SOARING WITH DRAGONS: FINDING INTIMACY AND PLAY IN CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

JOSHUA DAVID WILLIAMS. Soaring with dragons: Finding intimacy and play in children's and young adult literature. (Under the direction of DR. JOANNE MAGUIRE ROBINSON)

This thesis examines the way children's and young adult literature deals with play and intimacy. Using Georges Bataille's conception of intimacy, this thesis posits that intimacy, deriving from play, allows for a deeper understanding of self and a deeper connection with others. Within children's and young adult literature, various issues become approachable and relevant. Issues that are inappropriate in other contexts make appearances in literature, offering excellent introductions to these issues. Intimacy offers one such issue, and Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* imagines intimacy as fostering a deeper connection with other forms of life. Paolini's novels bring intimacy deriving from play to the foreground, creating a fantastical story of intimacy triumphing over evil.

Through examining the *Inheritance Cycle*, the usefulness of studying play and intimacy in children's and young adult literature should become apparent. Both play and intimacy offer ways of interacting with the world and others, forming unique bonds. Play does offer a category often studied in relation to children and adolescents, but intimacy does not present a category of study for these groups. Both, though, appear in literature written for these age groups, making both integral categories of scholarly inquiry. As such, intimacy, deriving from play, offers another avenue in understanding the elements found in the books children and young adults read.

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INTRODUCTION: WALKING AND MAYBE RUNNING

Early in life, children and adolescents play endlessly on the playground, in the park, online with friends, etc. Play brings children into contact with other people their age, allowing for deeper connection to be made with others. Play also teaches children about themselves. Through their interaction, they learn to navigate situation and see the results of their actions. Play in this context opens access to intimacy. How does this intimacy affect children and adolescents? Intimacy, deriving from play, allows for a deeper understanding of self and a deeper connection with others. At the most basic level, intimacy refers to the loss of individuality, leading to inclusion across all of existence.[1] Play allows for this intimacy to occur within and without participants, connecting them to each other. This phenomenon can be seen in children's and young adult literature.

Within children's and young adult literature, various issues become approachable and relevant. Issues that are inappropriate in other contexts make appearances in literature, offering excellent introductions to these issues. Intimacy offers one such issue, and Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* imagines intimacy as fostering a deeper connection with other forms of life. Paolini's novels bring intimacy deriving from play to the foreground, creating a fantastical story of intimacy triumphing over evil. Why, though, choose Paolini's series over so many other fantastical series? What makes it ideal for thinking about play and intimacy?

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[1] Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1986), 31.

Many people have criticized Paolini's work for plagiarizing other fantasy authors such as: David Eddings, Anne McCaffrey, and George Lucas.[2] His novels contain many derivative moments, some more explicit than others. However, the derivative nature of Paolini's work does not hinder analysis. Containing many of the same elements as other fantasy novels, the *Inheritance Cycle* offers an excellent source for analysis without having too many sources (i.e. the series is a good test case). The way Paolini pulls from various sources to form his story provides a superb source with which to analyze this niche of fantasy literature. Moreover, the centrality of play and intimacy to the story makes it the perfect case study. Without both play and intimacy, the *Inheritance Cycle* would not conclude in the way it does, and the story would be weakened overall. Intimacy and play develop the central arc of the story while simultaneously making the story intriguing to read. In this way, Paolini's series offers an superb case study to explore both play and intimacy in children's and young adult literature. The fact that Paolini began this series while still a teenager attests to the series' utility as a case study as well. From the mind of a teenager, a story of intimacy and play presents a superb case study to explore both phenomena in children's and young adult literature.

The first chapter will explore the historical understanding of play by tracking various theories from scholars of multiple disciplines. Looking at these theories of play beginning with Huizinga, this chapter follows the development of play theories while at the same time highlighting the usefulness of each theory. Five theorists will form the basis of this endeavor. Coming from multiple academic backgrounds and cultural locals, these theorists offer a broad range of definitions and approaches to understand the

[2] For more detail see: https://aydee.wordpress.com/2006/12/17/eragon/. Also a quick read through the comment section of Goodreads for *Eragon* provides a multitude of examples.

historical movements in play theory. The five theorists will be Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, D. W. Winnicott, Gregory Bateson, and Brian Sutton-Smith. All of these thinkers offer useful approaches to play, and they open up conversations to what play does for and to the participants. After enumerating several theories of play, this chapter will seek to outline play as it orients and teaches people how to act appropriately in the world and understand how play opens access to intimacy. The ultimate relevance of this chapter proposes that play leads directly to intimacy. Play in this context allows people to leave a space of individual self and enter into a space of intimacy with other people and beings.

Chapter two will lay the groundwork for my understanding of intimacy. Following Georges Bataille through his definitions and interpretations of eroticism and intimacy, I will use his theory of the dissolution of the self as the starting point for my characterization of intimacy, moving through how Bataille sees utility as inherently harmful to individual selves and how intimacy overcomes this utility. From detailing this understanding of intimacy as dissolving the self, this chapter seeks to expound upon the end result of intimacy. Intimacy moves people out of individuality and brings them into a connection with all living beings. This connection allows for people to see commonality across existence. To accomplish this task, Georges Bataille's theory of intimacy and sacrifice will prove essential. His understanding of sacrifice allows for those caught up in individuality to find the intimacy lost from the instantiation of the individual self. Ultimately, this chapter should lay the foundational perception of intimacy that can be applied to a close reading of the *Inheritance Cycle*.

Following the theoretical chapters enumerating my perspective on play and intimacy, the third chapter offers a close reading of the *Inheritance Cycle* with focused attention on play. Drawing from the theoretical characterization of play, specific scenes from Paolini's novels will show how play affects both Eragon and Saphira. For example, Eragon undergoes intense training to become a better Dragon Rider, but some of this instruction appears playful in the way Eragon has to perform activities. One such activity is listening to the surrounding nature. Eragon must spend an hour listening to the world around him without knowing the specific goal of the assignment. Eragon does this daily and eventually develops an intimacy with the world around him through this playful activity.[3] Through close reading with attention to play, this chapter will begin to show the way play opens access to (deeper or lost) intimacy. The specific examples from the *Inheritance Cycle* should illuminate the way play affects the world of Eragon and allows him to be more aware of his relationship to the world. Moreover, this chapter should highlight how play leads to intimacy, affecting both Eragon and the world around him.

Picking up the line of thought from the proceeding chapter, chapter four will emphasize intimacy in the *Inheritance Cycle*. Following the theoretical approach of Georges Bataille, several examples will show how Eragon and Saphira have an intimate relationship that leads to dissolution of their selves. For example, while flying with Saphira, Eragon joins his mind with Saphira seeing everything through her eyes and from her mental perspective.[4] In this moment Eragon loses his sense of the boundaries of his body and becomes continuous with Saphira. This conception of the dissolution of the self appears overtly similar to Bataille's understanding of intimacy and eroticism. Within

[3] Christopher Paolini, *Eldest*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).
[4] Christopher Paolini, *Eragon*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

this chapter, more close readings will highlight examples dealing with the effects of intimacy. Intimacy will become critical to the conclusion of the conflict in the series, making it an invaluable tool to think about the destruction of evil.

Through examining the *Inheritance Cycle*, the usefulness of studying play and intimacy in children's and young adult literature should become apparent. Both play and intimacy offer ways of interacting with the world and others, forming unique bonds. Play does offer a category often studied in relation to children and adolescents, but intimacy does not present a category of study for these groups. Both, though, appear in literature written for these age groups, making both integral categories of scholarly inquiry. As such, intimacy, deriving from play, offers another avenue in understanding the elements found in the books children and young adults read. So without further ado, let's go play.

CHAPTER ONE: PLAY, PLAYING, PLAYFUL: PLAYING WITH THOUGHTS

In 1998, Jonathan Z Smith published the famous chapter "Religion, Religions, and Religious" for Mark C. Taylor's *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Smith maps out the broad range of definitions of religion in this chapter from the explicitly Christian to the modern scholarly use of the word (or range of words). Smith problematizes the notion of religion being one definable action or mode of life in the world. His chapter opens up the possibility that religion can only be defined by those scholars when they know what they want to study.[5] Smith's understanding of religion places it into a scholarly category that changes definition based upon the scholar's interpretation of an event/phenomenon/culture.

Drawing on Smith's understanding of religion, the term "play" offers a problematic variety of disparate definitions. As an important part of childhood and pleasure in life, play takes a large role in human experience. Various scholars have invested lifetimes into understanding what play is, yet with this multitude of definitions play's workings in the world largely go neglected. What does play do for participants? How does play shape and change the culture in which it happens? This chapter will seek to present past theories of play and bring them together into a coherent understanding of play as a useful category.

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[5] JZ Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Five theorists will construct the basis of this endeavor. Coming from various theoretical backgrounds and cultural areas, these theorists offer and expand definitions and approaches to understanding play as a phenomenon. The five theorists are Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, D. W. Winnicott, Gregory Bateson, and Brian Sutton-Smith. All of these thinkers offer insightful approaches to play, and they open up conversations to what fits into the category of play. Their theories offer in-depth insights into the categories of play from the cultural implications to the individual evolutionary implications. Each of these theories offers a nuance of play's function in the world, and by bringing them all together several useful characterizations of play become apparent.

Having navigated the historical theorizing of play, I will highlight the utility of thinking about play, specifically the functions of play that orient people to the world and teach them how to act appropriately in the world. Play provides a way for people to familiarize themselves with the cultural workings of their world. They learn how to interact with other people and see their place in the society. Play teaches participants how to act appropriately with other people. Communication plays a central role in how people play with one another, but play also develops people's aptitudes of connecting with others in a given culture. The last implication of play emerges from the way play lacks a goal, which associates it with intimacy. Following the thought of Georges Bataille, an activity lacking a goal opens a space for intimacy to occur for the participants.[6] Since play happens without a goal or purpose, it can lead to experiences of intimacy, opening a space for intimacy to happen. Following these implications I will posit my own definition of play, drawing on all the theorists to ground my definition. Before delving into all of this though a historical look at play theories must ensue.

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[6] Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1986), 11.

Johan Huizinga' Theory

In *Homo Ludens*, published in 1938, Johan Huizinga theorizes play as the foundational base of culture.[7] His understanding of play as a precursor to culture stems from the play found among animals.[8] Huizinga moves play onto a grand scale, making it the method through which people come together to make a culture. Huizinga denounces earlier theorists for defining play too narrowly and looking for biological explanations.[9] Huizinga wishes to expand play to the larger context of society and the movement of play in bringing people together, yet what characterizes Huiznga's understanding of play?

Huizinga lays down four areas that make up the characteristics of play: it is free, not "ordinary" life, bounded by time and space, and ordered.[10] The free quality of play appears in how play happens only during moments of leisure. As Huizinga notes, "Play is superfluous."[11] Humans do not have to play at all, but they choose to play. Having no sense of obligation or goal, play happens extraneously to the everyday flow of life. Following this characteristic, everyday life does not constitute a continual play. Play stops and starts where real life begins; play is "an interlude in daily life."[12] Because play resides outside of the everyday, play activity is bounded. Play transpires in certain spaces and times.[13] Though these bounds exist, they are not the same for all forms of playing. The space and time of play vary drastically from situation to situation, yet with these parameters, play establishes order.[14] All forms and types of play entail some rules which

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[7] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, (Mansfield Centre: Martino Publishing, 2014), 1.
[8] Ibid., 1.
[9] Ibid., 2.
[10] Ibid., 13.
[11] Ibid., 8.
[12] Ibid., 9.
[13] Ibid., 9.
[14] Ibid., 10.

the players must follow. "The rules of a game are absolutely binding and allow no doubt."[15] Play comes with an understanding that not all things are allowed, and humans engaging in play comprehend the inherent order of play. They know the consequences of breaking the rules.

Having detailed his main characteristics of play, Huizinga moves to play's place in the world. He makes the case for play being a vital element to culture. "[C]ulture arises in the form of play, … it is played from the very beginning. … By this we do not mean that play turns into culture, rather that in its earliest phases culture has the play-character, that it proceeds in the shape and mood of play. In the twin union of play and culture, play is primary."[16] Huizinga suggests here that play exists along and even comes before culture. Culture forms through the competitive aspect of play.[17] Through competition, clusters and groups form, pitting themselves against one another for satisfaction of winning. In these contests, people support their group's participant(s), making up a cultural group. When these groups begin to come together after the competition, more advanced and civilized cultures appear.[18] Huizinga expands this understanding of play throughout history, examining various forms of play forming and sustaining culture. He details play's appearance in law, war, knowledge, art, and philosophy.

From Huizinga's theory of play, three useful understandings of play stand out. The first comes from the existence of rules within play.[19] All players recognize and know the rules while engaged in play. These rules orient the players to the way play

[15] Ibid., 10.
[16] Ibid., 46.
[17] Ibid., 47.
[18] Ibid., 64.
[19] Ibid., 10.

works in the moment. The rules within play appear distinct from those outside of play. Having this distinction orients the player to the world even after play ends. When play expires, the rules revert back to the standard "rules" of the culture and society, and the play space allows for certain rules to be worked around for the full duration of play. Moving out of the rule-bound space of play, people begin understanding and living within culture. After play, the norms of culture reinstitute themselves, but also the culture comes out of play. As Huizinga points out, "In the twin union of play and culture, play is primary."[20] Play precedes culture; thus, play also introduces players to the working of culture. Play opens the space for players to learn how culture works and the appropriate way to participate within culture. During play, culture works itself into and out of the players, making them into cultural actors and instigators.

The final element of Huizanga's definition comes from his commentary on play's superfluous nature in culture.[21] Coming from the point that play does not constitute a necessary activity to existence, Huizinga shows that play does not have a set purpose or goal. Play becomes that in culture that happens spontaneously without having necessary point. This outlook of play connects it directly to intimacy. If play has no intended goal, then it offers a space for intimacy to flourish among participants. As Georges Bataille says, intimacy "is a psychological quest independent of [a] natural goal."[22] With this understanding of intimacy, play resides in the category of the intimate and offers a way to gain access to intimacy. Thinking with the goalless nature of play, Huizinga offers a way to clearly connect play with intimacy, but he is not the only one. Gregory Bateson

[20] Ibid., 46.
[21] Ibid., 7.
[22] Bataille, *Erotism*, 11.

examines the communicative aspects found within play bringing out the way play teaches appropriate interaction among beings.

Gregory Bateson's Theory

In 1955, seventeen years after Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, Gregory Bateson published his own theory of play revolving around communication. Bateson posits the term meta-communicative which Bateson claims as, "the subject of discourse is the relationship between the speakers."[23] This understanding of communication sees the interlocutors as possessing a higher order process to understand certain signs as signals.[24] For Bateson, this higher form of communication presents the foundational element for play. Meta-communication allows beings to interact with each other in a playful way without interpreting signs as threatening to their existence.[25] Bateson explicitly states his definition of play through negative statements: "'These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote.'"[26] Following Bateson's logic, play occurs when beings communicate using common forms of language and action to symbolize something different than the common understanding of said language and action. This theory of play emphasizes the way beings interact with one another in their communication. Play constitutes a specific form of exchange that, for Bateson, makes it into a special interaction worthy of study. Nevertheless, this theory does have its own complications as detailed by Bateson.

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[23] Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Reality," in *Play: Its Role in Development,* Jerome Bruner, Alison Jolly, and Kathy Sylva eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 119.
[24] Ibid., 119.
[25] Beings here refers to any mammal capable of meta-communication. Bateson details several animal species that participate in play particularly play fighting.
[26] Ibid., 121. Emphasis Bateson's. Another way to think about this communication is with the statement: "this is play" (120).

Given this understanding of play as a higher form of communication, Bateson moves his thought about play into a paradoxical space, thinking about the opposite position of play denying the sign its usual meaning.[27] Bateson poses this paradox as a question in response to "this is play:" "is this play?"[28] This paradox adds a whole new dynamic to meta-communication in denouncing the common meaning of a sign. The monkeys in Bateson's research understand that the playful nip does not indicate an actual bite; thus, "the bite itself is fictional."[29] This new element changes the way play works as meta-communication. Play not only represents the sign in a new way, it also makes the meaning of the sign nonexistent. An example may help further clarify this point. Imagine two children playing at pirates having a sword fight; they may use sticks or other straight sturdy objects as swords. During this pretend fight both children threaten each other with their "swords" and even possibly with their words, but the meaning of both gestures do not denote any real physical threat. In addition to understanding the play as nonthreatening, the children also realize the sword fight is fictional. Their interaction during pretend does not make the sword fight real, thus the threat of a true fight is nonexistent.

In this sense, players can tell the difference between play and not play through meta-communication. Bateson refers to this ability as discrimination.[30] The ability to discriminate allows interlocutors to understand that what they play is not existent, yet they also understand that their signs have a new meaning in this space of play. For Bateson, this makes play special. Using the example of a map and the actual territory,

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[27] Ibid., 122.
[28] Ibid., 122.
[29] Ibid., 123.
[30] Ibid., 125.

maps only represent the territory, yet the map also gives a visual symbol of how the territory looks.[31] Following the map example Bateson says, "In play, they are both equated and discriminated."[32] Play offers the space of overlap where paradox happens. It allows the player to use everyday signs to signify another event, making play a complex system of communication. Therefore, Bateson views play as part of the evolution of communication where beings can both equate and discriminate at the same time.

Bateson's definition of play presents a way to think about play as familiarizing interlocutors with the way culture operates. This meta-communication teaches people how to communicate with others and understand the culture, communicative method, particularly the way people within a culture communicate with each other. Through play people learn how to communicate and understand communication in an appropriate way. Play introduces the cultural communication method; it even goes so far to teach the higher forms of communication such as body language and intended meaning. From Bateson's theory, play becomes that element that instills appropriate communication within the players. While providing insight into play's ability to foster communication and teach proper understanding of communication, Bateson does not provide much insight into intimacy's connection with play. For more on this connection Roger Caillois's theory of play seems more appropriate.

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[31] Ibid., 121. Not all maps give visual symbols of how the territory looks. Some maps give topographical features in place of symbols. In either case, the map still contains some feature that only represents the territory; it is not the actual territory. Therefore, the map only gives a representation of the territory. Someone cannot know the exact territory from a map. This furthers Bateson's point about meta-communication since we already understand and use meta-communication in other contexts.

[32] Ibid., 125. The they here refers to the signs used in play. The signs are at the same moment equated with what they actually mean and discriminated as not actually referring to the actual meaning.

Roger Caillois' Theory

Roger Caillois, in *Man, Play and Games*, posits his own theory of play focusing explicitly on the category of games, which Johan Huizinga leaves out of his theory completely. Caillois' theory of play contains five characteristics: it is free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, and rule governed.[33] Before expounding on the different categories of games and competitions, Caillois defines play with characteristics but all the traits apply to games. Each of these traits offers a different dynamic to play and the way it presents itself in the world of games.

The first two characteristics of play go together quite well, free and separate. Play offers an activity that happens in a particular space and time while also not being necessary.[34] Caillois posits both of these positions as inherent to any form of play. Without the activity being free it would be unappealing to the participants, and without a separate time and space play would be meaningless unprotected event.[35] The next characteristic comes through play's uncertainty.[36] Play always possesses an unknown outcome. Players do not want the ending result to be known in advance. Knowing the outcome in advance removes the fun from play. The subsequent characteristic of play follows from the uncertainty of the outcome; rules provide the structure for the players, making the event fair for all.[37] Players agree to the rules before participating in play; thus, they make certain that the outcome cannot be known before the end. The uncertain outcome and the rules keep the game fun and fair for all partaking in the play.

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[33] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001, 9.
[34] Ibid., 6.
[35] Ibid., 7.
[36] Ibid., 7.
[37] Ibid., 8.

All of these characteristics lend clarity to the way play acts as familiarizer and teacher. The freeness of play marks it as a way for people to learn. With play, education and learning can happen naturally with students learning through their organic interaction with others in a play space. The ruled nature of play also pushes learns into appropriate interaction with the other players. Freedom of playing and the ruled nature of playing both teach players how to interact with others and can act as excellent teachers for the players. The uncertainty of play allows for the participants to learn that different scenarios and actions lead to different outcomes. Uncertainty gives the players opportunities to try out different actions to see the outcome; they learn the appropriate way to respond to various situations. In all of these ways play affects the partakers in making them see the world differently and teaching them apt ways of acting in the world.

Moreover, the most important aspect of Caillois' theory comes from the characteristic saying play is unproductive.[38] Play becomes an activity with no goal or reason. "Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, [and] skill."[39] Caillois here highlights the ultimacy of play as non-productive; as an activity it is complete waste. This characteristic ties play explicitly to intimacy following Georges Bataille's understanding. For Bataille, labor removes intimacy from the world by forcing man to work for everything and expend energy through labor. From this, "man is *in search of a lost intimacy* from the first."[40] Bataille understands labor as taking away from intimacy because it turns people into laborers only removed from intimate contact with others, and people want to find the lost intimacy. This intimacy can be found

[38] Ibid., 10.
[39] Ibid., 5.
[40] Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share,* Vol. 1, (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 57. Emphasis in the original.

though in aimless consumption.[41] Thus, if play has no goal for the energy expended during the play, then play offers a move toward intimacy. Play consumes the energy from the participants without putting that energy into productivity; if play did produce something then the activity would not be play.

Thinking of play as unproductive activity connects it explicitly to intimacy. This connection between play and intimacy is the most useful portion of Caillois' theory. His expansion on play being an inherently non-productive activity allows Bataille's theory on intimacy to be a result of the play. Even though Caillois' theory brings more than a connection to intimacy with the other characteristics allowing play to teach and orient players to the world, play's unproductive nature produces a space for intimacy to occur. With Caillois' theory providing access to intimacy, what other theories of play open space for teaching and orientation to the world? For the latter, D. W. Winnicott's theory posits some strong connections.

D.W. Winnicott's Theory

D. W. Winnicott, in *Playing and Reality*, offers a theory of play focusing on infants and orientation to reality. He posits the transitional object as the "intermediate state between a baby's inability and his growing ability to recognize and accept reality."[42] This transitional object allows the child to symbolically represent a dear object with another object. This symbol comes to stand for something else, but the infant realizes this symbolic nature. "When symbolism is employed the infant is already clearly distinguishing between fantasy and fact, … between primary creativity and perception."[43] Winnicott here points to the way play (through the transitional object) orients the person

[41] Ibid., 58.
[42] D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3.
[43] Ibid., 8.

toward the reality of culture. This object allows for the distinction between reality and fantasy, but more so it offers a way for a person to learn how to act accordingly in reality. Play opens a place for children to understand and relate to the culture and society in which they reside.

After laying this foundation of the transitional object as play, Winnicott details different ways the transitional objects affect children and how an ineffective transitional object disturbs a person's development.[44] Winnicott details these two processes through extensive clinical examples from his psychiatric practice. In working with play in this manner, he spends more time explaining the psychology and way play affects people. However, these examples do not hint at the extent of Winnicott's thought. Through thinking about the transitional object, Winnicott posits his main thesis about cultural experience: "The place where cultural experience is located is in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment. The same can be said of playing. Cultural experience begins with creative living manifested in play."[45] From this, initiation to culture occurs in play. Children and people interact with others using play or transitional objects that opens them to experiencing culture. As infants and children place transitional objects between themselves and the surrounding environment, they learn to engage the world actively and understand their connection to this reality. Brian Sutton-Smith's theory of play offers this same insight and more.

Brian Sutton-Smith's Theory

"We all play occasionally, and we all know what playing feels like. But when it

[44] Winnicott does this through explaining multiple test cases from his psychology practice. In using examples, he relates the transitional object (which for him is play) to each example making play relevant to his understanding of childhood and human development of a self.
[45] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 135. Emphasis in the original.

comes to making theoretic statements about what play is, we fall into silliness."[46] This quote opens Brian Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play*. In this book, he approaches play in a completely different way than other play theorists. As he states in the opening of his book, play theories only lead scholars into folly. The theories only add to the great confusion and misunderstanding about what play actually is, and they distract scholars from seeing the underlying effects of play. For this reason, Sutton-Smith highlights the ambiguity(s) of play following the seven types of ambiguity laid out by William Empson: ambiguity of reference, referent, intent, sense, transition, contradiction, and meaning.[47] Some form of play or one of its theories falls into one type of ambiguity or another; therefore, Sutton-Smith seeks to clear up some of the obscurity of play. He attempts to find this clarity not through adding another theory of play but by understanding the rhetorical functions of play theories.

For the entirety of his book, Sutton-Smith sets out to "bring some coherence to the ambiguous field of play theory by suggesting that some of the chaos to be found there is due to the lack of clarity about the popular cultural rhetorics that underlie the various play theories and play terms."[48] In thinking through these different theories, Sutton-Smith finds the underpinning rhetorics that inform the cultures where play happens. He thinks more knowledge about play becomes accessible through understanding the rhetorical structure surrounding the play theories. By rhetorics, Sutton-Smith means "persuasive discourse, or an implicit narrative." [49] Throughout his book, he attempts to

[46] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.
[47] Ibid., 2.
[48] Ibid., 7-8.
[49] Ibid., 8.

show the exact rhetorical workings of play theories combined into several categories based on the rhetorics used in those theories.

Sutton-Smith values the way rhetorics of play shape and form the world. He wants readers to see the foundations of play theories as the cultures accept them. Focusing solely on the rhetorics of play theories, Sutton-Smith cautions his readers to understand all play theorists' assumptions about culture. In forming their theories, scholars already presume ideological value systems exist in these cultures.[50] They work their play theories into and through these systems making compelling arguments for the validity of their theory. Sutton-Smith points to this as why these theories of play are so convincing to audiences. They feed into these larger rhetorics already functioning in culture. Given this understanding, Sutton-Smith hopes to find a "more unifying discourse" through detailing these rhetorical natures of play theories, but what are the different rhetorics of play?[51]

In the introduction, Sutton-Smith lays out seven different rhetorics that encompass the vast multitude of theories about play. He sees the rhetorics of play as: progress, fate, power, identity, imaginary, self, and frivolous.[52] Every play theory falls into one of these rhetorics, with some falling into multiple ones. Going about play in this way, Sutton-Smith covers an extensive number of theories, placing them together in their common rhetorical function. In closing the conclusion, he provides justification for the rhetorics from their cultural establishment to their perpetuation by certain groups, yet the most interesting justification details the types of play definitions appearing in the book.

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[50] Ibid., 8
[51] Ibid., 9.
[52] Ibid., 9-11. All rhetorics get at minimum a chapter with three receiving two chapters (progress, identity, and imaginary).

Sutton-Smith details three types of definition of play relevant to the rhetorics: play experiences (play as the player defines it), intrinsic play functions (theorized by looking at player motives), and extrinsic play functions (play's supposed function in culture).[53] Throughout the book, these definitions appear for further explanation and relevance of the rhetorics, but Sutton-Smith does not front a new definition as his main goal. Because of his depth, Sutton-Smith offers many different avenues into the way play functions. Sutton-Smith's theory highlights all the other theorists' ideas informing his reader of cultural understanding of play, and this theory offers a way to analyze play in general.

Playful Thinking

From these various theories of play many different avenues of thought become apparent. Play appears to function in culture without any intended purpose or goal, but it also affects the player, bringing them new ways of understanding and moving in the world. Particularly from the theorists of play mentioned above, play orients people to their place in culture while also teaching them how to interact appropriately with their culture. Drawing from these theorists, the most important aspect of play comes out in the goalless way play happens. Play does not occur with an intended results to happen: play simply transpires.

Pulling from Huizinga and Sutton-Smith, play orients people to the culture in which they live. Huizinga posits play as being rule bound with players inherently knowing the rules of the specific play.[54] These rules open a space for participants to act differently than they would while in regular culture. Play allows for activity that brings culture into context with rules and highlights the perception of the rules of culture. In

[53] Ibid., 15.
[54] Huizinga, 9-11.

this way, players become fixated on the way they live within culture and how they find themselves in a society. Moreover, Sutton-Smith's notion of play theories as rhetorics brings the academic understanding of play into formative action. Theorists posit definitions of play in a specific rhetorical stance, shaping the way their reader view play.[55] Sutton-Smith's explanation begins to orient his reader into a space where understandings of play become influential in shaping players. By this I mean that Sutton-Smith's analysis orients his readers to play's effect on players; moreover, his analysis familiarizes the society to rhetorics about play.

This orientating nature of play can be seen in Winnicott's theory explicitly. Winnicott posits the transitional object as the step in moving toward reality.[56] This object allows for the infant to adjust to reality, providing a way to learn what is real. In this way the transitional object orients the child to the real world. Transitional objects present a form of play where the player becomes aware of the world learning how to move and interact in it. This play creates awareness in the player for the way things actually are; it then allows them to be actors in the world. Play moves people into acting in and on the world through highlighting reality.

Not only does play orient people to their space in the world, it also teaches people how to act appropriately with others. This function of play brings people into a space of better communication with one another. Play as teacher comes up in both Huizinga's and Bateson's play theories. For Huizinga play precedes culture.[57] This means that play occurs before culture; thus, people learn about and enact culture in play. Play introduces the cultural workings and allows the players to learn culture through competition. In this,

[55] Sutton-Smith, 8.
[56] Winnicott, 3.
[57] Huizinga, 46.

players learn to act properly with others. They begin to understand the cultural significance of certain actions and the grievances of other actions. Play becomes the element in culture that brings people into interaction with one another and sanctions the action of the players. In this way, play becomes the cultural indicator of suitability in interactions.

Furthermore, Gregory Bateson's theory of play brings the communication found in play into a clearer conception. Bateson's understanding of the meta-communicative aspect of play provides insight into the way play introduces people into a cultural communication. The meta-communication teaches players the signals of play, particularly body language and actions.[58] Once the person (or animal) learns to interpret the play signal as play then they can appropriately communicate with their interlocutor. This communication spills over into other interacts with people. The communication learned in play also teaches the acceptable way to communicate and interact with other people on a regular basis. Play here teaches the meta-communication which in turn opens more possibilities for communication in the non-play world. The signs and signals learned in play translate to the suitable exchange of information in everyday life. Through play, people learn to interact with one another in the best way possible.[59]

The most important aspect of play within the above theories comes from its connection to intimacy. Play opens up access to intimacy through play's superfluous

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[58] Bateson, 119.

[59] A caveat here in regard to play. Though play does orient and teach people how to communicate and interact with one another in culture; neither of these are the goal of play. Play does not have any goal. To have a goal makes the activity something other than play. Both the orientation and the teaching only result from the activity of play. They both present the effect of play on people and the world.

nature.[60] Play does not possess a particular goal or push a predesigned outcome on the players. It does not produce any goods or give anyone wealth.[61] Both of these understandings of play mark it with a connection to intimacy. As Georges Bataille states, "[Intimacy] … is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal."[62] Following the thoughts of Georges Bataille, the theory of play as superfluous and free of production connects it closely to intimacy. Play here allows for intimacy to become a factor among those who play; it brings people into close proximity without the barriers of normal life to hinder their connection. Since play is a free and unnecessary activity, people can bond together in play without the block of regular societal structures. Play in this context brings intimacy to the foreground in thinking of what play lets people experience.

In addition to the superfluous nature of play, play as an activity is ambiguous.[63] Sutton-Smith points to the ambiguous nature of play to point out the silliness of the multiplicity of theories; however, he seems to home in on the crux of play's effect in the world. Play ambiguity means it has no goal, purpose, or productivity. This understanding permits play to consume without making it into a form of labor. Play consumes without having anything to show for the consumption; thus, it moves closer to intimacy. As Bataille states, "Consumption is the way in which *separate* beings communicate. Everything shows through, everything is open and infinite between those who consume intensely."[64] Consuming here opens people to one another, exposing them

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[60] Huizinga, 8.
[61] Caillois, 5.
[62] Bataille, *Erotism*, 11.
[63] Sutton-Smith, 2.
[64] Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vol. 1, 59.

completely. If play then is mindless consumption without a result, play begins to access the lost intimacy from the institution of labor.[65]

Before stating my own definition of play, the nature of the connection of play and intimacy must be addressed. Play and intimacy are not the same thing! Intimacy can result from play and play can lead to intimacy, but play does not equal intimacy. Even if play results in intimacy, the outcome does not change the activity. The result has no effect on the play. Play remains play; thus, it remains an activity with the three above effects. For my purposes here, play will mean a free, uncertain, ambiguous, superfluous, and transitional activity that leads to various ends and outcomes. These outcomes present a variety of different things play affects in the player, but it does not alter the activity of play. Play will survive as play no matter the outcome. This comes to distinguish play from discipline. Discipline changes the activity itself, making it essential to achieve a particular outcome. Discipline forms and influences the person participating in an activity to become a certain thing or act a certain way. Play freely happens as an activity that can end with a change in a person, but the change in the person is not the goal of the activity. In this way, play offers a unique activity that leads people to an outcome without intending said outcome.

The notion of play here then affects people in orienting them to their place in the world while also teaching them to interact appropriately with other people. The ultimate deduction from these theories of play appears in the close connection with intimacy. Though play may not be equivalent to intimacy, it does offer access to intimacy. Play allows people to move to a space of selflessness that does not happen in the everyday

[65] For Bataille, labor creates and sustains the discontinuity of humanity. People caught in projects and labor do not experience the connection of humanity; they are stuck in a space of discontinuity separate from the rest of the world. More on this in the next chapter.

context. Intimacy becomes a direct result of play allowing people to take part in a free and superfluous activity, but what does intimacy then do to those people who experience it?

CHAPTER TWO: KNOWING INTIMACY: SHATTERING THE SELF

One rarely thinks of intimacy in regard to children's literature. Intimacy often becomes a marked category too explicit and mature for children to consider, a category from which to be protected. Nevertheless, intimacy plays a role in the transition from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. Children learn to further and deepen their relationships, moving through life toward maturity, and intimacy in relation to children's literature needs to be examined and seriously considered as a category for children. As shown in the previous chapter, play provides access to intimacy through being superfluous and non-goal oriented. Play leads people into contact with one another, allowing them to be free outside of everyday life, which invokes intimacy directly. If play invokes intimacy, then what are the characteristics of intimacy? Also, how does intimacy affect people? Georges Bataille's contemplations of intimacy offer a strong and relevant understanding of the phenomena that surround moments of intimacy.

At the most basic level, Bataille's understanding of intimacy focuses on the dissolution of an individual's selfhood into another.[66] Writing in the wake of World War II, Bataille struggles through reconciling the calamity of fascism in Germany and Italy while also considering the mass deaths of the Holocaust. Through these musings, intimacy becomes the important aspect of human life which brings individuals together.

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[66] *Erotism*, 31.

Bataille frames his understanding of intimacy in eroticism.[67] Eroticism refers to "a psychological quest independent of the natural goal."[68] Bataille thinks about eroticism as moving beyond the utilitarian goals of sex (i.e. reproduction). For Bataille eroticism moves an individual to a state of death. By death, Bataille does not mean a physical ending of life but a disruption of people's sense of being.[69] Starting from the position that humans occupy an existence of discontinuity, Bataille claims that eroticism equivalent to death moves people to a space of continuity.[70] Humans remain in a state of discontinuity while they work on and remain caught in projects (i.e. work, productivity, etc.). This discontinuity keeps us separated from one another, only seeing the utilitarian value of other people without recognizing their actual humanity.

For Bataille, eroticism overcomes this discontinuity though it does so only through violence. "[The] domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation."[71] Eroticism breaks an individual out of their static position of being defined by boundaries. By this I mean, that intimacy breaks down personal boundaries which individuals establish to protect and maintain their sense of selfhood. Moreover, eroticism breaks people out of discontinuity, particularly work and project. In moving people out of discontinuity into continuity, eroticism instantiates the person in a moment of death. "The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial

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[67] This understanding of eroticism does include sexual relations, but it also encompasses more. For this reason when using the term eroticism, I mean both Bataille's notion of eroticism and intimacy. The two terms should be seen as interchangeable in almost all circumstances, even when taking about physical eroticism.
[68] Ibid., 11.
[69] Ibid., 12.
[70] Ibid., 13.
[71] Ibid., 16.

dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity."[72] Individuals moving into a world of continuity lose part of their boundaries of self. Their selfhood dissolves into the other individual bringing them closer to a state of continuity. This dissolution appears as death because it breaks the discontinuous person. It overcomes and overwhelms a person's discontinuity and moves them to a space of continuity with another being. The dissolution of the self marks the point of eroticism and intimacy; it heightens the awareness of a connection with others. It moves people out of their discontinuous lives of work, projects, and selfhood to a place of recognizing the continuity of existence.

Three Types of Eroticism

If Bataille's eroticism offers the insight into the dissolution of our discontinuous selves, then it is worth thinking through his three forms of eroticism: physical, emotional, and religious.[73] Physical eroticism finds its basis in the physical actions of sex and bodies. The initial move into continuity, when thinking with the physical, appears in nakedness.[74] Humans spend their lives hiding their bodies; the sight of the naked body sparks a visceral reaction from the individual seeing the body. Nakedness also holds significance for the person stripped bare, namely their movement into continuity. As Bataille points out, "the self is dispossessed, and so completely that most creatures in a state of nakedness … will hide."[75] Moreover the act of sexual consummation furthers the

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[72] Ibid., 17.
[73] Ibid., 15. All three types of eroticism will be useful to the analysis of Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle*. Eragon and Saphira exhibit all three types in their relationship, and all three are vital to them being the best dragon and Rider.
[74] Ibid., 17.
[75] Ibid., 18.

move to continuity in making one partner the victim and the other the consumer.[76] Bataille posits a hetero-normative relationship with the female partner being the victim and the male partner being the sacrificer; however, eroticism goes beyond these labels with the partners because "both during the consummation [lose] themselves in the continuity established by the first destructive act."[77] No matter whether one is the passive or active partner, both experience dissolution of the self.[78] Though physical eroticism may be the simplest example of eroticism, it is fraught with prior meaning and utility. This results in physical eroticism having "a heavy, sinister quality."[79] Physical eroticism can maintain the distinction of the selves very easily. Individuals do not always seek to experience physical eroticism; they may want sexual pleasure in their discontinuity, making the action goal oriented.

Different from physical eroticism, emotional eroticism can be and often is devoid of physical encounters (though it may lead to them).[80] Emotional eroticism comes from the perception of desiring an object and for this reason "the fervor of love may be felt more violently than physical desire is."[81] Following the violence of eroticism, the

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[76] The language of victim, sacrificer, and consumption appear repeatedly throughout Bataille's thought. The image of sacrifice offers valuable insight into the movement from continuity to discontinuity. For Bataille, the sacrifice was a form of eroticism (the highest form in fact); it moved the victim out of the world of things into the world of intimacy. The sacrifice reestablished the intimate relationship between the victim and sacrificer. More on this later.

[77] Ibid., 18.

[78] If has not been made clear up to this point, eroticism does not happen in goal oriented sexual activity. Goal oriented sex (i.e. for reproduction) begins viewing the partner as a tool rather than a co-participator in eroticism. This thought leads to the possibility that non-hetoro sex may be more erotic and self dissolving then hetero-sexual encounters (thought this is mere speculation and may be incorrect in our modern era). It is also a possibility for only one partner to experience eroticism and a move to continuity. Eroticism must be devoid of project which presents a complicated action in modern conditions.

[79] Bataille, *Erotism*, 19.

[80] Ibid., 19.

[81] Ibid., 19. Even though the word object appears here, a human is often the desired object. Though often a human, other objects can be the desired thing in emotional eroticism.

violence of emotional eroticism comes from the burning desire for the object. The pain of desire derives from the unattainability of the object, causing deeper desire for the object. What marks this eroticism for Bataille comes from the solitude of suffering revealing the import of the object.[82] The desire for the object often leads to violent tendencies on the part of the desirer. If the object cannot be possessed, then Bataille claims the object must be killed. Love pushes us to the point that we can only achieve satisfaction in having the loved object; we can only experience continuity in getting the loved object.[83] Coming into possession of the object happens through unlikely chance, but people desire a more sure way of achieving continuity. Here enters religious eroticism.

Religious eroticism comes through the sacrifice of the other individual, which is literally a death.[84] In sacrifice the sacrificer takes the life of the object nullifying their/its existence completely.[85] This death does not only affect the victim but also the person performing the sacrifice. They undergo change through the process of taking the life of their victim. The sacrifice reveals the continuity in the world; it highlights the starkness of all beings' continuity with one another.[86] One clarification needs to be made here, though; death does not halt or change the continuity of existing. "What I want to emphasise is that death does not affect the continuity of existence, since in existence itself all separate existences originate; continuity of existence is independent of death and

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[82] Ibid., 20.
[83] Ibid., 20.
[84] This death happens to both the human and the material object. The material object becomes consumed in the sacrifice negating its utility as an object. This eroticism comes about in the death of sacrifice.
[85] Bataille, *Erotism*, 22.
[86] Ibid., 22.

is *even proved by death*."[87] The continuity of people does not rely on death rather death reveals to us the continuity. In death, humanity sees the continuity of all existence. Death verifies the way in which all existence remains in continuity. Sacrifice offers a paramount example of this spectacle. In sacrifice, the victim dies, returning to the absolute state of continuity and the sacrificer(s) glimpse the reality of the continuity of all existence; thus, death only furthers the understanding of continuity, making it clear that all existence is continuous.[88]

Before continuing further into religious eroticism, death and its relation to eroticism needs more explicit development. Bataille explains eroticism as "assenting to life up to the point of death."[89] Thinking about this statement through the lens of each type of eroticism helps. Physical and emotional eroticism seek to dissolve the self into another being; one through the physical acts of sex and the other through the burning desire for the object. Religious eroticism literally encompasses the act of death; a victim dies in the presence of the sacrificer, showing the continuity of all existence. Eroticism's goal exists in moving individuals to a point where the frightening thought of ending our discontinuous selves goes away.

> And then … we achieve the power to look death in the face and to perceive in death the pathway into unknowable and incomprehensible continuity—that path is the secret of eroticism and eroticism alone can reveal it. … Eroticism opens the way to death. Death opens the way to the denial of our individual lives.[90]

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[87] Ibid., 21. Emphasis in original.
[88] Religious eroticism will undergird much of this chapter. It denotes the most explicit form of eroticism and highlights the continuity of all existence where physical and emotional eroticism only offer circumstantial examples (though this does not make them any less important for understanding eroticism and intimacy).
[89] Bataille, *Erotism*, 11.
[90] Ibid., 24.

Eroticism provides the way into continuity. In revealing death to individuals, they begin to understand the continuity across existence. This understanding leads to being able to deny discontinuity and embrace the continuity of all existence. In wrestling with death and eroticism, people begin to move beyond their individual selfhood into more awareness of the continuity of life (more connection with other selves). This appears to be the central claim Bataille wants his reader to see.

Death and eroticism show the danger of the discontinuous self; both highlight the need for continuity and the return of intimacy. In making this the central point, Bataille wants to see the shattering of the self for a better world of continuity and connection across nature. This intimacy seeks to make people aware of the surrounding world. Moving them out of the self-centered lives, intimacy generates people capable of seeing the continuity in the world. Though it is a violent transition, the move from discontinuity becomes a useful one. Continuity allows for people to see beyond the utility of objects and others; it opens the possibility of a more thoughtful world and society.

Coming Into Discontinuity

Turning back to religious eroticism, the explicit nature of how individuals move from discontinuity to continuity comes to be understood. In thinking about how religious eroticism works, Bataille understands the basis of humanity's existence in a world of utility (work) as offering a meaningful foundation to overcoming the world of utility through religion (sacrifice). The world of utility comes about through the instantiation of tools. According to Bataille, tools mark off the world of the profane.[91] Tools come into existence because of the usefulness in helping do a task. "Insofar as tools are developed with their end in view, consciousness posits them as objects, as interruptions in the

[91] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 27.

indistinct continuity."[92] When made, tools by their very nature break the continuity of existence. The tool only retains value so long as it is useful and becomes obsolete as soon as it can no longer be used. For this reason, tools break open the world of continuity; they begin the process of discontinuity because they are "the nascent form of the non-I."[93] The "non-I" of the tool marks the beginning of discontinuity in not recognizing the selfhood of an object, making it only about the utility toward which it works.[94]

Being all about the utility and result, the tool has no intrinsic value, or in Bataille's language, no "true end." "True ends" indicate a continuous being, but tools only have meaning in their usefulness, being always for another purpose beyond simple existence.[95] Because of the tool's nature, discontinuity enters the world of continuity, separating people into individual selves.

> The perfect knowledge that the subject has of the object is entirely external; it results from manufacture; I know what the object I have made is; I can make another one like it, but I would not be able to make another being like me … and as a matter of fact I don't know what the being is that I am, nor do I know what the world is and I would not be able to produce another one by any means.[96]

The object resides outside the subject, making it discontinuous with the subject. This comes from being able to produce and reproduce objects, but selves cannot be reproduced in the way objects (tools) can. There is only one self which is not completely comprehensible to the individual. The tool introduces the proposition of discontinuity

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[92] Ibid., 27.
[93] Ibid., 27.
[94] Ibid., 28.
[95] Ibid., 29. Bataille uses the analogy of water in water. Using this analogy, water in water cannot distinguish between different types or instances (i.e. water in water is continuous). Contrary to this, tools can be distinguished based on their purpose, one tool does not do the same function as another, making them discontinuous.
[96] Ibid., 30.

here in that it can only be known as the other. It cannot be the same (continuous) with the self because it is always external.

The beginning of an external reality shapes the beginning of religious sentiments. With the tool, objects form and inhabit the profane world that needs a contrasting world (i.e. the sacred). This allows for the positing of a Supreme Being who exists discontinuous from the world we inhabit. The Supreme Being takes the position of highest authority but it takes the same qualities of other subjects (selves) therefore making the Supreme Being the equal of all others.[97] In creating a Supreme Being, humanity also creates a world of the spirit (intangible) contrasting the world of the physical (tangible).[98] Bataille's distinction of two worlds, the sacred and profane (spirit and physical), posits humanity as divided between the two, utilizing the animals and tools of the profane world.

In creating a profane world of objects, humans must reconcile the profane and the sacred worlds, particularly since people reside simultaneously in both. The way to reconcile the sacred with the profane comes with turning the profane world into complete objects.[99] Objectifying the nonhuman allows for humanity to overcome and disregard their physicality. This comes about through seeing the body as the container of the true essence of humans (a spirit). In eating animals, humans must permanently turn the animal into an object.[100] Converting the animal into a thing (object), humans can now see themselves as more than things; they can understand death. Death reveals the truth of the spirit. As Bataille states, "In a sense the corpse is the most complete affirmation of

[97] Ibid., 34.
[98] Ibid., 37.
[99] Ibid., 39.
[100] Ibid., 39.

the spirit."[101] The corpse allows for the body to be completely and only a thing while the spirit is the true substance of an individual. Through the creation of tools, humanity moves into the space of the sacred, leaving tools and other lower beings in the world of the profane.

The final result of the division between a sacred and profane world reveals the danger of upholding a world of things. Necessarily humanity identifies the world of objects as fallen because they have no divine essence.[102] Humans distance themselves from the objects they have created; the tools only exist as objects to be utilized for an intended purpose. This move "entails the alienation of the one who created [the tool]. … to subordinate is not only to alter the subordinated element but to be altered oneself."[103] When placing objects in a fallen, profane world humanity also places itself in said fallen, profane world. Furthermore Bataille claims, "The tool changes nature and man at the same time: it subjugates nature to man, who makes and uses it, but it ties man to the subjugated nature."[104] The introduction of tools into the world marks the introduction of subordinated objects into the world as well. In this a person becomes subordinated himself or herself. People themselves become a tool! With tools as the principal object ("non-I") humans also take the place of the non-I; thus discontinuity enters the world in a real and terrible way. Now not only are tools subjected to being used for only an intended purpose, but humans become utilitarian in their purpose and usefulness to other humans. Nevertheless, hope of overcoming discontinuity exists in sacrifice (i.e. religious eroticism).

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[101] Ibid., 40.
[102] Ibid., 41.
[103] Ibid., 41.
[104] Ibid., 41.

Moreover, labor and slavery both highlight the subjugation of other humans as things. People should reside in the world of subject, but subjection moves them to the world of things. This necessarily means a loss of intimacy between people.[105] The lost intimacy here develops into an extremely dangerous notion for people. Without intimacy people live in a space of discontinuity allowing for the subjugation of other people. This subjugation allows for people to see others as tools and laborers only without seeing their humanity. Bataille's claim here emphasizes a crucial point of life and society without intimacy; people can be monsters without intimate interaction. No intimacy shows the evil way humans treat each other. Intimacy becomes the method of avoiding subjugating others and seeing them as true human beings. Intimacy overcomes the subjugation of people and their relegation to the category of thingness through sacrifice: annihilating the self.

Coming Out of Discontinuity Through Sacrifice

Sacrifice presents the central means of moving from discontinuity into continuity with the rest of existence. Sacrifice overcomes the world of objects and reestablishes intimacy.[106] This sacrifice, though, does not spell eradication of the victim. "The thing – only the thing – is what sacrifice means to destroy in the victim. Sacrifice destroys an object's real ties of subordination; it draws the victim out of the world of utility and restores it to that of unintelligible caprice."[107] Following this, sacrifice does not intend to obliterate the object sacrificed; it seeks to give it back the status of selfhood, of being. The sacrifice removes the thingness of the victim, denying and undoing the strictly utilitarian purpose. In changing the status of the victim, this sacrifice brings the sacrificer

[105] Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vol. 1, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 51.
[106] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 44.
[107] Ibid., 43.

and the victim into an intimacy with one another.[108] Moreover the sacrificed object receives its own intimacy back.[109] The object previously inhabited a space of thingness without retaining its own intimacy from its status as an object for an intended purpose. Sacrifice negates the strictly utilitarian status, thus giving the object its intimacy once more.

One key feature of sacrifice resides in the status of the sacrificer. The sacrificer must hold a position in the world of subjects:

> The sacrificer's prior separation from the world of things is necessary for the return of *intimacy* … between the subject and the object. The sacrificer needs the sacrifice in order to separate himself from the world of things and the victim could not be separated from it in turn if the sacrificer was not already separated in advance.[110]

With the sacrifice the victim regains intimacy and moves into the world of subject. The sacrificer validates himself as always already in the world of subject. Without being in the position of subject the sacrifice would not be a true sacrifice, and the victim would remain in a utilitarian existence. This understanding of sacrifice focuses on the sacrificer as having a legitimate claim of subjecthood (selfhood), yet the movement to intimacy rips the sacrificer in a violent way, negating the individuality of the sacrificer.

Intimacy established in the sacrifice violently interrupts individuality; furthermore, it denies individuality. In removing the utility of an object through sacrifice, intimacy returns to the object and the sacrificer. "What is intimate … is what has the passion of an absence of individuality … intimacy is violence, and it is destruction,

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[108] Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 58.
[109] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 44.
[110] Ibid., 44.

because it is not compatible with the positing of the separate individual."[111] Restoring intimacy necessarily means the negation of the individual; it is violence to both the sacrifice and the sacrificer. Both beings lose their self in the circumstance of sacrifice. If the sacrificer maintains individuality it occurs only in their suffering and pain. They identify with the object sacrificed ("victim") bringing the object and themselves into intimate connection with the other. [112] This recognition of sacrifice as restoring intimacy and bringing the sacrificer and victim into a space of lost individuality resonates with religious eroticism.

In both sacrifice and religious eroticism, the end of the self is paramount. During both circumstances the self dissolves into the other, creating a continuity across existence. In religious eroticism the death of the victim resonates with the spectators, bringing about the continuity in the victim and the observers.[113] Similarly in sacrifice the sacrificer comes into continuity with his or her sacrifice negating the individuality in the process.[114] Both situations perform the same act in overcoming and denying the individual selfhood of the participants. This denial shows the dissolution of the self into the other which marks a deep intimacy. Like physical and emotional eroticism, sacrifice jars the self out of discontinuity into continuity. The importance of this lies in the transformation and the denial of the self. Eroticism/intimacy reveals the commonality across humanity and brings the continuity of existence to the fore.[115] This is the most

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[111] Ibid., 50-51. Here comes a shift back into religious eroticism. The sacrifice and the sacrificer dissolve into one another causing the dissolution of individuality (selfhood), which is central to intimacy.
[112] Ibid., 51.
[113] Bataille, *Erotism*, 22.
[114] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 51.
[115] Another element of eroticism and intimacy comes through inner or mystical experience. These experiences come to be a central feature in thinking through religious eroticism. Because

important point of eroticism/intimacy. Without revealing the continuity across existence, eroticism/intimacy would be uninteresting phenomena. Because of their nature in pulling the self out of discontinuity, they change the individual and foster realization of connections with the world.

Intimating Intimacy

Sacrifice reinstates a lost intimacy, overcoming the discontinuity between people. The importance of this transition back to intimacy, back to continuity, comes through by making people aware of their connection to others. In dissolving and shattering the self, intimacy and sacrifice open the possibility of harmony among people and nature. "The victim is a surplus taken from the mass of useful wealth. … Once chosen, he is the *accursed share*, destined for violent consumption. But the curse tears him away from the *order of things*; it gives him a recognizable figure, which now radiates intimacy, anguish, the profundity of living beings."[116] Sacrifice connects the victim and the sacrificer, and the victim becomes the picture of intimacy. The victim gives off the intimacy and profundity of life. This marks the importance of the sacrifice; in it a return to intimacy occurs, showing the most profound picture of what it looks like. Sacrifice denies the utility of the other, bringing them back into a place of living intimately. The fruition of this phenomenon marks a change in thought. Sacrificers no longer view the victim as a slave or tool that performs a certain function; the victim becomes human once again. This move changes the dynamics of a relationship, bringing two (or more) people into intimate contact with one another.

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of time and length constraints, inner and mystical experiences will not be expounded upon in this thesis. Though they would both aptly fit with both Bataille's thoughts and the *Inheritance Cycle*'s themes, this will be their only mention from here on out.

[116] Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 59.

The intimacy here shatters the self-contained individual; it changes the perception of the world. It brings people and nature into continuity. Restoring continuity across existence, intimacy overcomes the evil of subjugating others to the meager existence of utility. This result of intimacy becomes the most important because it seeks to restore connection between people. Through dissolving the self, intimacy breaks the barriers people place around themselves, exposing them to others. This exposure breaks the cycle of disjoint individuals to shape continuity among people. Intimacy, in this way, denies the individual self in recognition of a connection across existence. The foundational movement here breaks the individual self through completely opening them to another being. Intimacy changes societal dynamics in denying the utility of others. People count as human beings again rather than only the service(s) they perform. In this way, intimacy brings people out of individualized self-centeredness into continuity across existence, and play opens a space for this to occur.

CHAPTER THREE: PLAYING WITH A DRAGON: PLAY IN THE *INHERITANCE CYCLE*

Drawing on notions of play as discussed earlier, this chapter will address the elements of play within children's literature, particularly Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle*. The play elements within these novels show how play leads the protagonist, Eragon, to his role as a Dragon Rider and being in the world of Alagaësia. Through play, Eragon learns to interact with other entities in his world especially his dragon partner, Saphira. He also learns more about intimacy through the playful teaching of his Dragon Rider mentor, Oromis. Play in this context leads Eragon into knowledge about how to function in the world to be a better human and be the hero Alagaësia needs.

Initiating Play

One of the first instances play appears in this book comes when Brom, Eragon's elderly mentor and guide, tells his fireside stories for the harvest festival. At this time of trading and selling goods, the entire village gathers to hear the tales of history and legend. On this particular night, Brom's story focuses on the legendary Dragon Riders and the rise of the evil emperor Galbatorix.[117] Among the listening audience, Eragon hears the magnificent tale of Dragon Riders. Brom extolls the great deeds of the Riders and their fabled protection of the land, but the story shifts to the evil deeds and reign of Galbatorix. Throughout telling this story, Brom remains animated, moving with the mood of the tale.

[117] Christopher Paolini, *Eragon*, 31.

"Brom looked down silently. Infinite sadness resonated in his voice. … The next words came like the mournful toll of a requiem. … Brom's words dropped to a mesmerizing whisper."[118] This animated storyteller playfully draws his audience in to hear the story and he embodies the story in his intonations. The playfulness appears in the movement of voice and the emotion Brom radiates while telling the story. The play in his mannerisms captivates his audience. As Eragon listens, he gets caught up in Brom's story but at the same time he hears the history of the Dragon Riders. This sets up for him the beginning of a learning experience.

After Saphira hatches from her egg, Eragon seeks out Brom for more knowledge about the dragons and their Riders.[119] In this moment, Brom recounts the Riders' longer history with Eragon telling the minute details of their formation and their way of life. Through these two sequences the mesmerizing, playful way Brom narrates these tales leads Eragon to a deeper understanding of the history he is now entering. Playful retelling of legendary tales leads to more questioning and knowledge for Eragon. This play follows from the definition posited at the end of the first chapter. The stories work to transition Eragon into a long history of Dragon Riders. Through the stories, Eragon becomes aware of the responsibility of what it means to be a Rider and begins to learn how he fits into this history.

Moreover, as Eragon begins his journey with Brom as his mentor, he begins to hone his magical skills through playing with a pebble. Previously, Eragon made the mistake of using magic to kill two Urgals.[120] Using that amount of magic nearly cost Eragon his life since magic is directly tied a person's physical ability. As Brom later

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[118] Ibid., 32, 33.
[119] Ibid., 47.
[120] A monstrous race that supports Galbatorix through the first half of the series.

informs Eragon, "[Magic] takes just as much energy as if you used your arms and back. … If the magic had used more energy than was in your body, it would have killed you. You should use magic only for tasks that can't be accomplished the mundane way."[121] With this admonishment, Brom wants Eragon to begin strengthening his ability over magic. Eragon must begin this training quickly so as to be prepared should he meet another magic user more powerful than himself. A pebble becomes the simple object with which this training is initiated.

With the pebble in hand Eragon learns the words of the ancient language to levitate the stone.[122] "Eragon looked at [Brom], confused. 'I don't understand.' 'Of course you don't,' said Brom impatiently. 'That's why I'm teaching you and not the other way around. … The words you're going to use are *stenr reisa*.'"[123] With the words of the ancient language memorized, Eragon struggles to lift the stone off of his palm. After several failed attempts, Eragon exclaims, "'This is impossible.'"[124] However, Brom quickly corrects him, telling Eragon to continue trying to lift the stone. Trying several more times, Eragon finally levitates the stone for a moment receiving a small praise from Brom.[125] This initiation into magical training shows the playful quality of learning from a mentor. Brom remains stern but also playful in his interaction with Eragon and commands to continue trying. Eragon also exhibits playfulness in his learning to control

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[121] Paolini, *Eragon,* 141.
[122] The ancient language contains the words to control magic. This language is the "true" language of everything. It is the primary form of communication among the elves, and whilst speaking in the ancient language a person cannot lie. As Brom explains to Eragon, "'The language describes the true nature of things, not the superficial aspects that everyone sees. For example, fire is called *brisingr*. Not only is that *a* name for fire, it is *the* name for fire.'" (*Eragon*, 140)
[123] Paolini, *Eragon*, 148.
[124] Ibid., 148.
[125] Ibid., 149.

the magic. Though he struggles and becomes frustrated, Eragon continues at his training to become a stronger magic user. Play comes out here in the way Eragon freely trains with the magic. He concentrates on the pebble at his leisure while learning to control the magic. The process of honing the magic also contains an element of play in that it is uncertain. Eragon does not know when the training will be over, and he does not know the end result of the magical training for a long time. This movement to pereptual training of his mind shows Eragon's commitment to being a Dragon Rider and his origins as a hero, but the magical training is only the beginning.

The other step in this playful training comes through sword sparring. While traveling on the road, Brom and Eragon train in swordsmanship every evening before they go to sleep.[126] Both use sticks for the earliest part of the training, only moving to swords with a magical protected edge once Eragon gains rudimentary skills.[127] These sparring lessons form a playful time for Eragon to strengthen his skill with a blade. Though he goes to bed sore and bruised, Eragon finds pleasure in this training. "Eragon gained confidence and speed, striking like a snake. His blows became heavier, and his arms no longer trembled when he warded off attacks. The clashes lasted longer as he learned how to fend off Brom."[128] As Huizinga sees play as happening outside of normal time, Brom and Eragon relegate their sparring to the evenings, making it a part of play through the specific time chosen.[129] Again following Huizinga in having rules that players follow for the entire duration, both follow rules of swordplay.[130] They do not overtly try to harm each other but do not refrain from hitting each other completely.

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[126] Ibid., 122.
[127] Ibid., 160.
[128] Ibid., 150.
[129] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, (Mansfield Centre: Martino Publishing, 2014), 9.
[130] Ibid., 10.

Moreover, the swordfights appear to be a form of meta-communication in that both participants know the signals of fighting as not intentionally harmful. This aligns with Gregory Bateson's understanding of play as following a higher form of meta-communication.[131]

The characterization of Brom's teaching as playful comes through in his method of continually encouraging Eragon to keep trying. The playfulness appears in the free way Brom lets Eragon learn on his own. Brom does not step in to perform the task for Eragon, but Brom allows Eragon to fail in his attempts. Playfulness contains the freedom of Eragon to act on his own, but also it has an uncertainty to it. Brom does not make Eragon see the reason for the intensity of the training. In this way, the playfulness in the training exudes many of the same characteristics of play. Moreover aligning the sword fighting and magical training with play, the effects of play become apparent. The play found in these instances teaches Eragon how to be more of a Dragon Rider and hero. He learns to fight through these fun, though painful, evenings. He also comes to know how to utilize magic through this training. Through both of these instances play leads Eragon into more understanding of how to act in the world. The play activity here results in Eragon learning to be a hero. He learns how to wield a sword and use his magical power for good. The play allows Eragon to transition into his position as a Dragon Rider as well as teaching him how Dragon Rider's should act.

Playful Teaching

As Eragon learns to be a Dragon Rider he goes to Ellesméra to learn from an elder

[131] Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Reality," in *Play: Its Role in Development,* Jerome Bruner, Alison Jolly, and Kathy Sylva eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 121.

Rider, Oromis.[132] Though Galbatorix killed all the other Riders, Oromis remains hidden within the elven kingdom, waiting to instruct the next Dragon Rider. Upon Eragon's arrival Oromis begins teaching Eragon immediately. While Oromis instructs Eragon rigorously, the teaching comes about through playful interaction. When Oromis neglects to include magic in his instruction, Eragon questions his mentor about magic's absence.[133] Oromis explains to Eragon the danger of magic and the traditional instruction in magic for Dragon Riders. Though Brom began teaching Eragon to harness the magic, he did not provide the full details of magic's danger. With this caveat Oromis concludes, "'These techniques are so potent and dangerous, they were never shared with novice Riders … but circumstances demand that I divulge them and trust that you won't abuse them."[134] Because of the need to give Eragon as much knowledge as possible quickly, Oromis must inform Eragon of everything he can; this means even the way magic works. Therefore, Oromis begins the instruction immediately.

Standing beside a river, Oromis uses magic to pull out a sphere of water. Oromis tells Eragon to catch the water sphere, but Eragon misinterprets the instruction, attempting to catch it with his hands. Oromis performs the magic again, throwing the sphere to Eragon. This time Eragon catches the sphere with magic and attempts to throw it back at Oromis. "However, the sphere did not land where Eragon had intended, but rather shot past the elf, whipped around, and flew back at Eragon with increased velocity. The water remained as hard and solid as polished marble when it struck Eragon. … The blow knocked him sprawling on the turf."[135] In this moment Eragon attempts to splash

[132] Ellesméra is the capital city for the elves in Alagaësia.
[133] Christopher Paolini, *Eldest*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 354.
[134] Ibid., 355.
[135] Ibid., 355.

his mentor with the water, but being wiser and more skilled, Oromis sends the water directly back to Eragon. The nature of this instruction shows how play leads Eragon to learn about himself. He learns that his power does not match his mentors, and he comes to understand that he has a long way to go before he can skillfully use the magic. This playfulness even comes out in Oromis's admonishment about lying on the ground. "[Oromis] finally turned to look at Eragon and raised an eyebrow with apparent surprise. 'Whatever are you doing? Get up. We can't lie about all day.'"[136] Oromis reprimands Eragon here in a playful way; he commands him to get up without acknowledging Eragon's silly magical attempt. This play teaches Eragon to take the training seriously and teaches him the appropriate way to interact with his mentor. The play here bring Eragon into a moment of realization that magic can be dangerous and that he must learn to control it with respect and restraint. Play here results in a lesson learned. Through the playful teaching, Eragon realizes his minimal grasp of magic and the respect he needs to show his mentor.

Another instance of play teaching Eragon to interact with other entities comes through his sword sparring session with Vanir.[137] In their first sparring session, it becomes apparent quickly that Vanir despises Eragon. Because of his superior speed and ability, Vanir disarms and defeats Eragon multiple times without Eragon even making any progress to defeat Vanir. As Vanir defeats Eragon for a sixth time, he exclaims, "'Coward, I say. Your blood is as thin as the rest of your race's. I think that Saphira was

[136] Ibid., 356.
[137] Ibid., 370. Vanir comes to Eragon as a sparring partner the morning after Eragon's magical training with Oromis. Though Vanir does spar with Eragon daily, he does not become a dear friend or even kind acquaintance.

confused by Galbatorix's wiles and made the wrong choice of Rider.'"[138] This slight against Saphira stirs Eragon to action, attacking Vanir in a fierce rage; however, before he lands a blow Eragon experiences an intense pain in his back, causing him to lose all ability to move.[139] Though Eragon should not fight after undergoing this painful attack, he forces Vanir to spar with him for the assigned hour. After the hour is over, Eragon flies with Saphira to Oromis's hut, commenting to Eragon, "*Oromis was right. ... You give more of yourself when you have an opponent.*"[140] The sparring lessons with Vanir denote a certain play that allows Eragon to see more of himself. Through sparring, he learns to control his body and mind, but he also understands his limitations. Eragon begins to fight harder because he wants to beat this arrogant opponent. Play here teaches Eragon to give more of himself in training and to know his own capabilities. This competitive spirit follows Johan Huizinga's understanding of play a competition.[141] The competitive element of Vanir and Eragon's conflict introduces Eragon into the culture of the elves through seeing their superior strength; he learns to embrace this culture and understand why he remains outside it. Though after the *Agaetí Blödhren* [Blood Oath] celebration, this dynamic changes completely.[142]

During the Blood Oath celebration, Eragon gains the strength and perception of an elf. His physical body changes completely, giving him a new way to spar with Vanir.

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[138] Ibid., 372.
[139] The pain in his back comes from his fight with Durza, the evil Shade. Though Eragon defeated Durza, Eragon suffered a severe slash to his back, leaving him scarred (Paolini, *Eragon*, 490). The scar is not the only effect of the wound. Eragon also experiences bouts of agonizing pain, making him incapable to do anything for the duration of the painful bout.
[140] Paolini, *Eldest*, 373.
[141] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 47.
[142] This celebration takes place every century, honoring the pact between the dragons and elves. During this celebration, Eragon undergoes a physical change through magic, making him stronger, faster, and more perceptive. More on this change will come in the next chapter on intimacy.

Eragon's first fight after the change shocks Vanir. While unsheathing his blade, Eragon does not realize his own strength and throws his sword through the trunk of a tree. This small mishap denotes the new strength Eragon has and shows his inability to control the strength just yet. As Vanir and Eragon begin their duel, the contest turns into a heated struggle for victory. Both viciously block and dodge blows with neither gaining an advantage until Eragon lands a blow on Vanir's arm, breaking it. In this moment Eragon does what he has been unable to accomplish: he defeats Vanir at a duel.

> Then Vanir did what Eragon had never expected: the elf twisted his uninjured hand in the gesture of fealty, placed it upon his sternum and bowed. 'I beg your pardon for my earlier behavior, Eragon-elda. I thought that you had consigned my race to the void, and out of my fear I acted most shamefully. However, it seems that your race no longer endangers our cause.' In a grudging voice, he added: 'You are now worthy of the title Rider.'[143]

In this moment after the sparring match, Vanir recognizes Eragon as a Dragon Rider worthy of respect. The play dueling allows Eragon to understand how to compose himself and manage his new strength, but it also leads Vanir to respect Eragon for his skill and commitment to defeating Galbatorix. Play here acts as the bridge to bring these two adversaries together. They learn to respect one another and each other's culture. Vanir finally understands the strength of the human race, and Eragon understands the intense passion of the elven race. While this play teaches both Eragon and Vanir to respect one another, it also allows them to see the other as more than a tool. In this way, play begins to move toward intimacy.

Playing Toward Intimacy

The inclination toward intimacy from the play comes into fruition fully in Eragon's training with Oromis. On the second day of training Oromis takes Eragon to a

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[143] Paolini, *Eldest*, 534.

secluded glade with a smooth white stump. Oromis instructs Eragon, "'Open your mind and listen to the world around you. … Listen until you can hear them all and you understand their purpose and nature. Listen, and when you hear no more, come tell me what you have learned.'"[144] In this moment, Eragon should simply listen to the world around him. This teaching exudes play because it does not seem to have a particular goal. Oromis does tell Eragon to listen to understand the beings in the glade, but he gives no indication as to what the point of the exercise is. Eragon has only the guidance to open himself to the beings in the glade.

As he begins to do this, Eragon notices the ants in the glade. He finds them, observing their movements and actions. He focuses intensely on these ants without giving credence to the other entities in the glade. He finds the ants' nest and looks at their lives in the anthill. He discovers the queen and all the workers bringing her food. Through this listening Eragon finds a deeper appreciation for the immensity of life forms, but he ultimate does not master the task.[145] When Eragon reports to Oromis his time observing the ants, Oromis reprimands him for focusing too closely on just the ants.[146] In this reprimand, Oromis does not give Eragon any guidance for improving his listening or how to go about mastering the task. When Eragon asks when he will achieve mastery, Oromis answers, "'When you can watch one and know all.'"[147] This unclear instruction shows the goalless nature of the activity; Eragon needs but simply listen in the glade and observe all. The listening invokes a type of play, as it seems superfluous.[148] Oromis gives Eragon no direction of how to approach the glade nor does he tell Eragon exactly

[144] Ibid., 290.
[145] Ibid., 292.
[146] Ibid., 293.
[147] Ibid., 293.
[148] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 7.

for what he should be listening. The glade seems to serve no purpose in Eragon's training other than a break during the day to hear other life forms. Play here though does move Eragon into a more intimate space; play becomes the conduit for finding intimacy. Even if the glade has a purpose, Eragon can achieve it though whatever means are at his disposal; there is not one way to learn the lesson. The uncertainty of the activity makes it all the more playful. This becomes evident in the length of time it takes for him to understand the beings in the glade.

Though Eragon begins to understand the ants and perceive from their lowly vantage point, this does not mean he finds the intimacy he needs. The narrow focus on the ants means Eragon misses out on the rest of the glade completely. For months Eragon continues listening in the glade without much success. Every time he visits the glade, Eragon obsesses on one group of animals. Each time he reports to Oromis, Eragon receives an admonition to try harder and listen more. The activity of listening offers a deep moment of play in the superfluous nature of the activity. Eragon's daily venture to the glade only makes the activity that much more play. In all this time, the activity has not lead to a result, and in this it is play. Listening in the glade becomes an unproductive activity though ultimately it does lead to a result. It is not until after the *Agaetí Blödhren* [Blood Oath] celebration that Eragon finds the true purpose of listening to all beings.

The Blood Oath celebration did not only change Eragon's physical body, allowing him to be stronger and faster; it also changes his perception and ability with magic.[149] Eragon's first day in the glade with this heightened ability shows the magnitude of life all around him. Not only do the creatures of the glade come into Eragon's mind, but the

[149] Paolini, *Eldest*, 536.

plants' consciousness comes to Eragon's awareness as well.[150] Eragon in this moment loses himself in listening to the life around him; "He allowed himself to becomes a nonentity, a void, a receptacle for the voices of the world. Nothing escaped his attention, for his attention was focused on nothing. He *was* the forest and its inhabitants."[151] In this moment of communion, Eragon experiences a loss of self deeply negating his individuality. Through his play of listening in the forest, Eragon moves into a space of intimacy with the life around him. He comes to understand the profound nature and expanse of all life. His long struggle of listening in the glade results in a final place of intimacy. Eragon finds intimacy with all life in the glade through this form of play. The method of play, coming from the goalless listening, brings Eragon to the realization that he needs to live in harmony with all nature. The result of understanding the purpose behind the glade does not lesson the playful experience of listening there. Listening leads to understanding but it does not alter or change the activity of listening. This lesson profoundly changes Eragon as a Dragon Rider, creating an intimate connection between him and the glade.

When Eragon details his experience to his mentor, Oromis commends Eragon for finding this intimacy. Oromis now can begin to teach Eragon a lesson because he has this understanding of intimacy.[152] Oromis takes Eragon back to his early training with magic, showing him a new way to draw the energy necessary to perform magic.[153] Prior to his intimate connection, Eragon draws the energy for magic from within himself and

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[150] Ibid., 538.
[151] Ibid., 538. Emphasis in the original.
[152] Ibid., 539.
[153] As stated earlier in this chapter, magic does not lessen the strength it takes to do a task. The energy required to physically accomplish a task equals the energy required to perform the same task with magic. For this reason, magic can be dangerous to the individual. If the spell uses too much energy, it can kill the magic user.

Saphira. He uses this energy to do difficult magic and protect himself and others from danger, but this is not the only way to acquire the energy. By connecting with other beings and being able to reach into their consciousness, Eragon can draw energy from them to perform magic.[154] After explaining this to Eragon, Oromis tells him to draw a sphere of water out of the stream using only energy from the life forms around Eragon. The sphere of water immediately rises out of the stream with little effort or fatigue on Eragon's part; however, the same cannot be said for the life forms from whom Eragon took the energy. "The sphere was only in the air for a moment when a wave of death rolled through the smaller creatures Eragon was in contact with. A line of ants keeled over motionless. A baby mouse gasped and entered the void. … Countless plants withered and crumbled."[155] The energy used by Eragon overtaxes the animals and plants around him, causing mass death in an instance. Eragon learns here the extreme cost of this form of magic; moreover, he learns that death hurts.

The death Eragon causes brings him to a place of understanding even deeper than that found in the glade. "Eragon flinched, horrified by what he had caused. Given his new respect for the sanctity of life, he found the crime appalling. What made it worse was that he was intimately linked with each being as it ceases to exist; it was as if he himself were dying over and over."[156] Through his connection to all these life forms Eragon comprehends the pain of death; he feels death so closely that it feels like he is dying. Just hours after experiencing an intimate connection with all the life forms in the glade, Eragon experiences the deaths of those same life forms.

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[154] Paolini, *Eldest*, 540.
[155] Ibid., 540.
[156] Ibid., 540.

Through play, Eragon learned to listen and hear all the life forms of the glade turns into a tragic lesson on magic's dangerous uses. Play, which opened the space for Eragon to experience intimacy, also opens him to experience death across his connection with life forms. In this way play leads to both the intimate connection with life and also to understanding the way to use that life for further ends. Though the listening activity may seem like discipline, the activity itself is play. The distinction between these two becomes apparent in how play results (leads to) intimacy. The activity of play opens Eragon to the intimate connection of all things. However, if the activity only disciplines him, he never learns this intimacy; he just learns how to listen. In this way play offers an activity that leads to a result without changing the activity. Discipline changes the nature (meaning) of the activity, but play allows the activity to be free and superfluous while leading to an outcome. Therefore, Eragon's play brings him to a place of intimacy.

Play in this moment leads Eragon to a deeper understanding of himself and also others. He learns through listening in the glade that all life is precious and sacred. He connects with these life forms, valuing their existence and the intimacy he finds in the connection. He also comes to see the danger of overextending his magic to draw energy from other life forms, which he vows never to do again.[157] The way play brings Eragon into intimacy highlights the aspect of play that opens access to the intimate connection across existence. The freedom of play in the glade allows Eragon to come to a realization of intimacy on his own, and it makes the connection more real.[158] Through coming to the intimacy in his own time and understanding, Eragon finds the sanctity of all life of paramount importance. The intimate connection found in play produces in Eragon a

[157] Ibid., 541.
[158] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 8. The characteristic of freedom is central to play, for Huizinga.

desire to avoid killing; he begins to see all life as intimately connected and worth saving. Following this thought, play opens a space for deeper understanding of an individual but more importantly a deeper connection with all life, leading directly to intimacy.

CHAPTER FOUR: BECOMING ONE WITH THE DRAGON: INTIMACY IN THE *INHERITANCE CYCLE*

Intimacy becomes a crucial element throughout the *Inheritance Cycle*. The intimacy between Eragon and Saphira often seems disorienting early in the series, but as Eragon and Saphira become closer the intimacy appears natural. What is most striking about this intimacy is the way in which it resonates with Georges Bataille's understanding of intimacy and eroticism. Thinking with Bataille's observations on the dissolution of the self allows one to read Eragon and Saphira's relationship as deeply intimate. Moreover, the intimacy of the *Inheritance Cycle* follows Bataille's conclusion that eroticism and intimacy allows a person to see beyond the discontinuous individual self to a space of continuity with the world.[159] The series accomplishes this intimacy in the epic conclusion of Eragon's battle with the evil emperor Galbatorix. In this way, intimacy overcomes the evil of the world; it becomes the driving factor in bringing down a vicious ruler. This form of intimacy, though, comes after the initial dissolution of the self, so before jumping to conclusions, what does the dissolution of the self look like and accomplish?

Becoming One

The first instance of intimacy appears in the earliest moments after Saphira hatches from her egg. In these moments Eragon becomes marked with the *gedwëy*

[159] Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986), 24.

ignasia showing he is a Dragon Rider.[160] Eragon experiences an invasion on his consciousness after receiving this mark.[161] This invasion comes from the newly hatched Saphira taking in her surroundings and being curious about the human she is bonded with. This first encounter with Saphira's consciousness shocks Eragon, but the second encounter appears more intense. "It was as if an invisible wall surrounding his thoughts had fallen away, and he was now free to reach out with his mind. He was afraid that without anything to hold him back, he would float out of his body and be unable to return."[162] Eragon becomes able to communicate and feel beyond the boundaries of his individual mind and body, immensely frightening him. These first contacts with Saphira mark a new intimacy between them; the boundaries of Eragon's self have been changed and dissolved (to an extent). This, however, only exhibits the beginning of their intimate relationship.

As Eragon and Saphira grow as Rider and dragon, their relationship deepens and at time becomes disorienting for both them and the reader. While traveling through the barren plains of Alagaësia, Eragon does not ride on Saphira but rides a horse as his means of transportation. After several weeks of this, Saphira grows aggravated with Eragon for not riding on her back, and she confronts him about this issue. After consulting with his mentor, Brom, Eragon agrees to ride on Saphira the next day.[163] The next morning when Eragon climbs on Saphira's back they fly like they never have before. At first the connection between them allows Eragon to feel Saphira's energy and bodily motion, but

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[160] All Dragon Riders have this mark (gedwëy ignasia) on their palm. It appears after the first contact with the hatched dragon, and it is the instrument through which Dragon Riders funnel their magic.
[161] Christopher Paolini, *Eragon*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 39.
[162] Ibid., 39.
[163] Ibid., 158.

this intensifies rapidly. "Their connection grew stronger until there was *no distinction between their identities*. They clasped their wings together and dived [sic] straight down. … The air rushed past their face. Their tail whipped in the air, and their joined minds reveled in the experience."[164] This exhilarating experience pulls Eragon into Saphira's mind without a distinction between the two. This comes not just from the scene telling the reader this, but also the grammatical usage of singular nouns shows the strong connection between Eragon and Saphira. The intimacy experienced in this moment dissolves the individuality of Eragon and Saphira; they become one with each other. They share the same feelings, viewpoint, and body. With this sense of oneness and sameness, the intimacy between Eragon and Saphira is disorienting.

The way in which this scene melds Saphira and Eragon together offers a disorienting moment for the reader. Where moments before Eragon had been distinct from Saphira, experiencing the flight through his own body, suddenly, he enters in Saphira's mind seemingly losing all connection to his own body. This change jars the reader out of the third person account from Eragon's point of view and switches to a third person account of a melded point-of-view combining Eragon and Saphira. This disorientation only lasts for two paragraphs, but the scene reorients the reader to a singular point-of-view immediately after the intimate encounter in the air. "[Their] minds began to diverge, becoming distinct personalities again. … Eragon felt both his body and Saphira's. Then his vision blurred and he again sat on her back."[165] With this textual and grammatical reversion back to Eragon's perspective, the story reorients the reader to Eragon. The intensity of the intimacy experienced between the Eragon and

[164] Ibid., 162. Emphasis added.
[165] Ibid., 163.

Saphira requires a moment for the reader to enter into the story once again with their bearings intact.

Intimacy in this scene occurs in much the same way Bataille describes it. The sense of being dissolved into another person and the move from discontinuity to continuity abounds in this scene with Eragon and Saphira flying together. As Bataille notes, "The whole business of [intimacy] is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives."[166] Here Bataille points to the way intimacy changes the individual, breaking them out of their normal selves into a space of continuity. Through this intimacy, Eragon moves into continuity with Saphira, understanding her thoughts and emotions. He even changes his own opinion of flying after this experience. "*That was incredible! How can you bear to land when you enjoy flying so much?"*[167] His experience of the intimacy of flying from Saphira's back allows Eragon to appreciate Saphira as another being, thereby growing and strengthening their relationship with one another. This strengthening relationship becomes a by-product of the deep intimacy Eragon and Saphira share, and it leads to them being open with one another. They can know each other's thoughts without having to communicate them in words.[168] Even with this growing intimacy, Eragon and Saphira must learn to strengthen their bond further to be a great Rider and dragon.

As Eragon and Saphira continue their journey through Alagaësia and choose to fight against the evil emperor Galbatorix, they need training to achieve their goal of restoring justice and peace to the land. To receive training, they need a teacher who

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[166] Bataille, *Erotism*, 17.
[167] Paolini, *Eragon,* 163. This quote is in italics because it is communicated non-verbally between Eragon and Saphira. They use their mental link to talk with one another.
[168] Ibid., 223.

understands what a Rider and dragon are; thus, they go to the elves' city of Ellesméra. Within this city an elder Dragon Rider, Oromis, still lives with his dragon, Glaedr; both possess the knowledge to train both Saphira and Eragon.[169] After a brief introduction to their new teachers, Eragon and Saphira begin their training immediately. Oromis and Glaedr both examine Eragon and Saphira's physical and mental abilities to understand the knowledge they already possess. With this examination complete, Oromis begins teaching Eragon while Glaedr teaches Saphira in a distant location. For the first day this training does not go well, especially the training of the bond between Eragon and Saphira.

After their first full day of training separately, Oromis and Glaedr test the connection and intimate bond between Eragon and Saphira. Glaedr asks Eragon about flying with the wind, but Eragon does not know anything about this topic. Subsequently, Oromis asks Saphira about the ants Eragon observed during the day, but she knows nothing of the ants.[170] Both Eragon and Saphira fail to keep their mental bond open while they were being taught; they shut each other out from mental contact. This break shows the fragility of the intimate connection of Eragon and Saphira. Though they have had moments of melding their minds together, they miss having the link continually. As Oromis admonishes them,

> 'After all the two of you have done together, I would think that you had learned the most basic lesson of being [Dragon Rider]: Share everything with your partner. … [You] should [not] just talk to each other with your minds, but rather mingle your consciousness until you act and think as one.' [171]

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[169] Christopher Paolini, *Eldest*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 244. Eragon and Saphira were thought to be the only free Rider and Dragon in Alagaësia, but their teacher, Oromis, had been in hiding since the Riders had fallen. He has been waiting to train the dragon and Rider for many years.
[170] Ibid., 296.
[171] Ibid., 297.

Oromis commands them to continually keep the link open. This link and intimacy should be the most important thing to both Eragon and Saphira. They should know each other's most private thoughts. Moreover, they should always be in intimate contact with one another. As Rider and dragon, their actions and thoughts must be together without any separation. The intimacy Oromis asks them to have calls for the dissolution of their individuality. To be a great pair, they can no longer think and act as individuals; they must act as one.

As their training proceeds, Eragon and Saphira's consciousness comes closer and closer together, allowing them to hear, see, and comprehend all the other one is learning and doing.[172] Eventually they reach the point in their training where their link is strong, and they can learn about manipulating their link in case of either's death. Because of the strong bond between Rider and dragon, the death of one can mean the death of both. When one dies, the bond can cause the other to go mad and eventually lead to their own death. Glaedr explains it to Eragon and Saphira in this way,

> *Because we are so closely joined, when a dragon or Rider is injured, they must harden their hearts and sever the connection between them. … And since the soul cannot be torn from the flesh, you must resist the temptation to try to take your partner's soul into your own body and shelter it there. … Even if it were possible, it would be an abomination to have multiple consciousnesses in one body.*[173]

While the bond and intimate link between Saphira and Eragon remains a vital part of their relationship, at death they must separate their consciousness. This separation may be difficult to do from an emotional stance, but it is vital to the survival of either Eragon or Saphira. This separation calls attention to the temporality of intimacy. Even with the

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[172] Ibid., 349.

[173] Ibid., 441. This quote is in italics because it is communicated non-verbally by Glaedr to Eragon and Saphira.

strong connection that Eragon and Saphira share, they cannot go beyond this to become an "abomination." Intimacy has limits in the acceptable. The intimacy that Eragon and Saphira share must stop with death; as Bataille says, "Each being is distinct from all others. His birth, his death, the events of his life may have interest for others, but he alone is directly concerned in them. He is born alone. He dies alone."[174] Intimacy can only be experienced while living; it cannot continue on after death. Death marks the ultimate separation of people because death consumes completely. Though intimacy can be found in the total destruction of an object or person, the connection to the object or person dissolves.[175] Eragon and Saphira must separate their consciousnesses at death, ensuring one of them can continue on; therefore, Glaedr makes this clearer when he reminds Eragon that "Everyone dies alone."[176]

Glaedr's teaching becomes especially apparent when his Rider, Oromis, dies leaving Glaedr alone. Before Eragon and Saphira's final parting from Glaedr and Oromis, Glaedr entrusts Eragon and Saphira with his Eldunarí.[177] In doing this Glaedr gives Eragon and Saphira his consciousness, so that if his body dies he can still help Eragon and Saphira through teaching them. Shortly after giving this gift, Glaedr and Oromis face Galbatorix through one of his minions. The battle rages but Oromis is no match for Galbatorix. In the midst of battle Oromis loses his sword then is split open

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[174] Batialle, *Erotism*, 12.
[175] Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vol. 1, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 60.
[176] Paolini, *Eldest*., 441.
[177] Christopher Paolini, *Brisingr*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 696. This Eldunarí is the heart of a dragon. It is a magical item that contains the consciousness of the dragon it comes from. Galbatorix has several in his possession which give him immense power. The Eldunarí is the most sacred secret and item of the dragons, and this gift to Eragon and Saphira is more than priceless.

from shoulder to hip.[178] Oromis commands Glaedr to sever their link in the last moments before he loses consciousness. Glaedr does sever his connection to Oromis, but he continues fighting the battle only to be killed moments later himself. With the death of his physical body, Glaedr becomes trapped within his Eldunarí. The anguish he feels in his loneliness is incomparable. "*Where was he? He was alone. He was alone and in the dark. He was alone and in the dark, and he could not move or see. ... And then Glaedr realized where he was, and the true horror of the situation broke upon him, and he howled into the darkness*."[179] The pain Glaedr feels shows the torture of losing his intimate connection to Oromis. Because of the severed link, the anguish seems completely unbearable. As Glaeder admonished Eragon about everyone dying alone, he now experiences death alone.

Another Intimacy

While training with Oromis, Eragon learns a deeper form of intimacy involving more than his relationship with Saphira. This intimacy shapes the way Eragon views the world and changes the way he interacts with other beings. As part of his daily training, Oromis instructs Eragon to sit in a secluded glade extending his magical awareness to all things around him. "'Listen, and when you hear no more come tell me what you have learned.'"[180] When Eragon extends his consciousness outward through this part of the forest, he becomes overwhelmed with what he senses. The sheer amount of life in this hollow shocks Eragon; he never imagined the number of life forms that surrounded him. While taking in all the life, Eragon focuses on the ants crawling up through a bush.[181] He

[178] Ibid., 734.
[179] Ibid., 735. This quote is in italics because Eragon listens to Glaedr's thoughts in this moment.
[180] Paolini, *Eldest*, 290.
[181] Ibid., 291.

senses the ant's instincts of finding food, protecting the colony, and finding mates. By opening his mind to these other beings, Eragon sees the simplicity of their world and the beauty of life. However, when Eragon returns to tell his findings to Oromis, Oromis admonishes him for focusing too heavily on one animal in the hollow; "'You must become aware of all things equally and not blinker yourself in order to concentrate on a particular subject."[182] Eragon's focus on the ants neglects to view the other life throughout the hollow. He misses the beauty of all life while focusing on the one; therefore, Oromis commands him to return to the hollow for one hour each day until he learns to broaden his focus.[183]

While this exercise seems ridiculously vague and unimportant, it lays the foundation for Eragon to understand how to defeat Galbatorix ultimately. Focusing on the life of other beings brings about a move from discontinuity to continuity with the world. Eragon lives within a space of discontinuity with the life around him; he does not understand the working of life and the complexity of other's lives (even small insects). He must learn to understand and empathize with all life forms; he must move into a space of continuity with the world. This reflects Bataille's understanding of intimacy moving people out of discontinuity into continuity. Eragon must learn to recognize the significance of all existence. Bataille claims continuity occurs through intimate encounters with other beings.[184] In learning to focus on everything without focusing on one life form, Eragon needs to experience intimacy. Through experiencing intimacy, Eragon can move to a space of continuity and be a better Dragon Rider. Though this transition may seem simplistic, it does not happen quickly.

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[182] Ibid., 293.
[183] Ibid., 293.
[184] Bataille, *Erotism*, 23.

Eragon struggles with hearing other beings besides the ants within the hollow. During his second attempt at listening and learning in the hollow Eragon becomes enraptured in the ants once again. This time he follows the ants as they protect their nest from a spider, and the way the ants work in harmony fascinates Eragon. This misses the point of the lesson; however, Eragon grows from the experience. Eragon informs Oromis on his return, "Master, I could listen night and day for the next twenty years and still not know everything that goes on in the forest."[185] While it may be true, Oromis commends Eragon for this answer but also pushes him to try harder while listening in the forest because it is central to being a great Dragon Rider and person. Though he continues at this exercise daily, Eragon does not learn the intended lesson for many months into his training.

While undergoing this training Eragon has not eaten any meat. The elves and Dragon Riders only ate meat in the direst situation when they were near death from starvation. Oromis expects the same from Eragon, but Eragon misses the taste of meat. After living with only vegetables for several months, Eragon goes hunting with Saphira. While she goes to find a deer Eragon kills two rabbits. He guts and skins them cooking them over a fire. Before he can take his first bite Eragon becomes disgusted with the meat. "Gripped by revulsion, Eragon thrust the meat away, as appalled by the fact that he had killed the rabbits as if he had murdered two people."[186] After months of listening to other creature and being inside their minds, Eragon cannot kill anymore without feeling remorse. "*I can't do it*, he said. … He did not condemn those who did partake of flesh … Having been inside of a rabbit and having felt what a rabbit feels … eating one would be

[185] Paolini, *Eldest*, 346.
[186] Ibid., 443.

akin to eating himself."[187] Through this sacrifice of denying his enjoyment, Eragon moves to a space of continuity; he cannot eat the flesh of animals he comes to understand.

The intimate connection of entering an animal's mind makes him see the harm killing causes. Eragon vows to deny himself all his desires "that are destructive."[188] From listening to the animals and creatures in the hollow, Eragon comes to know their innermost thoughts and feelings. From this vantage point Eragon cannot kill with a clean conscious, to do so would mean killing himself (or at least a part of himself). This sacrifice follows the model of sacrifice as detailed by Bataille. "Sacrifice restores to the sacred world that which servile use has degraded, rendered profane."[189] Rabbits no longer offer a viable food source; they have moved from the profane world of food to the sacred world of living being. The sacrifice here does not destroy the rabbits but brings them back into the world of intimacy. Through his sacrifice, Eragon restores animals to the world of intimacy, and he finally reaches a space of continuity with the animal world around him.

Even with this achievement Eragon still has not come to a total continuity with the world around him. To reach the point of total continuity with the world Eragon must undergo a form of "death."[190] During the *Agaetí Blödhren* [Blood Oath], two elves, who maintain the pact between elves and dragon in a tattoo on their bodies, dance to a rapid

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[187] Ibid., 444.
[188] Ibid., 444.
[189] Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 55.
[190] Eragon does not actually die in this instance. It should be seen as a figurative death leaving him transformed.

rhythm invoking magic to awaken the tattooed dragon.[191] As the elves dance, the dragon tattoo comes away from their bodies forming a three dimensional dragon in the midst of the revelers. Eragon hears a voice in his head coming from the dragon saying, "*Our gift so you may do what you must*."[192] With this said the dragon touches Eragon on his *gedwëy ignasia*; "A spark jumped between them, and Eragon went rigid as incandescent heat poured through his body, consuming his insides. His vision flashed red and black. … Fleeing to safety, he fell deep within himself, where darkness grasped him and he had not the strength to resist it."[193] The powerful magic overwhelms Eragon, forcing him to withdraw into himself as a protective measure. By retreating into himself, Eragon loses consciousness from the magic.

Being knocked out by the contact with this powerful, magic dragon, the elves and Saphira transport Eragon back to his lodgings, allowing him to recover from this ordeal. Eragon awakes to find himself alone but immediately contacts Saphira. She informs him that nothing like this had ever occurred during a ceremony before but that the magic came from the memory of the dragons anointing Eragon because he offers the best hope to overthrow Galbatorix. The magic performed on Eragon transforms him completely. His body shows no sign of trauma, "Every … scar and blemish had vanished from his body, leaving him as unmarked as a newborn babe."[194] Through the magic of the

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[191] The Agaetí Blödhren [Blood Oath] is celebrated every century. This celebration marks the anniversary of the pact between elves and dragons. Prior to this pact, the two races had been at war with each other having terrible casualties on both sides. Eventually both sides decided to come to a peace sealed with the formation of the Dragon Riders. With this pact, the elves and the dragons tied their species together with deep magic only ever changing it to add humans to the agreement. Eragon and Saphira's coming to the elves land was fortunate because of the length between celebrations.

[192] Paolini, *Eldest*, 469.

[193] Ibid., 469.

[194] Ibid., 471.

dragons, Eragon's body died as a human transforming into something more. His appearance shows his physical change, but he also possesses new strength in both the physical sense and the magical sense. He gains the speed and strength of an elf, and his magical abilities enhance so he can feel, hear, and understand more than he previously did. This transformation allows Eragon to move completely into a space of continuity.

As his training continues after his bodily transformation, Eragon perseveres in going to the hollow to listen to the woods. Finally the day comes when Eragon understands what the purpose of this training is. While listening this day Eragon senses all living matter in the glade; the plants, the animals, even the earth itself. The immensity of this revelation shocks Eragon, leading him to the conclusion that "Intelligent life … existed everywhere."[195] This realization moves Eragon to the absolute place of continuity with the world. "As Eragon immersed himself in the thoughts and feelings of the beings around him, he was able to attain a state of inner peace so profound that … he ceased to exist as an individual."[196] Coming to this inner peace Eragon loses himself in the world around him; his intimate connection allows him to experience the lives of all living things. In this way Eragon finds the true understanding of intimacy; he has moved beyond the individualization of himself and joins a larger world teeming with life. Eragon achieves the height of continuity and intimacy in this moment.

Through his bodily transformation and heightened awareness, Eragon comes to understand the world. Intimacy and continuity in this instance resonate with Bataille's exposition of both. "The concern is to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity. … The most violent thing of all .. is death which jerks us

[195] Ibid., 538.
[196] Ibid., 538.

out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous being."[197] In his transformation, Eragon undergoes a form of death changing him completely. This change shocks Eragon out of his hold on his individual self, moving him out of discontinuity. Eragon learns the continuity of all existence through his contemplation in the glade, but it was only after his "death" that this could occur. In this way, Eragon's move to continuity echoes Bataille's thoughts of death moving individual selves from discontinuity to continuity. "Eroticism [read as intimacy] opens the way to death. Death opens the way to the denial of our individual lives."[198] Through listening to life in the glade, Eragon opens himself up to dissolving into the life forms in the forest. He learns his place among the others' existence, finding that his individuality ceases to be when connecting to everything. His dissolved individuality restores Eragon to a place of intimacy and allows him to accomplish his ultimate goal: defeating Galbatorix.

Overcoming Evil

With his final move to continuity Eragon can face most any test thrown at him. He has become a true Dragon Rider joining the ranks of these legendary heroes. Before he can face Galbatorix though, Eragon needs others to help him. Drawing on advice he receives early in his journey, Eragon travels to the abandon island of the Dragon Riders, Vroengard.[199] On this island Eragon, Saphira, and Glaedr enter the Vault of Souls to discover that many dragon eggs and Eldunarí have been preserved for the entire reign of

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[197] Bataille, *Erotism*, 15-16.
[198] Bataille, *Erotism*, 24.
[199] Eragon receives this advice from a secondary/tertiary character who is a werecat, Solombum. Solombum tells Eragon to travel to the Vault of Souls when all hope seems lost. Before he faces Galbatorix for the final battle, Eragon travels to the Vault of Souls discovering an unexpected secret.

Galbatorix.[200] The Eldunarí agree to accompany Eragon to defeat Galbatorix, and on their way to Galbatorix's stronghold, Urû'baen, Eragon and Saphira learn one more simple truth.

The Eldunarí constantly convey the history of Alagaësia to Eragon and Saphira throughout the entire journey to Urû'baen not knowing what will help them in their upcoming fight. One dragon named Valdr, the oldest of them all, shows to Eragon and Saphira a memory from long ago. The memory conveys the temporality of physical matter; it fades so quickly. More intimately Valdr shares the memory of watching a nest of starlings looking into the starlings minds to understand their dreams. Valdr's first reaction is contempt for the simplicity and insignificance of the dreams, but changes his disposition to one of sympathy. Valdr realizes that the concerns for the starlings appear large to them, so large in fact that the starling's concern rivals the worries of kings.[201] Through coming into intimate contact with the starlings, Valdr understands the importance and emotional concerns of even the smallest creature. He wishes to convey to Eragon and Saphira that they should never disregard or belittle the lowest being because these smallest have just as much significance as the greatest. Valdr's lesson follows the fruition of Bataille's commentary on intimacy. "What is intimate … is what has the passion of an absence of individuality, the imperceptible sonority of a river, the empty limpidity of the sky."[202] Valdr shows Eragon and Saphira what the absence of individuality looks like in his memory of the starlings. The small birds matter as much as Eragon and Saphira both; thus, the intimacy here shows the connection across all existence and the importance of all living things.

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[200] Christopher Paolini, *Inheritance*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 555.
[201] Ibid., 582.
[202] Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 50.

With all these understandings of intimacy Eragon and Saphira now have the necessities to face Galbatorix. When facing Galbatorix, Eragon always remains on the verge of losing. Galbatorix toys with him for much of the battle never allowing Eragon to gain the upper hand.[203] In the final moments of the confrontation Galbatorix painfully invades Eragon's mind seeking to make him submit to his will. The pain and utter helplessness of Eragon causes him to feel an overwhelming sense of loss. Eragon feels wronged in this moment of overwhelming loss, leading him to question why Galbatorix needed to be punished in the first place.[204] At this moment, Eragon remembers the vision of Valdr about the starlings' concerns being as great as kings'. This memory of the intimate connection leads Eragon to form a thought and spell in his mind, but he needs everyone's help to make the spell work.

Through the spell Eragon does not seek to attack Galbatorix but wants him to understand the pain, hurt, and suffering he has wrought over the past hundred years.[205] As the spell takes effect all those present pour their power into the spell, causing it to move beyond simple communication to feeling. "Not only would the spell show Galbatorix the wrongness of his actions; now it would compel him to experience all the feelings, both good and bad, that he had aroused in others since the day he had been born."[206] The spell draws on the feelings of beings who have existed through Galbatorix's lifetime wanting him to feel both the joy and pain. This spell brings Galbatorix into intimate contact with all existence. He sees, hears, and feels everything

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[203] Ibid., 711. Eragon, Saphira, and their companions have struggled against Galbatorix, but he places many obstacles in their path. The greatest of which is threatening two children with death if Eragon and his companions attempt to harm Galbatorix.
[204] Ibid., 714.
[205] Ibid., 714.
[206] Ibid., 715.

from all parts of Alagaësia through the time he has lived.[207] The intimacy comes out here through the way Eragon understands what will defeat Galbatorix.

Throughout his reign Galbatorix caused million to suffer from the Dragon Riders he annihilated to the people he controlled for one hundred years. Eragon understands that Galbatorix has forgotten the intimate connection a Dragon Rider should have with all existence, and with this knowledge Eragon pushes this intimacy back onto Galbatorix. Eragon forces Galbatorix to experience the intimacy fully and completely. "The lines upon Galbatorix's face deepened, and his eyes began to bulge from their sockets. 'What have you done?' he said, his voice hollowed and strained. He stepped back and put his fists to his temples. '*What have you done!*'"[208] With the overwhelming intimacy of all thoughts throughout Alagaësia, Galbatorix experiences pain and shock at seeing and feeling all these emotions at once. He cannot stand to feel this much since he has been numb to the intimacy for the past hundred years. The intimacy that Eragon conveys in this moment allows him to finally gain the upper hand in this climactic struggle with Galbatorix.

As Eragon performs the spell, his companions subdue and kill Galbatorix's dragon, causing Galbatorix to attempt his final attack. Galbatorix swings his sword at Eragon's head but misses, and as Eragon rises he stabs Galbatorix in the abdomen.[209] While all this is occurring, Galbatorix still feels all the emotions pouring into him from Eragon's spell. His reaction to this intimacy after being stabbed appears extremely pained. "'The voices … the voices are terrible. I can't bear it…' [Galbatorix] closed his eyes, and fresh tears streamed down his cheeks. 'Pain … so much pain. So much grief.

[207] Ibid., 715.
[208] Ibid., 715.
[209] Ibid., 718.

… Make it stop! *Make it stop!*'"[210] Galbatorix experiences extreme anguish in this moment; the intimacy returns to him in an overwhelming fashion. After living so long devoid of connection with the world, the intense connection to all of existence across time from Eragon's spell sends Galbatorix into a space of insanity. The intimate spell overwhelms the person of Galbatorix; he no longer can exist in his isolated world. The joy of causing others pain becomes his ultimate downfall. This intimacy undoes the selfhood of Galbatorix following Bataille's notion of intimacy completely.

Bataille's understanding of intimacy comes through most in the moment of Galbatorix death. Even with his pleas to Eragon to stop the spell, Eragon refuses to end the magic. Galbatorix stands in total agony as he receives the emotion from the world he destroyed for more than one hundred years.

> Galbatorix's eyes snapped open—round and rimmed with an unnatural amount of white—and he stared into the distance as if Eragon and those before him no longer existed. He shook and trembled and his jaw worked but no sound came from his throat. … Galbatorix shouted, '*Waíse néiat*!'
> ***Be not.***[211]

The intimacy engulfs Galbatorix to the point where he no longer wants to or can exist. In this moment he shouts the spell to end his being completely. Galbatorix cannot live with the intimacy of the entire world; the intimacy overcomes him to the point that he seeks release from existence. Because of the evil he wrought in Alagaësia, Galbatorix can no longer embrace the lost intimacy his only option is to stop existing. Just as Bataille says, intimacy destroys self-contained identity.[212] Galbatorix's identity progresses toward destruction in receiving the overwhelming intimacy from Eragon. "Intimacy is violence, and it is destruction, because it is not compatible with the positing of the separate

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[210] Ibid., 718.
[211] Ibid., 719. Emphasis mine.
[212] Bataille, *Erotism*, 17.

individual."[213] Through the spell, Galbatorix undergoes overwhelming violence to his individual self. Because he lived in his individual self completely, he could not withstand the intimacy from Eragon's spell. The intimacy shatters and destroys him completely, leaving nothing of him in existence. Galbatorix's existence was incompatible with intimacy; consequently, Eragon utilizes intimacy in conquering this evil. In this way, intimacy overcomes evil, ultimately destroying it completely.

[213] Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 51.

CONCLUSION: SOARING EVER HIGHER

When thinking about intimacy in the *Inheritance Cycle*, it becomes apparent that intimacy presents the crux of the story's unfolding. Intimacy creates within Eragon a method for defeating evil; he magnifies his connection with other life forms to triumph over Galbatorix. In focusing on the intimacy, the *Inheritance Cycle* offers a story about good defeating evil, but more so, it offers a story about connecting with others and finding harmony across all of life. This intimacy forms the basis of moving away from self-contained individuality to continuity with existence. Eragon accomplishes this task through understanding his place within Alagaësia and seeing himself as no more important than any other life form. Bringing Georges Bataille's theory of intimacy into conversation with children's and young adult literature provides new ways to see intimacy working to bridge the gap left by self-contained individuals. Without play, though, this intimacy may not have come about. Through playing, Eragon learns how to view the world and listen to other beings. He simply listens to all life forms and comprehends the sanctity of life, allowing him to find continuity with others. In this way, intimacy deriving from play fosters a deeper understanding of self and a deeper bond with others.

The importance found in studying intimacy in this way comes from how it changes individuals. Focusing on Georges Bataille's understanding of intimacy moves beyond a traditional perception of intimacy as only a sexual encounter to intimacy being about bringing people into continuity with others.[214] Intimacy encompasses so much more than physical encounters; it breaks people out of their self-centeredness, making

[214] Georges Bataille, *Erotism*, (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 24.

them realize their unification with other beings. Intimacy's usefulness links people together; it makes them see similarities with other people. Within children's and young adult literature, this intimacy begins to attempt to teach readers the commonality among all beings. The main thrust of intimacy comes in pushing this understanding of the world. Seeking to show continuity across existence, Bataille's intimacy offers a valuable theory to examine literature, especially in children's and young adult literature. Intimacy found in this genre begins teaching this continuity at a young age, hopefully instilling true intimacy in readers.

At the very least, reading these books offers a moment of play for readers. The activity of reading displays the same characterization as my definition of play as a free, uncertain, ambiguous, superfluous, and transitional activity. Reading is a free activity; reading does not require special training to partake of a book. Also, reading can be free in the way people can read whatever they enjoy. In this way, novels offer one of the highest forms of freedom in reading. Readers can choose to read a novel, and they can choose from a myriad of genres and authors. Novels become a form of play in allowing the reader to freely partake of the content. Moreover, novels also have an uncertain effect on people. People do not always come to the same conclusion upon reading a novel, by themselves or with others. The outcome and meaning of the novel varies between people and changes over time for an individual, leaving each person can develop their own understanding of the story.

Furthermore following Georges Bataille, literature offers a way for the reader to experience intimacy. While reading, the book captures the reader, bringing them into the story. The reader gets lost in the book. As Georges Bataille says in *Literature and Evil*:

> Death alone – or, at least, the ruin of the isolated individual in search of happiness in time – introduces that break without which nothing reaches the state of ecstasy. And what we thereby regain is always both innocence and the intoxication of existence. The isolated being *loses himself* [or herself] in something other than himself [or herself]. What the 'other being' represents is of no importance. It is still a reality that transcends the common limitations. So unlimited is it that it is not even a thing: it is nothing.[215]

Bataille here posits the novel as a way to experience the intimacy with other beings. The other "thing" can be any object for a person to experience the intimacy; therefore, novels and literature offer a way for a person to find intimacy. A person can get lost in a book and feel intimacy. This understanding of literature offers a profound insight into the way reading happens. The action of reading offers readers access to intimacy. Through getting lost in a book readers can experience Bataille's notion of intimacy; they can find the self-shattering intimacy in the books they read. Following this thought, children and young adults can be experiencing intimacy through the act of reading with the books they read. Children and young adults can begin to move beyond the isolated individuality with the intimacy found in reading a novel. Through the act of reading and the novel itself, people become aware of others and move beyond themselves to a space of intimacy.

The understanding of literature as offering reader access to intimacy seems to be central, placing Bataille and literature into conversation. In studying children's and young adult literature Bataille's conception of intimacy needs to be taken into account for what the reader undergoes. Using Bataille offers a new avenue to study the phenomenon of reading and the effects of literature on the reader. For this reason Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* offers the perfect series to study in relation to Bataille. Paolini's novels already

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[215] Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. by Alastair Hamilton, (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 18.

embody intimacy in the structure and plot of the series; as shown throughout this thesis, the plot utilizes intimacy to show how intimacy can overcome evil. Paolini includes intimacy in his series as the method for understanding the world. The plot of the *Inheritance Cycle* already seeks to deconstruct and shatter the self in the very narrative that people read. Furthermore in the act of reading, people can experience this intimacy for themselves. Following Bataille's understanding of the novel and reading, Paolini's series offers intimacy to the reader through both the plot and the act of reading. Readers can move beyond the intimacy found in the plot and begin to experience the intimacy for themselves by getting lost in the books. This offers a new way to understand both the content and the action of reading; both provide a new way to experience and understand intimacy. Through both plot and reading, readers can undergo the shatter of the self and move closer to continuity with all existence.

From all of this, the study of Bataille and children's and young adult literature becomes apparent. If readers experience intimacy in the simple act of reading, then Bataille's theory becomes centrally relevant to understanding the phenomenon of reading. Moreover if novels use intimacy as a central part of their plot, then Bataille's theory provides insight into how to think about the ways the novel goes about using intimacy. Additionally, children's and young adult literature offers a superb genre to study the phenomenon of intimacy. The novels and series people read and love while they are young remain loved even after reaching adulthood. These novels and series remain canon to many people who vehemently argue and defend their beloved novels and series; therefore, this genre presents a myriad of material to study. If people hold to these

novels so tightly, then it benefits scholars and readers to study these works critically.[216] Using children's and young adult literature as a genre for critical thought opens a space to think more fully about the ideas children and adolescents are exposed to at a young age, especially when these ideas linger into early adulthood and adulthood proper. While studying this genre scholars and readers may come to see how thoughts and ideas take hold in the mind of young children through literature. Maybe along the way all readers will find some intimacy.

[216] This critical study does not necessarily need to be harsh or destructive. Critical insight into these works should provide new ways to think about the novels and series and present these thoughts for further discussion.

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