

Immortal Fixation

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Edward Cullen is an immortal vampire, stuck in a never ending, never changing cycle of forever. He can neither consume what he once ate, sleep as he once did, nor find peace in his own mind, for he has the ability to hear every thought a person generates, with the exception of Bella Swan. When human, he lived during a time period when sexual desires were unspoken of and avoided. Edward's death and transformation occurs during his seventeenth year of adolescence, causing him to freeze in what Sigmund Freud terms the "genital phase" of psychosexual development, making him an ideal candidate for repression and ultimately fixation ("Psychosexual Development" 2, 5). Based on the aforementioned observations, one might form the conclusion that Edward is a fragmented individual and that Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga is an *entwicklungsroman*; however, this is not the case. Through careful textual analysis, this essay argues that the saga is in fact a *bildungsroman*, and that Edward is not entirely frozen in time.

One of Sigmund Freud's basic psychological theories is that of the pleasure principle, whose aim "is to rid the person of tension, or...to reduce the amount of tension to a low level and to keep it as constant as possible," thereby increasing the amount of pleasure and reducing the amount of pain in an individual (Hall 22). Freud believes that one way to relieve excess tension caused by sexual desire is to dream (25). He theorizes that the function of dreaming "is to reduce tension by reviving memories of past events and objects that are associated in some way with gratification" (25). He goes on to clarify that "we dream about what we want [...] since it is necessary to know[...] what one needs before one can set about getting it" (25, 26). Unfortunately, dreaming is a natural process Edward does not have the luxury of, which he admits in *Twilight* by

stating, “I can’t sleep” (Meyer 186). Because Edward cannot sleep, this demonstrates that he neither has the capability of relieving all possible pressure built up over time, nor has a concrete picture of what he truly desires, especially sexually. This essay will attempt to explain Edward’s psyche and resulting actions through close examination of factors contributing to his ignorance of his internal sexual desires, the genital phase of Freud’s theory of psychosexual development, and fixation resulting from repression of sexual desires. Concluding the essay will be the assertion that the text is a *bildungsroman*.

Aside from lack of sleep, many other factors in Edward’s existence also contribute to his obliviousness towards his internal sexual desires. According to *Twilight*, he is “born in Chicago in 1901,” a time when sexual feelings are kept at constant bay (287). In *Midnight Sun*, Edward hints that he has never been in love and says he has “no memories of another kind of yearning” and that, besides his “mother’s love, there was no other love that had made [him] wish to stay” (141). After many years of wandering the earth as an undead vampire, Edward views himself as a monster with “a mask of evil,” and comes to believe that what he really hates is himself (*Midnight Sun* 20, 16). Because of his self-loathing, he speculates that no one can ever “see [him] as someone worthy of love” (108). All of these factors intertwine to establish Edward as frozen in Freud’s genital phase of psychosexual development, causing repression and fixation to occur. A closer inspection of the theory of psychosexual development reveals much about Edward’s psyche.

Five stages of childhood and adolescence comprise Freud’s theory of psychosexual development, including the oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital phases

(“Psychosexual Development” 2). Upon completion of these phases, one reaches adulthood (5). Edward becomes a vampire during the genital phase of psychosexual development, due to the fact that he has neither reached his eighteenth year, nor has he completely detached himself from his parents upon death, which are both requirements to attain full status as an adult (5). As a self-loathing vampire, Edward holds forever a seventeen-year-old physical state, with the mentality of a boy living in 1918 with no sexual experience. Immediately, he replaces his human father for Carlisle as his vampire father. When coupled with the fact that Edward is unable to dream, the reader understands the perfect scenario for what Freud calls repression, a result of unrelieved tension (Peters 7).

Repression is, in essence, an unconscious defense mechanism that prevents “wishes for or thoughts of events which represent possible temptations for disapproved of and punishable instinctual demands” (7). If this state of repression continues for a considerable amount of time with little tension relieved, then an “individual is often beset by anxiety to which no object can be attached” (7). Freud theorizes that a period of regression, “dealing with frustration by returning to an earlier period of life when satisfaction was obtained,” soon follows, and a fixation occurs (8). A fixation can be described as “a state in which an individual becomes obsessed with an attachment to another person, being, or object” (“Fixation” 1).

Edward unconsciously represses sexual desire as a result of ethics he learns as human, burdens he carries as vampire, and as a self-depreciating individual who believes himself unworthy of love. When he meets Bella, a girl whose thoughts are refreshingly and frustratingly closed to him, he fixates upon her, hinted at by his statement in

Midnight Sun that “after eighty years of the same thing every day and every night, any change became a point of absorption,” and explicitly referred to by his statement that Bella is “my fixation” (Meyer 56). His fixation on Bella becomes so powerful that by only the fourth chapter of *Midnight Sun*, Edward describes himself as “like a stalker. An obsessed stalker. An obsessed, vampire stalker” (75). Edward’s fixation and continuous frozen state may make some believe that he can never reach adulthood, making the text an *entwicklungsroman*; however, Edward does in fact become an adult, proving that the text is a *bildungsroman*.

Audiences debate two forms of novel labels attached to the *Twilight* saga: the *bildungsroman* and the *entwicklungsroman*. In a *bildungsroman*, a character progresses from childhood to adulthood by the end of the novel, while in an *entwicklungsroman*, a character does not progress. Those in favor of the saga being an *entwicklungsroman* consider Edward to be a character who can never leave the genital phase of psychosexual development, and they might support the claim by pointing out Edward’s fixation with Bella throughout the entire text. This assertion, however, does not take into consideration the fact that Freud theorizes that a fixation can “persist into adulthood and underlies the personality structure and psychopathology” of an individual (“Psychosexual Development” 2). Therefore, Edward may be fixated on Bella for all eternity, but that does not mean that he cannot become an adult. In fact, Edward makes several attempts to break free of the genital phase, finally succeeding in *Breaking Dawn*, making the saga a *bildungsroman*.

The first time Edward tries to become an adult and leave the genital phase is early in his vampire existence. Edward states that he “had a typical bout of rebellious

adolescence” and “went off on [his] own for a time,” but after a few years returns “to Carlisle [to] recommit to his vision” (*Twilight* 342). Edward reasons in *Midnight Sun* that “though there was no basis for a resemblance, I’d imagined that my face had begun to reflect his, to an extent, in the last seventy-odd years that I had embraced his choice and followed in his steps” (Meyer 13). Because he cannot rid himself of his need for his vampire father Carlisle, he does not fully become an adult.

The second time Edward attempts to free himself of the genital phase occurs in *New Moon*. After Edward’s own family endangers Bella, he makes the adult decision to leave her for her own good. He tells Bella that “this will be the last time you’ll see me,” and that he “won’t come back” (*New Moon* 71). Once again, upon returning to Forks from being saved from the Volturi in Italy, he admits that “it was only a matter of time—and not much of it—before I showed up at [Bella’s] window and begged” (*New Moon* 514). Edward fails yet again at escaping the genital phase by choosing to return to Bella over the responsible, adult thing to do.

The final time Edward tries to leave the genital phase does not occur until *Breaking Dawn*. After learning that Bella is pregnant with his half immortal child, he makes up his mind to rid Bella and himself of the fetus, telling Bella, “we’re going to get that thing out before it can hurt any part of you” (*Breaking Dawn* 133). This shows that Edward is not quite ready to separate himself from the genital phase. However, a turning point takes place when Edward becomes aware that he can hear the thoughts of his unborn child. Edward looks at Bella after listening to their child’s thoughts and stares up at her, not with a frightened, angry or burning face, but with a marveling one of a man whose wife is expecting (*Breaking Dawn* 326).

In this moment, Edward leaves the genital phase of psychosexual development and becomes an adult. He no longer can rely on Carlisle to be the father figure, because he must take on the role of father for his unborn child. The *Twilight* saga from this point on successfully portrays a *bildungsroman* text, following Edward from his unorthodox adolescence to his abrupt ascent into adulthood.

Edward's very existence is suspended in time. He describes his initial reaction to becoming an immortal by stating that "my self...had frozen as it was-my personality, my likes and my dislikes, my moods and my desires; all were fixed in place" (Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 109). Edward's dreams of humanity are taken away in the most literal sense, as he is swept from one world of suppressed desires and into another. After many years of unconscious sexual repression and anxiety, he fixates onto a girl who cannot be read by his probing abilities. But change does come for Edward, which he describes as "a rare and permanent thing" (*Midnight Sun* 109). He becomes a father, breaking the bonds of Freud's genital phase of psychosexual development and cementing a *bildungsroman* tale into the hearts of readers forever.

Works Cited

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