional modeling. The framework may also be tested and refined through empirical reader-response methodologies that examine the relationship between kernel narrative structures and actual reading processes.

Within the scope of the present study, empirical data are intentionally used as “heuristic indicators of structural regularities”, supporting the formulation of an analytical tendency of reading, rather than as statistically conclusive evidence.

## **4. Analysis**

From a comprehensive analysis of the text, it is evident that the structural organization concerning narrative isotopies is centered around four primary topical units: 1) the theme of the psycho-cultural processes involved in the boy's initiation, spanning Chapters I to V; 2) the theme of the child's socio-moral integration within the context of World War II, covering Chapters VI to X; 3) the hybrid theme addressing the transition from psycho-cultural identity to socio-moral identity influenced by the war, which includes Chapters XI to XIII; and 4) the hybrid theme of the child's complete social initiation, encompassing Chapters XIV through the conclusion of the book, Chapter XVIII.

At the basic structural level, an interesting dynamic of the kernel narrative is observed throughout the text. In chapters that focus exclusively on a single topic, the kernel narrative is constructed using opposing units from a signification perspective. The relationship between the components of the kernel narrative is almost entirely of the metaphorical, oppositional type. During Chapters I–X, the standard kernel narrative unit represents such a dynamic of change: from the designation of a given state to its new, abstracted version.

Here are some examples from Chapters I–X where the "metaphorical" relationship between the constituent units of the kernel narrative is realized:

- *"those old ones (raindrops), that had been lying down there for a long time, // were joining the new ones, with the furious drops of this night's storm and they wanted to do something bad"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter I, p. 44);

- *"about magic, the old women said some very sparing words and mentioned some old examples, from which one could more or less draw the conclusion that such outbreaks of magic // usually occurred on the eve of great events, when people's souls are restless like leaves before a storm"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter III, p. 79);

- *"The thick books were there in the chest, one on top of the other, an endless multitude of Arabic letters, waiting to take me with them and lead me into secrets and mysteries, // because only Arabic letters knew the way to secrets, just like earth flies, which knew the holes and cracks in the ground"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter IV, p. 95);

- *"He had approached the city in complete silence and no one knew anything, not only about his presence near the city, but about his existence in general, // until the moment when his single eye, like the eye of a cyclops, lit up one October evening on the bregu i Zallit"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter VI, p. 131);

- *"If I heard someone say 'my head is boiling', my mind, against my will, // would immediately imagine a head boiling like a pot of beans"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter VI, p. 131);

- *"I had noticed that news of engagements or weddings often caused discontent or confusion in some, and joy or smiles in others; // but I never thought that the news of a wedding could fall like a black plague on the heads of everyone without exception"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter VI, p. 141);

- *"The siren, at first slowly, as if waking from sleep, // then more and more fiercely, lets out its cry"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter VII, p. 157);

- *"I, as before, stared into the distant wasteland // but now I knew that there, somewhere in the field covered by night, the great airplane was sleeping with its wings spread out in the rain"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter VIII, p. 185);

- *"while she was talking // I tried to imagine how that snow of nails, hair, beards and noses would fall"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter IX, p. 200);

- *"And now he was snapped and coming towards us // emerging from the world of words and taking, as he walked, the body, eyes, hair and mouth of a woman"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter X, p. 220).

The volume of kernel narrative in these chapters is notably high, resulting in a corresponding metaphorical intensity during reading. Non-kernel narrative units typically serve an explanatory role for the kernel narrative units. This dynamic predominates throughout the narrative. In each oppositional or metaphorical kernel narrative unit, there is a clear transition from common ritual referential indicators – semes that hold significant value for the possible reader – to new, alternative indicators – semes that carry fresh sign values for understanding.

This reality changes during the hybrid chapters, where the kernel narrative units remain at the level of a simple dynamic of homologous states. While the text moves towards hybrid isotopies, the structure of the kernel narrative loses its oppositional tension. Their relationship with non-kernel narrative units is generally of a "reinforcing" type from a signification perspective.

Examples of the "reinforcing" relationship between kernel narrative and non-kernel narrative units during Chapters XI–XVIII:

- "kernel narrative" – *"So, somewhere the state of Greece was shattered // and its rags and feathers were being carried away by the winter wind"* – is followed by a "non-kernel narrative": *"They were now wandering everywhere like spirits"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter XI, p. 229).

- "kernel narrative" – *"the sheets, the undershirts, the long-fringed velours, the laced napes, all that soft, white mass called the juk // was as dull as a trap"* – is followed by a "non-kernel narrative": *"In this city there are two ways of disappearing pregnant girls: drowning with a juk or drowning in a well"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter XII, p. 254).

- "kernel narrative" – *"At first glance it seemed as if nothing had changed, but if you looked carefully, // you would notice that some roads were gone, that others were giving up their lives, while among the dust and grass some new paths had emerged, still fragile, but quite persistent"* – is followed by a "non-kernel narrative": *"As always, the old man sat on the deckchair and read"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter XIII, p. 263).

- "kernel narrative" – *"She, after having endured the flames that had transformed it from a house into a ruin in a few hours, // was now completely indifferent and endured everything"* – is followed by a "non-kernel narrative": *"A few iron bars sticking out of the rubble of the wall looked like the fingers of a frozen hand"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter XV, p. 295).

- "kernel narrative": *"the city drenched in sludge, after a restless night, // dawned even more gloomy"* – is followed by a "non-kernel narrative": *"at midnight, Isa Toska's bands had entered, singing old songs"* (Kadare, 2008, Chapter XVI, p. 311).

The volume of the kernel narrative in these chapters is relatively low.

*Table 1. Distribution of Kernel Narratives Across Isotopic Strata*

Stratum	Chapters	Pages (Kadare, 2008)	Isotopic Type	Number of Kernels	Density (kernels/page)	Alignment with Dominant Topic
I	I-V	44-116	Pure	30	0.42	87%
II	VI-X	131-220	Pure	25	0.28	84%
III	XI-XIII	229-263	Hybrid	12	0.35	58%
IV	XIV-XVIII	295-311	Hybrid	16	0.94	63%

Note: The higher density in Stratum IV compensates for the lower total number of pages (17 pages vs. approximately 70–90 in other strata).

Marginal distribution: Total kernels identified: 83; full kernels (fully aligned): 58 (70%); partial kernels (partial alignment): 25 (30%); metaphorical relations (Strata I–II): 68%; homologous relations (Strata III–IV): 54%.

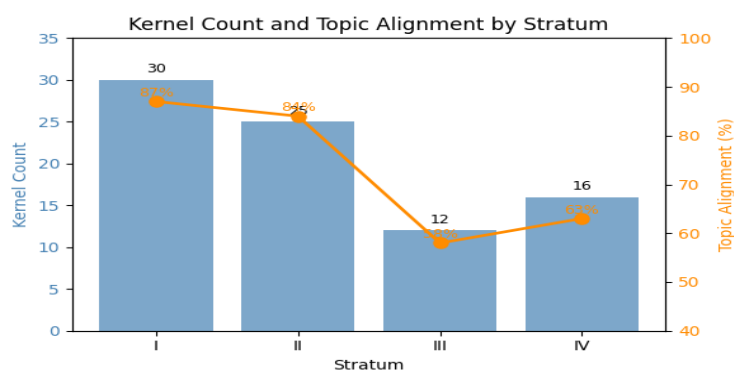


Figure 1. Trend of Kernel Narratives and Topic Alignment

It should be kept in mind that despite the functional relationship between the parts of the narrative kernel in the above chapters, metaphorical cases are present in the "hybrid" chapters and homologous cases in the "pure" chapters. Our attention has been on the cases of possession of a certain typology conditioned by the isotopic orientation of the text, particularly focusing on how these typologies manifest in both metaphorical and homologous contexts within the narrative structure.

#### 4. 1. Dynamics of the Numerical Presence of Kernel Narratives According to their Topic Grouping (Pure – Hybrid)

At the macrostructural level, it is important to highlight the narrative mechanism of including *intermezzos* after each chapter. Each completed narrative isotopy within a chapter is followed by an *intermezzo*, which employs an impersonal narrative voice, contrasting with the first-person narration of the boy in the main chapters.

Typically, an *intermezzo* serves to neutralize the topical choices made by the reader in the preceding chapter, lacking any semantic connection to those choices. *Intermezzos* themselves lack structural coherence; they present as a chaotic amalgamation of updated information about the "life of the city" or "the world as a whole".

For example, here is how an *intermezzo* is constructed, between Chapters III and IV, under the title 'From the Chronicle':

*"while Japan prepares to attack India and Australia. Trial. Execution. Property. Gole Balloma from the Varosh neighborhood is summoned to court for non-repayment of the loan. The auction of the loot from L. Xuhano's house takes place on Sunday. Arrest warrants were issued for the elderly women H. Z. and C. V., who are suspected of having practiced witchcraft. I inform the readers that the reason the previous issue of the newspaper came out weak and with errors was that I was sick with a stomach ache..."* (Kadare, 2008, p. 89).

The relationship between the situation created on the narrative level during a chapter and the situation presented by the following *intermezzo* can be hypothesized as a "kernel narrative on the macrostructural level". *Intermezzos* instantiate a macro-kernel when they satisfy four necessary conditions (structural segmentation, shift in narrative regime, disruption of topical coherence, internal fragmentation) and one sufficient condition (neutralization of the reader's prior topical choices). Sometimes the *intermezzos* between chapters are more than one, building kernel narrative units among themselves, e.g., right after Chapter V there are three short texts not included as standard narrative chapters, namely on the topics of "the sacrifice of an animal", "the departure of Margarita" and the usual 'chronicle' on the topics of "life in the city and in the world".

It is observed that the number of “kernel narratives” is relatively greater in the case of isotopic sequences built on “pure” topics. During hybrid isotopic sequences, their number falls – there is a tendency to fragment the narrative units in the text. During “pure” isotopic sequences there is a clear coincidence between the topic on which the isotopy is built and the “kernel narrative” units.

For example, during Chapter V, the dominant topic of the 'boy's obsessive thinking about Margarita' is answered by the corresponding kernel narrative units of “male initiation”, in function of which almost every other kernel narrative unit is placed:

“(IKN) Initiation Kernel Narrative” – *“the thought that I could see what Margarita was doing now // took away my lethargy”* (Kadare, 2008, p. 115).

“(AKN) Another Kernel Narrative that immediately follows” – *“I removed the pieces of broken glass, put one foot in the hole, then put the other on a beam // then I slid onto the ceiling”* (Kadare, 2008, p. 115).

(IKN) – *“then I heard a splash of water // and I realized she was bathing”* (Kadare, 2008, p. 115).

(AKN) – *“I waited a long time // until she came out of the bathroom”* (Kadare, 2008, p. 115).

(IKN) – *“when finally, she let her shirt fall and bent down to pick up his underwear // I closed my eyes”* (Kadare, 2008, p. 116).

(AKN) – *“while I was lying there completely exhausted // I heard my grandmother's voice looking for me around the house”* (Kadare, 2008, p. 116).

Only a few of them are not fully referentially related to the dominant topic of the chapter. During hybrid isotopic sequences, the number of kernel narratives decreases; also the number of coincidences between the corresponding dominant topic and the kernel narrative is lower.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5. 1. Kernel Narrative as an Operational Unit**

The analysis supports the treatment of the kernel narrative as a minimal and operational unit of narrative structure, defined by the coincidence between a single state transformation and its linguistic realization within clause-level boundaries. This alignment between semantic transformation and graphic segmentation preserves the structural and functional integrity of the kernel unit, allowing it to be identified and analyzed as an autonomous component of the text.

The separation of kernel narrative from surrounding discourse proves essential for interpreting their function. In particular, cases of poly-kernel sentences confirm that when multiple transformations coexist within a single syntactic unit, the assignment of a dominant topic becomes unstable. This reinforces the methodological decision to isolate kernel units as discrete analytical entities and suggests that effective narrative processing depends on the functional clarity and separability of such units.

### **5. 2. Microstructural Dynamics: From Metaphorical to Homologous Kernel Narratives**

The findings from the Analysis (Strata I–IV) demonstrate a clear structural progression in the behavior of kernel narrative units. In pure isotopic strata (I–II), kernel units are: (a) dense, (b) strongly topic-aligned, (c) predominantly metaphorical (oppositional). These units enact transformations based on semantic displacement, moving from conventional or “ritual” referential indicators toward alternative and newly constructed sign-values. This results in a high level of interpretive activation, requiring the reader to continuously reorganize meaning.

By contrast, in hybrid isotopic strata (III–IV), kernel narrative units: (a) decrease in density, (b) exhibit weaker topic alignment, (c) shift toward homologous (reinforcing) relations. Here, transformations tend to confirm rather than displace meaning, producing a more stable and less demanding interpretive environment. This transition from metaphorical to homologous kernel structures corresponds to a reduction in semantic tension and a gradual stabilization of narrative meaning.

### **5. 3. Macrostructural Dynamics: The Function of Intermezzos**

At the macrostructural level, the relationship between chapters and intermezzos introduces a second layer of kernel organization. As observed in the Analysis, each chapter, characterized by a coherent isotopic structure, is followed by an intermezzo that: (a) disrupts topical continuity; (b) introduces heterogeneous and fragmented information; (c) lacks direct semantic alignment with the preceding chapter.

These intermezzos function as mechanisms of interpretive neutralization, interrupting the reader's ongoing construction of meaning. By suspending or displacing previously established topics, they reduce the reader's ability to maintain coherent interpretive trajectories. The chapter–intermezzo sequence can itself be understood as a macro-level kernel structure, where the transition from isotopic coherence to informational dispersion produces a controlled destabilization of meaning. As the text progresses, this oppositional dynamic becomes less pronounced, mirroring the shift observed at the microstructural level.

### **5. 4. Toward a Generative Model of Narrative Structure**

Taken together, the micro- and macro-level observations support the formulation of a two-level generative model of the kernel narrative in this text: at the micro-level (within chapters) transformation from metaphorical to homologous kernel units; at the macro-level (between chapters and intermezzos) transition from oppositional to less oppositional structural relations.

This dual mechanism demonstrates that kernel narrative units are not merely local structural elements, but part of a broader dynamic system governing narrative development. Their variation in density, type, and function produces a process that moves *from complexity – to stabilization – to functional clarity*.

### **5. 5. Reader-Oriented Effects and the Phenomenological Norm**

From a reader-oriented perspective, these structural dynamics correspond to a gradual transformation in the mode of reading. In the early stages (Strata I–II), the high density of metaphorical kernels and the introduction of new semiotic indicators require active interpretive engagement. The reader operates in a mode of semantic production, continuously generating and testing hypotheses.

As the text progresses (Strata III–IV), the reduction in kernel density and the dominance of homologous relations lead to a shift toward semantic recognition. Interpretive possibilities become increasingly constrained, and meaning is stabilized through repetition and reinforcement rather than transformation. This progression supports the formulation of a phenomenological norm of reading, defined as a controlled trajectory from interpretive activation to interpretive stabilization.

Within this framework, reader competence remains present but becomes progressively less productive. The text increasingly determines the conditions of interpretation, reducing the reader's co-active role.

### **5. 6. Kernel Narrative as a Mechanism of Reification**

This process can be described as a form of *narrative reification*, whereby reading is transformed from an open, generative activity into a more mechanical and regulated process. The kernel narrative plays a central role in this transformation by structuring the sequence of interpretive demands, regulating the introduction and stabilization of meaning, and coordinating micro- and macro-level narrative dynamics.

From a cognitive perspective, this corresponds to a gradual reduction of interpretive freedom, which may be understood as a form of controlled restriction of interpretive openness. Unlike in more open narrative systems, where ambiguity sustains reader agency, here the text progressively limits alternative constructions.

### **5. 7. Broader Implications for Multi-Text and Computational Analysis**

Beyond the single-text design, the proposed coding protocol can scale to multi-text corpora through three pathways. First, the three-filter decision model is formalizable as a rule-based annotation scheme that can be applied consistently across different narratives, enabling comparative studies of kernel density and transformation types across authors or periods. Second, the distinction between metaphorical and homologous kernel relations can be operationalized for light computational annotation using dependency parsing and semantic role labeling to identify state-change predicates (e.g., "become" "transform" "emerge") and their argument structures. Third, the macro-kernel mechanism (chapter–intermezzo alternation) suggests a generalizable principle for analyzing paratextual or intercalated material (e.g., chapter epigraphs, embedded documents, commentary frames) in other literary traditions. A pilot computational implementation could use sentence embeddings to measure topical distance between consecutive textual units, flagging potential macro-kernel boundaries for human review. These extensions would test whether the phenomenological norm identified here is specific to Kadare's poetics or reflects a broader principle of narrative regulation.

### **5. 8. Contribution and Implications**

The study demonstrates that kernel narrative units can be systematically identified and classified through explicit structural and semantic criteria. Their distribution and typology correlate with the isotopic organization of the text, while their progressive transformation produces a corresponding shift in reading dynamics. In this way, narrative structure emerges not as a static configuration, but as a process that regulates the movement from interpretive openness toward semantic stabilization.

These findings contribute to contemporary narratology by integrating structural, generative, and reader-oriented approaches within a unified analytical framework. The study also proposes a replicable method for analyzing minimal narrative units and introduces a phenomenological norm grounded in observable textual mechanisms rather than abstract theoretical assumptions alone.

## **6. Conclusions**

This study aimed to define and operationalize an analytical approach to reading through the concept of the kernel narrative. This concept is understood as a minimal generative unit that can help explain the organizational dynamics of fictional discourse within a specific literary system. By integrating Gerald Prince's model of narrative grammar with Umberto Eco's theory of the reader, the paper proposed a framework in which narrative structure and reading experience are treated as interdependent processes.

The analysis of *Chronicle in Stone* by Ismail Kadare demonstrates that kernel narrative units are not merely structural components, but function as dynamic operators that regulate both

textual organization and reader engagement. At the microstructural level, the study identified a systematic transformation from metaphorical (oppositional) to homologous (reinforcing) kernel relations, accompanied by a measurable decrease in kernel density and a weakening of topic alignment. At the macrostructural level, the alternation between chapters and intermezzos was shown to produce a parallel dynamic, in which interpretive coherence is periodically disrupted and reconfigured.

Taken together, these findings support the formulation of a two-level generative mechanism governing the text: (1) the progressive replacement of metaphorical kernel units with homologous ones, and (2) the neutralization of reader-driven topical choices through structurally embedded intermezzos. Within this mechanism, the proposed phenomenological norm becomes observable and testable within the limits of the present analytical framework.

It consists in a structured transformation of the reading process, moving from an initial phase of high interpretive activation, characterized by semantic tension and the production of alternative meanings, to a later phase of interpretive stabilization, characterized by reduced kernel density, reinforced semantic alignment, and increased textual control over meaning.

The study argues that reader response in this narrative system is not open-ended but structurally regulated. The reader's creative competence remains active but progressively loses its productive function, resulting in a controlled form of interpretive subordination. This process corresponds to what has been described here as a mechanism of narrative reification, whereby reading shifts from generative engagement to procedural recognition.

The contribution of this study is threefold: first, it provides a replicable methodological framework for identifying and classifying kernel narrative units through explicit coding rules and a transparent analytical procedure; second, it advances narratological theory by demonstrating how micro-level structural features can be linked to macro-level reading effects, thereby bridging structuralist and phenomenological approaches; third, it positions Albanian literary analysis within contemporary debates in narratology, cognitive stylistics, and reader-response theory, offering a model that can be tested across different texts and literary traditions.

At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations. The single-text design restricts the generalizability of the findings, and the interpretive nature of the coding procedure, despite internal consistency checks, remains partially dependent on the researcher's analytical judgment. Future research should therefore extend this model to other texts by Kadare and to broader corpora of Albanian prose, as well as explore the integration of quantitative and computational methods for testing kernel distribution and reader response patterns.

In conclusion, the kernel narrative emerges not only as a structural unit but as an epistemological threshold through which fictionality becomes operational. By organizing the dynamics of narrative transformation and regulating the trajectory of reading, it provides a concrete basis for defining a phenomenological norm, one that is historically situated, structurally grounded, and open to future comparative and empirical investigations.

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### Appendix A: Borderline Cases for Filters 1–3

Case	Text Segment	F1 Event?	F2: Single state change?	F3: Topic alignment ?	Decision	Justification
1	"The rain fell all night."	No	No (static)	N/A	NON-KERNEL	Static description, no transformation
2	"The house became a ruin in a few hours."	Yes	Yes (became)	Yes (hybrid)	KERNEL	Clear state transformation
3	"He was tired, then he slept"	Yes	Yes (then + slept)	No (peripheral)	PARTIAL	Two events but single transformation
4	"She entered the room as	Yes	Yes (entered)	Yes (pure)	KERNEL	Metaphorical but real transformation

Case	Text Segment	F1 Event?	F2: Single state change?	F3: Topic alignment ?	Decision	Justification
	<i>if the walls were water"</i>					
5	<i>"I heard that the war had begun"</i>	Yes	Yes (had begun)	Unclear	WEAK KERNEL	Reported transformation
6	<i>"The old man sat and read"</i>	Yes	Multiple (2)	Yes	NON-KERNEL	More than one transformation
7	<i>"The city dawned gloomy"</i>	Yes	Yes (dawned as transformation)	Yes	KERNEL	Metaphorical but functional
8	<i>"He approached the city until his eye lit up"</i>	Yes	Yes (approach + until)	Yes (pure)	KERNEL	Complex but single transformation
9	<i>"The siren, as if waking, cried out"</i>	Yes	Yes (cried out)	Yes	KERNEL	Analogy does not cancel transformation
10	<i>"There are two ways of disappearing pregnant girls"</i>	No	No (declarative)	N/A	NON-KERNEL	State, not transformation

**Discrimination rules for metaphorical vs. homologous relations**

Type	Linguistic markers	Semantic relation	Example from text
Metaphorical (oppositional)	"like", "as if", "just as" "as though" Transition from ordinary to abstract referent	A : B : : C : D (structural analogy)	<i>"only Arabic letters knew the way to secrets, just as earth flies knew the holes"</i>
Homologous (reinforcing)	"and", "then", "so", "thus" Addition of confirming information	A → A' (internal transformation)	<i>"the sheets were dull as a trap... In this city there are two ways"</i>