



## UNIQUENESS AND OSTRACISM IN FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON*

[Étapes de traitement de l'article]

Date de soumission : 12-10-2025 / Date de retour d'instruction : 22-10-2025 / Date de publication : 12-12-2025

**Nassourou IMOROU**

Département des Etudes Anglophones, Université de Parakou, République du Bénin, Laboratoire du Groupe de Recherche sur l'Afrique et la Diaspora (GRAD),  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5639-4965>

✉ [imoroun@yahoo.fr](mailto:imoroun@yahoo.fr)

&

**Manzama-Esso THON ACOHIN**

Université de Kara, TOGO,

✉ [thonacohindavid@gmail.com](mailto:thonacohindavid@gmail.com)

&

**Hodalo POROKI**

Université de Kara, TOGO,

✉ [porokicharlotte768@gmail.com](mailto:porokicharlotte768@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This paper examines the unique life of Benjamin Button in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald and analyzes society's response to his uniqueness. Benjamin Button ages in reverse, thereby challenging conventional notions of identity, growth, and human experience. His physical and psychological difference from birth to death causes his ostracism by his family, the society and its institutions. This study explores the theme of uniqueness which has sometimes as direct consequence ostracism and alienation. It also develops the concepts of identity and appearance-based judgment, which are some key concepts of postmodernism. From a postmodernist perspective, the study shows that uniqueness leads to social isolation, and society resists behaviors that defy norms. Another key finding is that ostracism affects identity and belonging.

**Keywords:** postmodernism, uniqueness, ostracism, identity, paradox.

### L'UNICITE ET L'OSTRACISM DANS *THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON* DE FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD

**Résumé :** Cet article examine la vie singulière de Benjamin Button dans *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* de Francis Scott Fitzgerald et analyse la réaction de la société face à cette singularité. Benjamin Button vieillit à rebours, remettant ainsi en question les notions conventionnelles d'identité, de croissance et d'expérience humaine. Sa différence physique et psychologique, de la naissance à la mort, entraîne son ostracisme par sa famille, la société et ses institutions. Cette étude explore le thème de

la singularité, dont les conséquences directes sont parfois l'ostracisme et l'aliénation. Elle développe également les concepts d'identité et de jugement fondé sur l'apparence, concepts clés du postmodernisme. D'un point de vue postmoderne, l'étude montre que la singularité conduit à l'isolement social et que la société résiste aux comportements qui défient les normes. Un autre constat important est que l'ostracisme affecte l'identité et le sentiment d'appartenance.

**Mots-clés :** postmodernisme, singularité, ostracisme, identité, paradoxe.

### Introduction

Common sense realities are understood as everyday truths or facts widely accepted because they are intuitive and obvious. They are realities that most people agree with in any culture and take for granted. Such realities portray how things should work in daily life. Whether you go to Africa, Europe, America or Asia, these truths are the same. Illustratively, the gravity law stipulates that any object that is thrown in the air ends by falling down on the ground. Moreover, the stages of life cycle are common to all human beings and even all creatures. This alludes to the stages of birth, growth, aging and death. In every community, it is well known that life starts with the fact of being a baby. A little infant grows to become a toddler, a child, a teenager, a young person, an adult and an elder. After this process comes death.

Nevertheless, some events occur and puzzle everybody because of their particularity. They escape the understanding because they are out of the common sense and they do not align with the existing realities and any societal rule. This is the case of the protagonist Benjamin in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, a short story written by Francis Scott Fitzgerald and published in 1922. The story follows Benjamin Button, a man who is born as an elderly man and physically ages in reverse. He is born with the appearance and fragility of a seventy-year-old man, which frightens his parents, doctors and all those who hear about his story. However, as Benjamin Button grows older, he becomes younger in appearance and vitality. Over the course of the story, his life unfolds in an unusual way due to his reverse aging process. Benjamin becomes younger, more energetic and stronger until the time he is supposed to appear physically old. Over time, he regresses to a toddler and eventually dies as an infant. To analyze this uniqueness of Benjamin's life, we make use of the postmodernist literary theory. What is postmodernism and how can it be applied to this study?

*The Encyclopedia Britannica* defines postmodernism as being "in western philosophy, a late 20th century movement characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power." Postmodernism is a theory that emerged after the two world wars. It is a reaction to the beliefs of modernism; a break away from the enlightenment philosophy. Postmodernism is characterized by skepticism, rejection of the universal truth and the promotion of uniqueness or subjectivity. Jean François Lyotard (1984, p. xxiv), a French



philosopher, sociologist, literary theorist and postmodernist critic, defines postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives.” By this definition, Lyotard depicts the world’s rejection and doubt about all that is considered as absolute truth and undeniable, the universal common sense, the way things appear and how they are explained. Berker Dal & Burak Yigit (2019, p.3) clarify that: “any story that explains the way the world was and is and might be according to some sort of transcendent or universal truth is a meta-narrative. In this respect, all religious doctrines, Enlightenment philosophy, Capitalism and Marxism are the exemplars of meta-narratives.” Therefore, postmodernist philosophy promotes subjectivity. Every person is free to live their life as it pleases them without following the world trend. In this case, personal choice and opinion matter a lot.

Postmodernist critical theory interprets literary texts basing on these features and key concepts of the postmodernist philosophy. In the text under study, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, the protagonist’s unique life embodies the features of postmodernist philosophy. Benjamin is born with an old appearance while the world’s norm is to be born a frail baby. This denotes his refusal to conform to the universal rules. Benjamin’s life is an experiment in reversing the metanarratives of life (from birth to death) and this inversion insinuates that identities are not fixed; they are rather fluid and dynamic. Postmodernism usually uses irony and playfulness to mock at universal rules. The humor and irony that exist in Fitzgerald’s story confirms its postmodernist aspect. The special case of Benjamin brings dread among the doctors and the family. When his father goes to the hospital to visit his new born baby, he cannot believe his eyes on what the nurse shows him as his baby, as the passage illustrates it: “The cool perspiration redoubled on Mr. Button's forehead. He closed his eyes, and then, opening them, looked again. There was no mistake – he was gazing at a man of threescore and ten – a baby of threescore and ten, a baby whose feet hung over the sides of the crib in which it was reposing.” Fitzgerald (1922, p.6). Mr. Roger Button is shocked by the appearance of his new born child.

Another postmodern feature in the short story is the appearance-based judgment. In this perspective, Jean Baudrillard (1994) argues that the postmodern world is the one of simulation and hyperreality, a fake world in which the copy looks realer than the original one. In this postmodern world, people stick to the appearance ignoring the true identity which may be different. This reality is seen in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Throughout the story, Benjamin has been treated only out of his physical appearance. Anyway, himself, he gets married to his wife Hildegarde because of her physical beauty.

Fitzgerald’s *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* has attracted critical interventions on the problematic of temporality, identity inversion and societal alienation. Michael Basseler’s article “A Normal Biography Reversed: The Temporalization of Life in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*”

is an example offering a close reading of the story's temporal structure and highlighting how Benjamin's challenge of chronological and physical order goes against societal norms. Further, Banu Akçeşme and Melis Kutlu Girgin (2024) in "Traces of Postmodernism and Post humanism in the Construction of Body and Identity in Greek Mythology" show how mythological narratives present hybrid bodies, fluid identities, ambiguous origins as a foreshadowing of postmodern fragmentation, multiplicity and blurred boundaries. Besides, Yuju Lei *et al.*, in "The effect of ostracism on social withdrawal behavior: the mediating role of self-esteem and the moderating role of rejection sensitivity" examine how ostracism can lead to social withdrawal and a low self-esteem as the case of Benjamin Button. Despite existing research, there is a gap in literature combining psychological alienation, temporal uniqueness and social rejection. This study intends to fill this gap by combining these three realities and show how they come together to model Benjamin's unique and ostracized identity.

From the realities exposed in this short story, some questions may be raised as: is it a crime to be unique and different in this world? Should appearances rule our choices, decisions and perceptions? This article aims at highlighting the extraordinary and particular life case of Benjamin Button in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and exploring the theme of uniqueness which has sometimes as direct consequence ostracism and alienation. It also envisions to develop the concepts of identity and appearance-based judgment which rule the contemporary life. This study adopts a qualitative approach based on textual analysis of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald and focuses on central themes as uniqueness, ostracism through character development and symbolic elements. Secondary sources as articles and critical essays are used to interpret and contextualize the findings. To come to the expectations of this study, the work is divided into two main parts which contain two subparts each. The first one discusses how uniqueness can shape one's identity and social value or position whereas the second part is focused on ostracism as one of the social responses to uniqueness, its consequences on the victims and the judgment of appearances in postmodernism.

### **1. Individuation of Benjamin**

Individuation is the fact that a person distinguishes himself or herself from the general group. The concept of individuation has been developed by the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Kamila Gulnar (2020, p.126) reports Jung's definition of individuation as "the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; and particularly, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology." Basing on this definition, it is clear that individuation is the fact that a person is different from the general group through the development of some psychological traits as resilience, empathy, introverted or extroverted, intrinsic or extrinsic nature. Since his birth, Benjamin has



been different from other individuals. The first subpart of this part will present Benjamin's paradox life and the second one will deal with his postmodern fluid identity and time.

### **1.1 A Life Like No Other: The Paradox of Benjamin's Unique Aging Process**

Society follows a linear aging process, generally regarded as the norm. This has become a natural rule, upheld across generations. One is born an infant, grows up and finally gets old and dies. In this vein, Michael Basseler (2015, p.6), inspired by the ideas and philosophy of Martin Kholi, calls it chronologization. He argues that the "temporalization of life is to a large extent linked to chronological age as its basic principle, which has led to a chronologically standardized life-course model, the "normal biography." Thus, the normal biography is the one which is recognized and normalized by the society. However, Benjamin's life process does not respect this standard one. He ages in reverse, contrary to the generally observed way of aging.

The adjective "curious" chosen by the author to qualify Benjamin's life highlights its paradox. We would rather qualify his life as extraordinary because it is out of the common sense and that is the reason why it calls for attention. The journey of Benjamin who is born an elderly man and ages in reverse reflects a symbolic version of individuation. Apart from being born old man, he speaks. No normal child is expected to speak the first day of their birth. Every child learns progressively the language abilities from their parents. Surprisingly, Benjamin is not from the general but rather a peculiar case. He has already the sense of consciousness, the knowledge and wisdom of an old man the very day of his birth. He asks Roger Button if he is his father and begs to be taken out of the hospital because he is uncomfortable. From a conversation between him and his father, Benjamin realizes that his father is not happy to have him as his child. To the question to know what kind of child he is and where he comes from, Benjamin replies wisely: "I can't tell you exactly who I am, because I've only been born a few hours—but my last name is certainly Button." Angrily, Roger Button shouts: "You lie! You're an impostor!" The old man turned wearily to the nurse. "Nice way to welcome a new-born child," he complained in a weak voice. "Tell him he's wrong, why don't you?" Fitzgerald (1922, p.6). From the above first exchange from these two persons, it is clear that Benjamin is a child like no other.

Another proof of Benjamin's particularity is that he complains of being given milk when he asks for food to eat. He refuses the blanket with which he is covered pretending that it itches him. He prefers a sheet. Even, he asks a cane to walk with, an evidence of his old age. Furthermore, he asks his father which name will be given to him and as mockery, Roger Button replies harshly: "I don't know, I think we'll call you Methuselah." Fitzgerald (1922, p.9). In fact, Methuselah is the name of the oldest person in the Bible. By saying it, the father ironizes the elderly appearance of Benjamin.

Moreover, Benjamin's childhood is different from all normal children. His father tries by all means to make him fit his normal age, but he can't. For example, Benjamin

refuses to play with toys that his father brings him all the time. Every child of his age would be very excited to have such toys but Benjamin, instead,

would steal down the back stairs and return to the nursery with a volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, over which he would pore through an afternoon, while his cotton cows and his Noah's ark were left neglected on the floor. Against such a stubbornness Mr. Button's efforts were of little avail. Fitzgerald (1922, p.11).

There are certain activities assigned to each stage of age but it is obvious here that Benjamin does not fit to his normal age activities. Reading books by this age and not any book but an encyclopedia confirms his maturity. He sometimes pretends to behave in a childish way as breaking objects, throwing stones just to satisfy his parents. This behavior joins Baudrillard's (1994, p.3) concept of simulation which he defines as "to feign to have what one doesn't have." This also means to pretend to show an appearance of what one is not as in Benjamin's case. Just as Benjamin, people simulate to please other people or fit to the prevailing philosophy of their time.

Normally, physical oldness matches with the age maturity. That is, as you become old in age, you become apparently old, you develop wrinkles and lose your strength. However, Benjamin's life is not the case, "When Benjamin was eighteen, he was erected as a man of fifty; he had more hair and it was of a dark gray; his step was firm, his voice had lost its cracked quaver and descended to a healthy baritone." Fitzgerald (1922, p.13). He is aging in reverse, gaining more energy because he steps physically from seventy-year-old man to fifty-year-old man. He is even sent to school but he has been unfortunately rejected because of his appearance.

Benjamin gets married to the beautiful Hildegarde Moncrief thanks to his elderly appearance. At this time, he is twenty but with the physical appearance of a man of fifty. It is this appearance which charmed the lady. She argues that Benjamin is "just the romantic age" and men of his age (fifty) know how to appreciate women. Fitzgerald (1922, p.16). Curiously, there is a contrast between his apparent age and his normal age.

As years pass, Benjamin continues rejuvenating. He becomes very well-known and has a son called Roscoe. "He had hitherto hoped that once he reached a bodily age equivalent to his age in years, the grotesque phenomenon which had marked his birth would cease to function. He shuddered. His destiny seemed to him awful, incredible." Fitzgerald (1922, p.21). This situation becomes worrisome for him. His wife does no more attract him; she even accuses him for his condition and she complains. His marriage is broken some years later because of his rejuvenating condition.

Benjamin's process of rejuvenating continued. He is even ashamed to be addressed as a child. He loses the respect and consideration of his own child. Later, Benjamin is sent to kindergarten with his grandson because he has the appearance of a five-year-old person. There, "He cried because the other boys were bigger than he, and he was



afraid of them. The teacher talked to him, but though he tried to understand he could not understand at all." Fitzgerald (1922, p.27). At this time, his psychological mind matches not with his age but with his appearance. His situation worsens until he can no more go to school. A nurse is hired to take care of him as unconscious baby who has no idea of all his past life until the day "it was all dark, and his white crib and the dim faces that moved above him, and the warm sweet aroma of the milk, faded out altogether from his mind." Fitzgerald (1922, p.28).

From the above arguments and evidences in the short story, it is remarked that Benjamin's life process is the opposite of the general and normal one. He is born with the appearance and psychology of an elderly person; he rejuvenates as he grows up. He finally dies an infant. Benjamin's life is an extraordinary one. The following subtitle deals with Benjamin's identity and his life time basing on the postmodern philosophy.

### **1.2 Postmodern Reflections on Identity and Fluidity of Time**

Postmodernism is characterized by a revolution, an upheaval against the traditional principles governing the world. Postmodernist philosophy promotes subjectivity, individualism and a new way to perceive reality. In postmodernism, there is a multiplicity of realities, opinions, truths, choices. This philosophy is extended to literature where every author is free to write what they like, depict reality as it pleases them and even change what seems impossible in reality. This is the case of the concept of time which is fluidly manipulated in literature for different reasons. Indeed, authors have the possibility to travel through time, go back in the past, anticipate and live in the future, change the order of time, in their fictional worlds. Authors may start their stories by the end, come back to the beginning and finish with the middle. They may stop the story of the events in a middle for the reader to imagine the end. The chronological order of things is not respected. Sometimes, it requires much attention from the reader to grasp the meaning of some contemporary literary texts.

Postmodernists enjoy using such strategies in order to express their freedom. They also intend to mock the modernist prevailing rules, for satire and sarcasm. Moreover, it is to reject the modernist notion of time as a linear progression from past to present and future. Besides, it is a way for them to implement their creativity and art. The postmodernist writers give themselves the opportunity to play with reality and time, to manipulate them in order to make the reader experience another level of imagination. In this perspective, Tatyana Fedosova (2015, p.79) argues: "In literature and cinema, playing with time becomes one of the main devices with the help of which unique and original narrative courses, such as travel in time and time shifts are created." This quotation confirms the above reflection on the depiction of time in postmodern literature which is often presented non-linear, fragmented or cyclical. It emphasizes individual perspective, and time can be experienced differently based on personal perception, emotions and societal context. The subjective experience of this often challenges the objective clock-based view of time. To emphasis this, Rosen P,

quoted by Fedosova (2015, p.79) thinks that: "Modern temporality is like a battle terrain on which the disordering force of time struggles with the need and desire to order or control time." From the incapacity to control and order time in real life, contemporary writers seize this opportunity to do it in fiction.

As evidence, in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, the protagonist ages in reverse, questioning the conventional understanding of time and aging. He is born an elderly man and dies a baby. He lives his life backward. Therefore, the markers of human life which are childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age lose their conventional meaning. This is a real paradox to the traditional evolution of time and human life. In Benjamin's life cycle, chronological time loses its meaning and youthfulness equates to aging and aging itself results in becoming more youthful. The fluidity of his experience of time is radically different from the typical life cycle. Benjamin's life highlights the contradictions in the way time is understood and experienced. *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* suggests that time, instead of being a fixed and linear concept, can be unpredictable, fragmented and subjective. Benjamin's story challenges the conventions of age and time, presenting a reflection on human desire to control and understand the passage of life in a world where time does not seem predictable.

Apart from the fluidity of time, postmodernist philosophy is reputed in the promotion of flexible identities. While essentialists think that every person is born with some characteristics which define them, postmodernists claim that one's identity can be changed by the environment and society in which they live. This means that our understanding of who we are is influenced by the cultural, historical and social context in which we exist. Therefore, identity becomes a constructed rather than innate reality, shaped by how we present ourselves and how others perceive us. Our identity is not essential, fixed or stable but it is fragmented, and constantly changing. It is influenced by external factors and our own experiences. In this regard, Nahidul Ehsan Milon (2014, p.16) says that: "the self is shifting, fluid, dynamic, multiplicity, relativistic, context-specific and fragmented. If we consider this condition of identity beyond post-modernity, then it is nothing more than a complete identity crisis." He qualifies it as an identity crisis since identity has lost its primary characteristics and values.

In *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, the fluidity of identity is first of all explored through the reversal life of Benjamin. His life cycle which is from old age to infancy contrasts the usual life process identity. His identity as human being is unique and differentiated from the general. From the beginning until his birth, human beings are recognized by their linear chronological aging process. However, his opposite choice insinuates that one can make his or her way out of the general one, create his or her own identity. The environment and circumstances in which he is born shapes his unique condition.

As we go deeper in the study of Benjamin's life, we discover that, as he grows up, he encounters many difficulties because of his individual self. He discovers that he is



different in a uniformed society and this one has trouble to accept him. He is alienated. Sometimes, Benjamin is obliged to behave contrarily to what he really is in order to integrate himself.

Apart from his biological unique identity, Benjamin feigns to take the identity that does not belong to him in order to integrate himself. The constant changing of identities is what makes of the very identities fluid, flexible, fragmented and constructed.

This subtitle has explored the fluidity of time in literature as a postmodern feature. Postmodernist writers use the distortion of time to emphasis subjectivity, irony, playfulness and sarcasm. The ironic reversal chronological life of Benjamin Button is an evidence. The subtitle has also highlighted the fragmentation and flexibility of identities in postmodern life and literature. Going further in the analysis of this book, it is remarked that Benjamin's peculiar condition brings a reaction in the society. It has become a daily struggle for him to find a place in the society without being judged. The following part studies Benjamin Button as he is victimized and ostracized in the society in which he is born differently.

## **2. Reaction to Uniqueness in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button***

All that is unique attracts always attention and instigates reactions sometimes. These attentions and reactions vary basing on the kind of uniqueness. Sometimes, it is admiration; other times, it is hatred and rejection. Benjamin's unique life process is not from the rest. In his case, the reaction has been unfortunately negative. He faces difficulties to integrate his society. He is rejected and frustrated almost all his life. This, just because he is judged basing on his physical appearance. Such an ostracism has got some physical, moral and psychological effects on Benjamin.

### **2.1 Ostracism and its Consequences on Benjamin's Life Process**

Ostracism, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* is "the act of deliberately not including somebody in a group or activity." This definition suggests that we talk about ostracism when a person is rejected, ignored or excluded from a group by others. For an individual, ostracism may last for day, months, years or even a whole life. There are many reasons for which a person is ostracized. It can be their social status, their race, their moral condition or their physical appearance. Benjamin Button from the day of his birth experiences a kind of rejection from the doctors, his family and later from a society in which he lives. He has become a source of confusion, misunderstanding among his people. This situation is due to his reverse aging process.

In fact, the way Benjamin is welcomed by his father the day of his birth confirms him that his life will be a struggle to find a place for himself in the society. The fact of being born old and growing younger makes him a maverick in the society. This leads to the feeling of alienation and exclusion. Since Benjamin's reverse aging process challenges societal norms and expectations, it becomes difficult for others to

understand, sympathize and collaborate with him. His physical appearance makes of him an outcast of the society. His family is humiliated of having an old man as a child. Therefore, he is unable to live his life freely and happily. The doctors consider him as a curse for their hospital. We can hear the doctor saying to Benjamin's father the day of his birth: "Do you imagine a case like this will help my professional reputation? One more would ruin me – ruin anybody" Fitzgerald (1922, p.4). The doctor goes further to abandon Benjamin's family for whom he has been working for years as if it were Benjamin and his family's fault to be born this way. Doctor Keene argues:

What's more, you can go and see for yourself. And get another doctor. I brought you into the world, young man, and I've been physician to your family for forty years, but I'm through with you! I don't want to see you or any of your relatives ever again! Good-bye!" Fitzgerald (1922, p.4).

The nurses are also afraid of the situation. Normally a newborn child brings joy in the community and the family, but Benjamin brings fear, frustration and regrets. This is the beginning of his rejection and exclusion.

Furthermore, as Benjamin grows older and physically younger, the world outside his immediate family also reacts with confusion and fear at his sight. People treat him in a way he cannot understand and he falls in social exclusion. According to a research made by John B. Nezlek *et al.* (2012, p.95), ostracism has negative impacts on the ostracized in a way that "They felt as if they belonged less, had less control, had lower self-esteem, their existence was less meaningful, and they felt less apologetic and angrier." Benjamin's moral condition is not so different because, as the narrator argues: "Benjamin, once he left the hospital, took life as he found it." Fitzgerald (1922, p.11). Sometimes, his parents call him "Mr." This way of calling him denotes their unfamiliarity with him. He is addressed not as a member of his family, not even by his name but as an intruder. He is seen as a lunatic when he acts in the society. As a matter of fact, he has been chased from the Yale College because he does not fit to an eighteen-year-old person.

Even when Benjamin starts growing younger, he is also criticized. It seems that his uniqueness denies him joy and fulfillment. The paradox of his experience of aging in reverse makes of him a social outcast. Besides, his family life was not what it should be. At the beginning of his marriage with Hildegarde, all seem fine but as he grows younger, he lost his wife's admiration because the society expects the man to be older than the man. Once more, there is a misfit between Benjamin's life and his society. He even loses the parental authority on his child. As years pass, he finds himself having the same appearance as his grandson.

The inability for Benjamin to integrate himself in the society creates a profound sense of isolation and loneliness as he is unable to find anyone who truly understands what he is going through. The fact that he is rejected all the time creates also a fear of



association. It is worth mentioning that even before Benjamin's social ostracism, he has been rejected by the natural order and the life cycle. Society is just materializing this rejection. The fact that his life does not respect the universal order of time and life, his life cycle itself becomes an ostracism.

Ultimately, Benjamin Button's uniqueness places him in a position where he is excluded from the societal norms, relationships and even his own sense of self. This situation thrust him in an incomparable loneliness and isolation. This reflects how being different or unique in a way that challenges societal norms and universal realities may lead to experience isolation, alienation and ostracism in the society and even in one's consciousness. Basseler (2015, p.7) in this case finds that the way "Benjamin is repeatedly stigmatized as a social outsider and thus denied the possibilities and standardized life-course model that the normal biography usually provides. The story also exposes the alienation of human beings in the modern life-course regime." According to him, Benjamin's experience can be compared to human being in the postmodernist philosophy. Surprisingly, this rejection is solely based on the physical appearance of Benjamin. Nobody takes time to approach him to discover the identity of the person behind this elderly or young appearance. Then, the following subtitle discusses how appearance influences actions and reactions in the contemporary society.

## **2.2 The Judgment of Appearances**

The judgment of appearances is the fact that a person is treated basing on his physical appearance, his material possession and his social status. In postmodernist society, the kind of treatment, consideration and value somebody receives depends on how they appear in the society, not who they truly are. One of the most well-known thought of postmodernism is the theory of simulacra and hyperreality developed by Jean Baudrillard. In this theory, Baudrillard sustains that reality and appearance become undistinguishable. People are very strong in simulation that it is difficult to distinguish the real identity of a person from what they pretend to be. The appearance looks so much like the reality that it is taken for the reality. Therefore, society becomes more focused on representations of reality such as images and simulations than on actual truth. This appearance-based judgment is at its high level because the line between the real and fake, the authentic and the simulated is blurred. Abbas Murad Dohan (2019, p.630), arguing on Baudrillard philosophy of simulacra and simulation declares: "Thus, hyperreality is a rupture in the notion of the real. Reality is no longer a touchstone by which to measure everything else." The implication of this quotation is that with the blurring between the appearance and the reality, the truth or the reality is no more considered in analysis. The copy replaces the original.

Most of the time, these kinds of judgments are mistaken and false. The identity of a person may completely differ from what the person shows; this leads to misrepresentations and shallow judgments. Society prioritizes the external and

superficial traits like beauty, wealth and fashion over internal qualities like integrity, honesty and intelligence. One of the causes of this problem is technology and the consumer culture. This makes identity fluid and fragmented because they change constantly and they are fake.

In *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, the reversal aging of Benjamin is a metaphor of judgment of appearances. Society judges him basing solely on his physical appearance rather than his true identity. Everywhere that Benjamin goes in the society, he is treated basing on his physical appearance. His family is ashamed of him just because his appearance is different from the one of a newborn child. They don't take time to understand who he truly is and how they can help him integrate. Instead, the family looks at him as a disgrace and forces him to adopt some behaviors. Llewellyn Negrin (2008, p.9) implies accordingly: "Whereas previously, greater emphasis was placed on other sources of identity formation than that of personal appearance, increasingly, the self is defined primarily in aesthetic terms – that is, in terms of how one looks rather than in terms of what one does." In the light of this quotation, it can be said that Benjamin is evaluated basing on his physical appearance rather than his true identity. Moreover, he has been chased from Yale College because of this awkward appearance. Benjamin starts having the consideration of his father and is associated only when his physical appearance was becoming younger.

Besides, Benjamin himself has chosen his wife basing on her physical beauty. He qualifies her of being "beautiful as a sin" Fitzgerald (1922, p.15). He fell in love with her at the first sight because of her beautiful appearance. Hildegard Moncrief also accepted Benjamin because of his physical appearance which resembles to a fifty-year-old man. She argues: "I've always said, that I'd rather marry a man of fifty and be taken care of than marry a man of thirty and take care of him." Fitzgerald (1922, p.17). Despite her father's opposition and what people reveal on her husband to be, Hildegard has made her mind to marry an apparently fifty-year-old man and so does she. To those who were saying that Benjamin is too old, "In vain Mr. Roger Button published his son's birth certificate in large type in the *Baltimore Blaze*. No one believed it. You had only to look at Benjamin and see." Fitzgerald (1922, p.18). For them, there is no other truth behind what their eyes see. This is how Benjamin and Hildegard get married basing on physical aspects only. This denotes the superficiality of contemporary life. Nevertheless, when the physical state of Benjamin starts changing and he is becoming younger, the attraction his wife and him had once for each other starts disappearing, leaving place to shame and later divorce.

Furthermore, when the situation worsens and his wife leaves him and he goes to live with his son Roscoe, he is treated like a child. Roscoe goes further to ask his father to call him uncle. He declares: "'when visitors are in the house I want you to call me 'Uncle' – not 'Roscoe,' but 'Uncle,' do you understand? It looks absurd for a boy of fifteen to call me by my first name. Perhaps you'd better call me 'Uncle' all the time, so



you'll get used to it." Fitzgerald (1922, p.25). This situation hurts Benjamin so much. Because of his young physical appearance, Roscoe ignores that Benjamin is his father. He has no respect and consideration for him though he is his father.

The case of Benjamin reflects how much appearance governs judgments, choices and decisions in postmodernist society. It is true that appearance matters but taking it as an end in itself without discernment may lead to misjudgments. Therefore, we can conclude with Llewellyn Negrin (2008, p.3) that: "While it is true that one's appearance contributes to the sense of who one is, the self is more than the masquerade. Identity and appearance, though interrelated, are not synonymous." Then, limiting a person only to their physical appearance is synonymous of living in ignorance as far as who others are, their abilities and capacities.

## Conclusion

*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* is a short story written by Francis Scott Fitzgerald in 1922 which depicts the reversal life of the protagonist. Benjamin, the protagonist is born an elderly person and ages backward. This condition, unusual in society, calls for attention. The book highlights a breakaway from the universal rules governing life. The author's depiction of the protagonist's life in this way emphasizes the rejection of metanarratives and the promotion of subjectivity in the postmodern world.

Basing on the postmodernist literary theory, this work has explored the postmodern philosophy features contained in the short story. Primarily, this work has explored the unicity of Benjamin's life. It has showed how his birth is different from the general one and how it embodies individualism promoted by postmodernism. Moreover, this research has discussed the fluidity of identity and time in postmodernism, highlighting the challenge to universal perceptions. Postmodernist authors use playfulness, irony and time distortion in their literary works in order to fool or run down the modernist enlightenment or universal truth. Benjamin who does not align to the general identity and his life time which is the opposite of the normal one is an evidence. Furthermore, the work delved into ostracism which is considered as a consequence of uniqueness. Benjamin Button has been rejected by his own family and the society because of his unique condition. He becomes alienated and struggles all his life to integrate himself to the society. This research has finally explored appearance-based judgment, based on Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality. This theory sustains that because of the proliferation of copies and the phenomenon of simulation, copies are realer than the original and these copies are taken for the original. That is the reason why appearance is taken for granted without digging deeper in the real identity. This study has shown that throughout the book, Benjamin is treated only basing on his physical awkwardness. Nobody is interested in discovering his real identity. Contrarily, he is victimized, vilified and ostracized basing

solely on his physical look. Further research could explore society's fear of aging and obsession with youth.

## References

- AKÇESME Banu & GIRGIN K. Melis. 2024. Traces of Postmodernism and Post humanism in the Construction of Body and Identity in Greek Mythology. *Çankaya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 344-358.
- BASSELER Michael. 2015. "A Normal Biography Reversed: The Temporalization of Life in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*." *Journal of the Short Story in English*, 64. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/1570>, ISSN: 1969-6108.
- BAUDRILLARD Jean. 1994. *Simulation and Simulacra*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- DAL Berker & YIGIT Burak. 2019. "Postmodern Theory: Lyotard's Understanding of Postmodern." *IDE* 378, pp. 1-10.
- DOHAN Abbas Murad 2019. The Postmodern Simulation in Jean Baudrillard's Writings. *Misan Journal for Academic Studies*, pp.614-634.
- DUIGNAN Brian. 2023. Postmodernism" Encyclopedia Britannica, Last Updated December 23. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Postmodernism>. Accessed 28 July 2023.
- FEDOSOVA Tatyana. 2015. Reflection on Time in Postmodern Literature. *Athens Journal of Philology* - Volume 2, Issue 2 – pp.77-88. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajp.2-2-1>.
- FITZGERALD Francis Scott. 1922. *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Feedbooks. <http://www.feedbooks.com>.
- GULNAR Kamila. 2020. A Jungian Analysis of Ageing in the Movie: *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. *Drishti: The Sight* # Vol. IX, Issue: I, pp.124-128.
- HORNBY Albert Sydney. 2020. Ostracism. In *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*.
- LEI Yuju *et al.* 2024. The effect of ostracism on social withdrawal behavior: the mediating role of self-esteem and the moderating role of rejection sensitivity. *Frontiers in Psychology*, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1411697, pp.1-9.
- LYOTARD Jean François. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- MILON Nahidul Ehsan. 2014. *Postmodernism: Crisis versus Construction of Identity*. [A Thesis submitted to The Department of English & Humanities of BRAC University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for The Degree of Master of Arts].
- NEGRIN Llewellyn. 2008. *Appearance and Identity Fashioning the Body in Postmodernity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- NEZLEK B. John *et al.* 2012. Ostracism in Everyday Life. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 91-104.