

Language & Labyrinths

A METALINGUISTIC JOURNEY THROUGH ERGODIC LITERATURE

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PART 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: ABOUT THIS WORK

JT SEEMS ONLY APPROPRIATE TO PRESENT a paper on ergodic literature in ergodic format—in fact, I would argue that such an approach is necessary to properly convey the ideas and concepts contained within this tome. By its very nature, ergodic literature demands active engagement on the part of its Reader(s).¹ It requires not only *interpretation* but *reciprocation*. It is not meant to be *consumed*, but *explored*. Only through non-trivial effort can one effectively traverse such work.

In this introductory section and following chapters, I will define ergodic literature, explain its origins, present contemporary examples, and describe the advantages of ergodic media over more traditional means in engaging the reader on an interactive level. Furthermore, I will take time to explain my own intentions as author, and justify the means through which I have chosen to communicate these concepts.

HISTORY OF TERMS

The term Ergotic Literature was first defined by Espen J. Aarseth in his 1997 book *Cybertext*. It is derived from the Greek *ergon* and *hodos*, meaning *work* and *path*, respectively. The term Cybertext was first defined in Norbert Wiener's 1948 book *Cybernetics*. It is derived from the Greek *kybernetes*, meaning *steersman*.

DUNGEONS AND DIALOGUE

JHIS WORK IS PRESENTED IN THE STYLE of a 5e Dungeons and Dragons manual. Why this format, and not another? As the Author of this text, I knew from the beginning that I was going to take an ergodic approach to this assignment. Initially, I had planned on taking on a form inspired by *House* of Leaves. It is a favorite of mine, after all, and has shaped a great deal of my own thoughts and perspectives. However, implementing this proved difficult: *House* of Leaves is maddening—intentionally so. Immersing myself in the text never fails to induce in me an altered state of consciousness—we find ourselves consumed by a kind of madness. This mental state, while phenomenologically interesting, presents significant writing challenges. The thoughts are too disorganized, too flighty and entangled and

¹The term Reader is perhaps too restrictive in describing the role of one who engages with literature of this form. It may be more accurate to consider this individual a user or consumer of ergodic media. Moreover, such an individual need not act alone. Many ergodic works, such as MUDs, ARGs, and tabletop RPGs, require the participation and cooperation of multiple individuals for storytelling and puzzle-solving purposes.

chaotic and confused. I was entirely unable to write in such a way that could properly translate these states and ideas from Author to Reader. Any level of understanding would require significant effort on the part of the Reader.

That's asking a bit too much, I think.

Beyond that, there were typesetting concerns—trying to program all of this in L^AT_EX was simply taking up too much of my time. Searching for an alternative approach, I eventually stumbled upon a DnD 5e L^AT_EX template—perfect! For one, a DnD manual is a perfect representation of ergodic text. It is not intended to be read like a novel (or a paper), from cover-to-cover in a linear fashion. Its format makes it perfectly suitable as a reference guide. This seemed particularly appropriate for this assignment. What better way to explain and demonstrate ergodicity than by using this format to explore course themes and answer questions of interest? Furthermore, I know that the primary Reader for whom this is intended is already quite familiar with tabletop guides, and thus there is a common context upon which to base this work. This means less explanation on my part and less confusion on theirs—a boon for all!

READERS AND ROLES

CHE ROLE THAT THE READER PLAYS WILL shape how they traverse this document. Are they a (potential) Player? A GM? Perhaps they're curious about tabletop gaming, or perhaps they are unfamiliar with it entirely. Perhaps the Reader is myself, the Author, as I read and reread and organize and edit this document.

One particular Reader—our target audience—will play the role of 'professor who is grading a student's assignment according to a specific rubric'.² More specifically, this Reader is known to be 'a professor who is grading a student's assignment according to a specific rubric who already has familiarity with tabletop RPGs' and thus, as previously mentioned, already shares a common cultural background with the author/student.

This gives us the advantage of being able to use tropes and jargon that the Reader is already familiar with and greatly simplifies the effort to communicate effectively. As I, the Author, will be playing the role of the Student, it would behoove us to detail how this document intends to fulfill the rubric assigned by the Professor.

²Hello Dr. Cash!

REGARDING RUBRIC

 WILL NOW EXPLAIN HOW THIS DOCUMENT follows the guidelines defined in the course syllabus and how each section is intended to be interpreted.

The Research Paper, accounting for 20-25% of the total course grade, is to contain ~3000 words and include substantial discussion of at least two course readings and two academic works, with citations. Part 1 and its chapters are intended to fulfil these criteria.

The Short Paper, accounting for 15% of the total course grade, is to contain ~1000 words while answering a question or taking a position on a specific topic of interest that aligns with course themes. Requirements for the Final Reflections are similar. These assignments are contained in

Part II: Sessions, which takes form of dialogue between philosophers whose works have been covered in class. Taking the role of DnD players, they will discuss and debate topics of linguistic interest.

For those experienced in tabletop roleplaying, the style and content of these arguments may be familiar. Who among us hasn't gotten into a squabble over interpretation over the particulars of rules? Who hasn't engaged in hearty debate over RAW vs. RAI only to be shot down by ROG? These Sessions are designed to be thoughtful, but playful.

BEYOND THE BASICS

 GREAT DEAL OF EFFORT HAS BEEN expended in order to keep the formatting of this document true to form. As an ergodic work, we consider the document's style, as well as the code written to produce it, as essential as the text itself. Therefore, in order to more fully comprehend this project as a whole, we heartily encourage the Reader to explore the *Language and Labyrinths* [github³](#) repository.

The git commit log itself is a record of how this paper evolved over time. Particular note should be taken of the files

Language & Labyrinths.tex, *bibliography.bib*, and *glossary.tex*. These documents form the core of our work: the *.tex* file is compiled with the *.bib* bibliography and *.tex* glossary by *LATEX* to produce the final *.pdf*. Great care has been taken to ensure that the code is well-organized and heavily documented so that even a viewer with minimal programming

experience can understand how this work was created.

Images for the Title Page were generated with *gnofract4d*. These images and the code to produce them are included in the *img* directory.

This work and all content is published under the open source *MIT License*. The libraries used for our template are based on the *DnD-5e-LaTeX-Template⁴* published by *rpgtex*.

Neale Davidson is the author of the *Draconis* font used in the cover text.

For further instruction, consult the project's *README*.

³[https://github.com/agoramachina/
Language-and-Labyrinths.git](https://github.com/agoramachina/Language-and-Labyrinths.git)

⁴<https://github.com/rpgtex/DND-5e-LaTeX-Template.git>

CHAPTER 2: EXPLORING ERDOGICITY

A LESSON IN LANGUAGE

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LANGUAGE? What is it *for*? And what exactly is language, anyway? These questions form the necessary foundation for further linguistic inquiry: What forms can language take? What is the language of story, of narrative, of literature? Of games and play? What can we possibly say about language, and what can language possibly say about us?

TALKING ABOUT TALKING

BEFORE WE CAN BEGIN TO ANSWER these questions, a paradox of circularity greets us at the outset: in order to discuss language, we must *use* language. Whether this is an insurmountable challenge or not depends on one's approach.

Those following the Analytic tradition have typically emphasized the formal characteristics of language. Linguists of this variety tend to prioritize abstraction over synthesis, paying particular attention to a statement's grammar and syntax (Putnam, 1962). This is perhaps unsurprising, given that analytic linguistics is commonly motivated by the language of logic and mathematics. A search to apply such rigor to natural language is therefore often sought as a goal.

TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS

In this seminal 1921 text, Ludwig Wittgenstein attempts to develop a comprehensive model of language—an ideal, nonambiguous language of philosophical inquiry.

How does the inner relate to the outer? But what is form without content?

CYBERTEXT

A HISTORY

Nam dui ligula, fringilla a, euismod sodales, sollicitudin vel, wisi. Morbi auctor lorem non justo. Nam lacus libero, pretium at, lobortis vitae, ultricies et, tellus. Donec aliquet, tortor sed accumsan bibendum, erat ligula aliquet magna, vitae ornare odio metus a mi. Morbi ac orci et nisl hendrerit mollis. Suspendisse ut massa. Cras nec ante. Pellentesque a nulla. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Aliquam tincidunt urna. Nulla ullamcorper vestibulum turpis. Pellentesque cursus luctus mauris.

TRANSCENDING TEXT

Suspendisse vel felis. Ut lorem lorem, interdum eu, tincidunt sit amet, laoreet vitae, arcu. Aenean faucibus pede eu ante. Praesent enim elit, rutrum at, molestie non, nonummy vel, nisl. Ut lectus eros, malesuada sit amet, fermentum eu, sodales cursus, magna. Donec eu purus. Quisque vehicula, urna sed ultricies auctor, pede lorem egestas dui, et convallis elit erat sed nulla. Donec luctus. Curabitur et nunc. Aliquam dolor odio, commodo pretium, ultricies non, pharetra in, velit. Integer arcu est, nonummy in, fermentum faucibus, egestas vel, odio.

PART 2

SESSIONS

CHAPTER 3: SESSION ZERO

Curabitur dictum gravida mauris. Nam arcu libero, nonummy eget, consectetuer id, vulputate a, magna. Donec vehicula augue eu neque. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Mauris ut leo. Cras viverra metus rhoncus sem. Nulla et lectus vestibulum urna fringilla ultrices. Phasellus eu tellus sit amet tortor gravida placerat. Integer sapien est, iaculis in, pretium quis, viverra ac, nunc. Praesent eget sem vel leo ultrices bibendum. Aenean faucibus. Morbi dolor nulla, malesuada eu, pulvinar at, mollis ac, nulla. Curabitur auctor semper nulla. Donec varius orci eget risus. Duis nibh mi, congue eu, accumsan eleifend, sagittis quis, diam. Duis eget orci sit amet orci dignissim rutrum.

ON LANGUAGE ON TRANSLATION

Donec vehicula augue eu neque. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Mauris ut leo. Cras viverra metus rhoncus sem. Nulla et lectus vestibulum urna fringilla ultrices. Phasellus eu tellus sit amet tortor gravida placerat. Integer sapien est, iaculis in, pretium quis, viverra ac, nunc. Praesent eget sem vel leo ultrices bibendum. Aenean faucibus. Morbi dolor nulla, malesuada eu, pulvinar at, mollis ac, nulla. Curabitur auctor semper nulla. Donec varius orci eget risus. Duis nibh mi, congue eu, accumsan eleifend, sagittis quis, diam. Duis eget orci sit amet orci dignissim rutrum.

ON KNOWING

Nam dui ligula, fringilla a, euismod sodales, sollicitudin vel, wisi. Morbi auctor lorem non justo. Nam lacus libero, pretium at, lobortis vitae, ultricies et, tellus. Donec aliquet, tortor sed accumsan bibendum, erat ligula aliquet magna, vitae ornare odio metus a mi. Morbi ac orci et nisl hendrerit mollis. Suspendisse ut massa. Cras nec ante. Pellentesque a nulla. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Aliquam tincidunt urna. Nulla ullamcorper vestibulum turpis. Pellentesque cursus luctus mauris.

ON REFERENCE

Nulla malesuada porttitor diam. Donec felis erat, congue non, volutpat at, tincidunt tristique, libero. Vivamus viverra fermentum felis. Donec nonummy pellentesque ante. Phasellus adipiscing semper elit. Proin fermentum massa ac quam. Sed diam turpis, molestie vitae, placerat a, molestie nec, leo. Maecenas lacinia. Nam ipsum ligula, eleifend at, accumsan nec, suscipit a, ipsum. Morbi blandit ligula feugiat magna. Nunc eleifend consequat lorem. Sed lacinia nulla vitae enim. Pellentesque tincidunt purus vel magna. Integer non enim. Praesent euismod nunc eu purus. Donec bibendum quam in tellus. Nullam cursus pulvinar lectus. Donec et mi. Nam vulputate metus eu enim. Vestibulum pellentesque felis eu massa.

PART 3
ERRATA

CHAPTER 4: REFERENCE MATERIAL

SPELLS

SENDING

3rd-level Evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Unlimited

Components: V, S, M (a short piece of fine copper wire)

Duration: 1 Round

You send a short message of twenty-five words or less to a creature with which you are familiar. The creature hears the message in its mind, recognizes you as the sender if it knows you, and can answer in a like manner immediately. The spell enables creatures with Intelligence scores of at least 1 to understand the meaning of your message.

You can send the message across any distance and even to other planes of existence, but if the target is on a different plane than you, there is a 5 percent chance that the message doesn't arrive.

COMPREHEND LANGUAGES

1st Level Divination (Ritual)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of soot and salt)

Duration: 1 Hour

For the duration, you understand the literal meaning of any spoken language that you hear. You also understand any written language that you see, but you must be touching the surface on which the words are written. It takes about 1 minute to read one page of text.

This spell doesn't decode secret messages in a text or a glyph, such as an arcane sigil, that isn't part of a written language.

TONGUES

3rd Level Divination

Casting Time: Touch

Range: The creature you touch

Components: V, M (a small clay model of a ziggurat)

Duration: 1 Hour

This spell grants the creature you touch the ability to understand any spoken language it hears. Moreover, when the target speaks, any creature that knows at least one language and can hear the target understands what it says.

CLASSES

GLOSSARY

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