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Understanding Benjamin Button’s Displeasure

It may seem at first that if a man were born old, and gradually got younger, he would enjoy life since he may become more lively and energetic as time goes on. Mark Twain’s quote, which inspired the filming of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* to some extent, mentions that life would get “infinitely happier” if this were the case. In this film, Benjamin struggled in finding his true self because for most of his life he is mistaken for one who may be a different age. His unique form of aging also affects his relationship with his lover, Daisy. In fact, contrary to Twain’s opinion, Benjamin was rarely happy due to the fact that no one can really understand what is going on with him, including himself. There are certain things that we enjoy because we are young, and are only capable of these things for some time. After witnessing Benjamin’s struggles, and contemplating about how his life would be different if he had aged normally, I disagree with Twain’s position. I argue this because his aging process made him lonely, which is shown through his struggles with his identity, his romantic relationship, physical challenges, and social awkwardness.

Before completely contradicting Twain’s quote, it is important to understand the validity of what he is trying to say first. One thing that may have inspired him to say this is that human nature forces us to look into the future, as opposed to enjoying one’s current state of being. If we were gradually getting younger, we would be looking forward to, what are assumed to be, our better years. Looking at the quote from this perspective makes it seem like we could enjoy our lives much more. Often times older adults like to talk about how high school or college was the “best time of their life”, and if this is the case, then we would have our entire lives to look forward to creating memories. Part of that does not seem right, though. Assuming that we all aged the same way Benjamin Button did, we would die as happy individuals. However, I think a major key in making memories is being able to talk about them with friends later on in life. If we were to age the way Twain describes it, we would not really create memories; we would just die happy. It is reasonable to understand where Twain is coming from here, but I believe that talking about memories later in life is much more valuable than dying happy.

Benjamin Button is the perfect counter argument to Twain’s claim because he was so lonely in his aging process. It absolutely needs to be considered that Benjamin was all alone in his aging process because he was so different from everyone else. Benjamin was treated older than he really was for much of his childhood, but once everyone realized that he was only aging differently and was not going to die young, he was treated more appropriately. Benjamin was not only physically an old man, but it took longer for him than most kids to learn to walk, so he really could not participate in much physical activity, and many adults did not appreciate him hanging around their kids. For example, Daisy’s mother got very angry at Benjamin for having a late night chat with Daisy when they were very young. After Daisy’s mother took her Daisy to bed, Benjamin’s adoptive mother Queenie, had to tell him to be careful because other people were not like him, and they would not understand him. Although Benjamin did struggle with his identity as a child, life got harder when he began to age, and more importantly, attempt to continue his relationship with Daisy. In their later years, Benjamin realized once their daughter was born, that he would not be able to grow old with his lover and his daughter. This caused him to leave them and go live alone. This shows that one individual cannot go through such a unique process alone. Benjamin was looked upon on for just having a short conversation with the eventual love of his life. Not to mention his body was unfit for running around with other children and enjoying his childhood. He could not even be with the woman he loved because he would become younger than his daughter soon enough, and the difference in age with Daisy would have been too awkward. It is human nature to want to be with our lover and spend the late years of our life with them. Because of Benjamin’s peculiar aging process, he is unable to experience some of the most important things in life.

Benjamin felt out of place throughout the movie because he struggled to cope with missing opportunities. Besides not being able to grow old with his family, he also missed out on enjoying his childhood, which should be an energetic, carefree time for everyone. If Benjamin was not worried about all of his problems, then someone else would always remind him of them. He never made friends who had anything in common with him, and for part of his life he was almost forced into doing things he may not have been ready for. For example, Captain Mike took him to a brothel, and encouraged Benjamin to lose his virginity, which he ended up enjoying. But Benjamin was not mature enough at that time to understand that these were prostitutes. All of his life he is lost because he doesn’t understand the appropriate ways to act. He is not really a child when he is young, and when he gets older, he is not really becoming wiser. This confused him and contributed to his struggles within himself.

Another thing that causes my disagreement with Twain’s quote is that as a kid, Benjamin is never able to do the things that eventually make memories. Not only does he not have friends due to his physique, but he also misses out on all the fun things most people enjoy when they are young. While other teenagers were going out and enjoying themselves, Benjamin was working with a drunk, older man who he considered his “friend”. The point is that since Benjamin could never relate to people his age, he could not experience what everyone else did while they were young. He had no fun memories of his childhood, besides those with Daisy, and time that Benjamin should have spent having fun was spent worrying about what was wrong with himself.

Overall, I disagree with Twain because there was no possible way for Benjamin to be happy since he was the only person to ever age backwards. He ultimately worried about his problems more often than he just enjoyed the good things in life. He may have enjoyed life much more if everyone else aged the same way as him, but since he was all alone, he was somewhat lost for all of his life. Twain creates a good argument, but in the end the aging process is the way it should be.