



SOME FEATURES OF COGNITIVE-ARTISTIC SPACE IN THE WORKS OF  
PATRICK ROTHFUSS

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**Abstract.** *This paper examines the construction of cognitive-artistic space in Patrick Rothfuss's Kingkiller Chronicle through the lens of cognitive poetics, Text World Theory, and possible-worlds narratology. Four interrelated features are identified: naming as a fusion of cognitive linguistics and world-building; the frame narrative as a generator of layered text-worlds; the magic of "sympathy" as a dramatization of mental models; and the motif of silence as a cognitive-poetic structuring device. It is argued that Rothfuss's artistic space is distinctive because the text reflexively foregrounds cognition itself — naming, belief, attention, and silence function simultaneously as plot mechanisms and as the means by which the reader builds and inhabits the secondary world.*

**Keywords:** *cognitive poetics, artistic space (badiiy makon), Text World Theory, secondary world, sub-creation, naming, immersion, Patrick Rothfuss, Kingkiller Chronicle.*

## 1. Introduction

The "cognitive turn" in literary studies has reframed artistic space (badiiy makon) not as an inert backdrop against which events unfold, but as a mental construct assembled in the reader's mind from textual cues. Within cognitive poetics, the literary text is treated as a set of instructions for building and maintaining mental representations [1]; Text World Theory describes how discourse erects layered "text-worlds" that readers populate and update [2]; and possible-worlds narratology accounts for the immersive force of secondary realities [3, 4]. Underlying all of these is Tolkien's foundational notion of sub-creation — the making of a Secondary World endowed with an "inner consistency of reality" that secures the reader's secondary belief [5].

Patrick Rothfuss's Kingkiller Chronicle — The Name of the Wind (2007), The Wise Man's Fear (2011), and the novella The Slow Regard of Silent Things (2014) — offers a particularly productive case for such analysis, because the narrative does not merely depict a world but thematizes the very acts of cognition by which worlds are made. Naming, belief, attention and perception are at once elements of the plot and the cognitive operations the reader must perform. This paper identifies four defining features of cognitive-artistic space in Rothfuss's fiction.

## 2. Naming as a fusion of cognitive linguistics and world-building

The central magic of Rothfuss's world is Naming: to know the true name of a thing — the wind, fire, a person — is to gain mastery over it. This conceit literalizes a core premise of cognitive linguistics, namely that words are not arbitrary labels but triggers that activate embodied conceptual representations [6]. The novel's very title encodes the program: to name





the wind is to bring it fully into the mind, and thereby into the storyworld. Naming thus operates on two planes at once — diegetically, as a magic system internal to the plot, and cognitively, as a figure for the mechanism of immersion itself, since to name a thing in narrative is to summon it into the reader's mental world.

Rothfuss's onomastics extends this principle. Character and place names carry semantic and phonological motivation that guides readerly inference and contributes to the texture of the secondary world [7]. The system is openly indebted to Le Guin's *Earthsea*, where true-naming likewise binds language to being; in both, conceptual blending [8] fuses the linguistic and the magical so that the reader processes vocabulary as world-substance. Naming, in short, is where Rothfuss's cognitive-artistic space is most condensed: language is not about the world but is the world's material.

### **3. Frame narration and the layering of text-worlds**

The *Chronicle* is built on a frame: in the present, the legendary Kvothe lives in hiding as "Kote," a diminished innkeeper, and over three days narrates his life to a scribe, the Chronicler. Text World Theory illuminates the cognitive architecture this produces [2]. A matrix world (the Waystone Inn, present tense, the act of telling) frames an embedded story-world (Kvothe's remembered past), and the reader must hold both simultaneously, performing repeated world-switches and deictic shifts as the narrative moves between levels.

Two effects follow. First, the Chronicler functions as an in-text surrogate for the reader — a listener whose attention models our own and foregrounds the cognitive labour of reception. Second, the gap between the legendary Kvothe of the tale and the broken Kote of the frame opens an interpretive space the reader actively bridges, generating the suspense and pathos that sustain immersion across hundreds of pages. The artistic space is therefore not single but stratified, and its coherence depends on the reader's continuous management of nested worlds.

### **4. Sympathy and Alar: the dramatization of mental models**

Rothfuss's second magic, "sympathy," requires the practitioner to forge and hold a mental link between objects through Alar — a disciplined, sometimes deliberately divided, act of belief. Sympathy works only so long as the mind sustains the representation; lose focus and the link collapses. This is a striking externalization of cognition: the effortful construction and maintenance of mental models, familiar from psychological accounts of how readers simulate fictional situations [9], is here rendered as a visible craft within the story. The discipline of the "sympathist" mirrors the discipline of the reader, who must likewise sustain a coherent mental simulation of a complex world. Magic, in Rothfuss, is frequently a metaphor for cognition itself, and the University in which Kvothe studies these arts becomes a setting where the rules of attention and representation are made explicit.

### **5. Silence as a cognitive-poetic device**

The *Chronicle* famously opens by describing a night-time inn wrapped in "a silence of three parts." This recurring motif works as a structuring device of cognitive-artistic space. In the terms of cognitive poetics, silence operates through figure and ground: by foregrounding





absence — the missing sounds, the things that are not there — the text directs the reader's attention and builds atmosphere out of negative space [1]. The threefold patterning gives the void a perceptible shape, so that emptiness itself becomes a constructed region of the storyworld.

This is developed most fully in *The Slow Regard of Silent Things*, whose protagonist, Auri, inhabits a subterranean world of rooms and objects to which she attributes mood, propriety and need. The novella is, in effect, a sustained study in embodied and animistic cognition — how a mind constructs, orders and inhabits a space through perception and attachment. Stripped of conventional plot, it makes the building of cognitive-artistic space its explicit subject, and so stands as Rothfuss's clearest demonstration of the principle that animates the whole *Chronicle*.

### **6. Conclusion**

Across these four features — naming, frame narration, sympathy, and silence — a single principle recurs: Rothfuss's cognitive-artistic space is reflexive. The operations by which the reader builds and sustains a secondary world (activating concepts through language, managing nested mental worlds, holding mental models, directing attention) are precisely the operations the text foregrounds as theme. This self-awareness makes the *Kingkiller Chronicle* an unusually transparent case study for cognitive poetics and Text World Theory, and offers a productive object for Uzbek scholarship on *badiiy makon* and on the cognitive reception of English-language fantasy [10]. Further empirical work on reader immersion and mental simulation in such reflexive worlds would help test, against actual reading, the claims advanced here on textual grounds.

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## TANQIDIY NAZAR, TAHLILY TAFAKKUR VA INNOVATSION G'OYALAR



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