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Visibility of Inner Darkness in Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation*

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Anil Kumar Sapkota has completed his thesis entitled “Visibility of Inner Darkness in Elizabeth Wurtzel’s *Prozac Nation*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from December 2022 to May 2023. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

The thesis entitled “Visibility of Inner Darkness in Elizabeth Wurtzel’s *Prozac Nation*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Anil Kumar Sapkota has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Visibility of Inner Darkness in Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation*

Abstract

This paper studies the memoir Prozac Nation as an exploration of internal darkness made visible through socio-psychological reading. It analyses how Wurtzel's memoir unravels a complex and multi-faceted personal experience, mental health is correlated with societal structures, offering new possibilities for thinking about the complex relationships between individual experience and broader cultural and social norms. The narrator of this memoir and her inner psychology along with social ideologies, using Prozac (antidepressant medicine) as a culture unveils the dark side of American modern practices in which they live. The narrator's mental illness starting with her family complexes is observed and analyzed using the theory of psychoanalysis presented by Sigmund Freud, a broader socio-cultural study by Deleuze and Guattari and Jacques Lacan, and the collective unconscious as a universal analysis by Carl Gustav Jung. The research scrutinizes the complex relationship of the painful personal complications that start with the family complexes, living environment, and society that reaches to the collective study of the whole nation as Prozac. Study of Prozac as an antidepressant medicine helps readers access its negative impacts and prepare the ground for possible moral and social mental health recovery.

Keywords: Psychological problems, Depression, Unconscious, Mental health, Darkness, Prozac

This study attempts to analyze mental health issues including more social, cultural and universal quality of unconscious and helps to understand the collective way of living for understanding an individual life experiences. It exemplifies how the general outlook of American society towards individuals with mental illness is mirrored in Elizabeth Lee Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation* (1994). The purpose of this research is to demonstrate the significance of mental health narratives in generating a more comprehensive understanding of the societal and cultural standards that shape them. By recognizing how mental illness affects individuals and their surroundings, a better understanding of its socio-cultural impact can be attained. Using psychoanalytical theories, this research examines the character and understand the underlying psychological motive behind their behaviors.

The significance of the study is substantiated by the title of the memoir itself. The author's decision to title her memoir *Prozac Nation* is meant to highlight the growing issue of depression in modern American society. This problem is not only caused by the crisis of modernity, but also by people's desires and socio-cultural practices that affect not only their external appearance but also their inner psyche. The pressure to achieve the American dream, complex family dynamics, drug use, and active sex lives can contribute to mental illness, therefore this study delves deeper into the underlying socio-psychological factors that determine an individual's mental health. Despite appearing happy on the surface, many Americans are relying on antidepressant medication like Prozac to cope with their internal struggles. In this way, the psychoanalytical tool is appropriate and necessary to read *Prozac Nation*.

In the field of psychology, it is essential to develop a thorough understanding of an individual's thoughts, emotions, and actions. Psychoanalytic techniques, which consist of theories developed by different psychologists, can offer valuable insights

into the workings of the human psyche. The theories of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Carl Gustav Jung and Deleuze and Guattari are applied to analyze the memoir. It starts with the Freudian unconscious, explaining 'libido' which pulls the writer back to depression or near death. Linking this unconscious desire in relation to other people in general helps to study the 'symbolic order' of different cultures described by Lacan. This symbolic order or the cultural study leads towards the study outside the personal experience, which have more universal qualities called 'archetypes' described by Carl Gustav Jung to justify the whole nation as Prozac. Deleuze and Guattari's exploration of personal experience along with societal structures, for better thinking about the complex relationships between individual experience and broader cultural and social norms finally helps to fulfill our study aims. Finally, the theories of psychoanalysis are supported by the different theories of anxiety and depression along with textual shreds of evidence and its analysis.

Prozac Nation was published in 1994 in Houghton Mifflin, Boston City by an American writer Elizabeth Lee Wurtzel who was born on July 31, 1967. She is a journalist, and lawyer known for the confessional memoir *Prozac Nation* wrote at the age of 27. She died on January 7, 2020 at the age of 52. At the onset of modern times, the writer published her memoir that highlights how the influx of modern ideals and practices, and the social crisis and desires that came with it, impacted the psychological well-being of individuals. In this way, despite the apparent prosperity and pursuit of freedom in modern America, the memoir reveals the inner turmoil experienced by people during that time.

Wurtzel expresses her concern in a confessional memoir about the challenges of growing up in New York City while struggling with depression during adolescence. At the time, the diagnosis of her condition was difficult, as the field of

mental health was still developing. Through her memoir, Wurtzel documents the impact of her depression and its symptoms on various aspects of her life and perspective.

Before turning twelve, Wurtzel was a bright child and accomplished several things, such as writing the children's book. However, as she grew older, she began to exhibit behavioral issues and experienced multiple episodes of depression. Her family's internal conflicts and violence added to her struggles, leaving her mother unsure of how to manage her behavior. The divorce of her parents worsened her condition as their negativity impacted her deeply, causing her to constantly flee to new locations. Although new surroundings improved her mental state momentarily, her depression ultimately resurfaced, and she even traveled to England in search of relief. Although her symptoms did not align with those of other mental conditions like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. For this reason, Wurtzel's mood swings are difficult for therapists to manage and regulate.

After struggling with her mood swings, Wurtzel found control through the use of Prozac, an anti-depressant medication. She achieved normalcy and regained a newfound appreciation for life, but faced another obstacle when she attempted suicide during the early stages of her recovery. Fortunately, she was saved, and this experience led her to appreciate the impact of mental health and depression on society. Wurtzel was amazed at how Prozac's effectiveness made it mainstream in America, which led to more people talking about mental illness, particularly depression. This has caused mental illness to become more familiar and recognizable, allowing individuals to self-diagnose correctly or incorrectly. This study explores the issue of mental illness among young, depressed Americans, stemming from unconscious desires and the pursuit of individual peace, as portrayed through

Wurtzel's personal anecdotes in her memoir.

After the publication of this memoir, it has been analyzed and studied upholding different perspectives by various writers. Abigail Cheever in her article "Prozac Americans: Depression, Identity, and Selfhood" (2000) analyzes it from an identity perspective, Judith Kegan Gardine in her *Feminist Studies* (1995) makes an analysis of depression and antidepressant drugs through a concern about current attitudes toward gender. Likewise, Devereaux Kennedy makes a review of the memoir in his article entitled "Biological Psychiatry and the Postmodern Self" (1998) to study 'self' and medical practices. Some of the writers and their analyses have been described as below.

The writer Abigail Cheever in her article "Prozac Americans: Depression, Identity, and Selfhood" makes an interpretation in order to make an understanding of genealogical shift on the understanding about depression. The writer asserts:

Both the existentialism of Percy and the identity-based accounts of Styron and Wurtzel, illustrate in miniature the evolution in popular thinking about the self during the post-war decades... The post-Prozac depression memoir like Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation* conceives of depression not as a hindrance to or a vehicle for realizing the self but rather as the self itself. (350)

The author argues that the memoir *Prozac Nation* is a memoir that discusses depression in the postwar era, representing a change in the way it is understood. Previously, depression was viewed as a reflection of an individual's true self, but now it is more commonly associated with issues of identity. This shift is evident in *Prozac Nation*, according to the author.

Likewise, another writer, Judith Kegan Gardine makes an analysis of Prozac as drugs through a concern about current attitudes toward body, mind, personality,

especially, gender through the memoir *Prozac Nation* including other novels dealing with similar issues in order to understand “what drugs like Prozac mean for women today and what the discourses about them say to and about American feminism” (503). This means the writer intends to study depression and antidepressants relating to the feminist perspective on the memoir like *Prozac Nation*. The author argues that *Prozac Nation* encompasses the perspectives of liberal, cultural, and postmodern feminism. In addition, she suggests:

The ambivalence to drugs like Prozac shown in these books is partly the result of a broader ambivalence about social change and particularly about, the changes wrought in self and society by feminism. It is less easy to articulate, however, is anxiety about how much we have already changed and will change as our world changes and whether such changes will, this time, bring their promised rewards of pleasure and meaning. (515)

The author believes that Elizabeth Wurtzel's memoir is an example of how the inability of women to stabilize their mental health, due to factors such as societal expectations, is causing an increasing problem with depression. The author suggests that the feminist movement, while advocating for women's rights, has not been able to address this issue effectively.

Similarly, writer Devereaux Kennedy makes a review of the memoir of Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac Nation* in his article entitled “Biological Psychiatry and the Postmodern Self.” This article provides an assessment of how the perception of the ‘self’ has changed over time, particularly during the postmodern era. The article also discusses the ethical considerations surrounding medical practices related to depression. In the past, depression was viewed as a medical and biological issue related to the self. As the writer mentions, “Elizabeth Wurtzel admits to being afraid to

give up her depression. The idea of throwing away depression is of having to create a whole personality, a whole way of living ...she sees Prozac not as an end but as a beginning” (380).He further argues:

In her autobiography, Ms. Wurtzel argues that low-level depression is prevalent particularly among young people today. She suggests that its cause is social and not biological in origin-increasing economic inequality, structural unemployment, the crisis of the contemporary family, and the widespread flight from commitment. (385)

The writer argues that the view of depression as solely stemming from biological and medical factors led to the creation and recommendation of medications such as Prozac. This causes not only “symptoms of mental illness fade but life-long personality traits that they experience as debilitating are fundamentally altered” (378). In this sense, medication such as Prozac not only heals the mental disorder but also develops a new sense of identity, yet its origins are primarily social rather than biological.

In her article, “Feminisms and the Jewish Mother Syndrome: Identity, Autobiography, and the Rhetoric of Addiction” (1996), Melissa Friedling analyzes a memoir that deals with the challenges of redefining one's identity and the relationship between being Jewish and embracing feminist ideals while recovering from mental illness. She intends to investigate how ethnicity and gender can complicate and interfere with the recovery process. She clearly states:

Elizabeth Wurtzel represents herself as a voice of a ‘lost generation’ enmeshed in a feminist ‘third wave’ that coincides with the coming of age of a third generation of post-World War II, secular, American, Jewish daughters. Her ethnic inheritance has been disrupted by divorce. She neither is a mother, nor is she unproblematically someone's daughter. For Wurtzel, Jewishness cannot

be recovered or abandoned. Instead, she is compelled to choose and it is her guilt and anxiety over such a 'choice in no choice' that causes her to long nostalgically for the 'simplicity' of addiction and recovery. (121)

The passage suggests that the individual's recovery from mental illness is adversely affected by the existence of numerous identities associated with their ethnicity and gender. As a result of this complex duality, the person experiences a high level of anxiety, which reinforces their desire to escape and overcome their depression.

Moreover, Linda M. Blum in his article "Mother-Blame in the *Prozac Nation*: Raising Kids with Invisible Disabilities" (2007) examines family (mother) raising kids with invisible, social, and emotional behavioral disabilities to refine feminist theories of mother blame. The writer investigates how mothers handle the responsibility of raising children who have significant burdens to carry due to their mental health issues. Through this research, insight can be gained into the dynamic between parents and their children, and how one's behavior can impact the mental well-being of the other. For instance, the family of Elizabeth Wurtzel, who not only dealt with her own depression but also the aftermath of her parent's divorce, exemplifies this trend. After her mother was granted custody, Elizabeth lost contact with her father and struggled to communicate with him. Additionally, her relationship with her mother remained strained as she felt the need to compete with her. For example, she claims "although she absolutely hated summer camp, her mother sent her to summer camp for an eight-week reprieve from single motherhood" (217). It appears that Elizabeth's self-worth may have been negatively impacted by her father's revelation, when she was ten years old, that her mother had considered to send her summer camp and it impacted much. The article mainly focuses on the relationship dynamics in families and highlights the impact of gender on these interactions.

Taking the point of departure from the above-described critics and writers, this research focuses on the analysis of this memoir from the psychoanalytic perspective. Through Writzel personal analogy, this study claims that desire in the mind of individual and familial complexes is not only responsible but there are larger social, cultural and psychological factors causing the writer to undergo a state of depression. The writer is attempting to reflect upon the general condition of young, depressed people in America during the postmodern era.

In order to demonstrate the socio-cultural practices as an internal reflection of the dark side of contemporary American society through *Prozac Nation*, the theory of psychoanalysis developed by the Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, analytical psychology developed by Carl Gustav Jung and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of personal experience, mental health, and societal structures is used as the theoretical perspective. Different medical psychology including theories of anxiety and personality disorder is also used as supportive theories for a better understanding of the dark side of American society. Psychoanalytic theories are now engrained in our daily existence, providing us with the tools to solve our emotional issues and offering insight into why people behave the way they do. Everyone has some sort of psychological quandary that they face at some point in their lives. Therefore, this paper starts with the Freudian concept of the unconscious.

According to Freud, "there are unconscious purposes in mental life, nothing is proved by showing that purposes opposed to these are dominant in conscious life" (Freud 153). The belief that people are compelled by unknown desires, fears, needs, and conflicts is known as the unconscious. These feelings and experiences are stored in the unconscious part of the mind and can include painful memories, emotions, fears, desires, and unresolved conflicts. The unconscious mind is driven by seeking

pleasure and satisfaction and is a repository for unfulfilled desires. As we look at the memoir, Wurtzel experienced a lack of love from her father which created a strong attachment to him. She may have been seeking the love she yearned for from her father in her romantic relationships. Her relationship with her mother also appears to be somewhat competitive, even though this may not be a conscious realization. The idea of why she is strongly drawn to her father causes her to feel anxious, as it may be related to repressed desires. One can draw a parallel between her experiences and the Oedipal complex, which refers to an unhealthy attachment to a parent of the opposite sex. “When other children appear on the scene the Oedipus complex is enlarged into a family complex” (Fraud 377). Secondly, Freudian concept of ‘libido’ is a useful tool to study her mind. “The psychoanalytic investigation of sexual urge or energy” (Fraud 368). There are two primary instincts that drive human behavior: the life instinct (Eros) and the death instinct (Thanatos). Eros is focused on the drive for survival, while Thanatos has a pull toward depression or death. Initially, in the memoir discussed, Eros serves as the life instinct, leading the author to experience joy through activities like spending time with friends, dancing, drinking alcohol, and engaging in sexual relationships. However, as time passes and her partner leaves and her friends withdraw their support, Eros slips into Thanatos, causing her to become depressed and attempt suicide.

Similarly, like Freud, according to Lacan, our wants, convictions, prejudgments, and other similar attributes are formed for us by the symbolic order that we are immersed in. “Desire is always the desire of other not unique personality” (Lacan 16). What we desire is what we are taught to desire. “Different cultures have different symbolic order, this symbolic is about the language and narrative of society and culture” (Lacan 284). The symbolic order pertains to the ideologies, beliefs,

values, biases, governmental system, laws, education, and religion that constitute society. Our personal identity is shaped by how we respond to these societal ideologies. The narrator attempts to find a new location and connect with nature, but remains unhappy as the wider culture continues to influence her. In this sense, all Americans like the narrator are depressed.

Moreover, according to Carl Gustav Jung, individuals are also influenced by unconscious factors that lie outside their personal experience, and which have more universal quality. “The collective unconscious contents are concerned we are dealing with archaic or I would say primordial types, that is, with universal images that have existed since the remotest times” (Jung 2). Jung identified certain innate concepts that exist in the collective unconscious, which he referred to as ‘archetypes’. These archetypes shape the typical stories and religious occurrences that influence the broader scope of human experiences and cultures. Understanding these archetypes helps to comprehend the factors that affect Wurtzel’s life, and provides a framework for interpreting an individual’s life experiences. Therefore, the collective reading of whole Americans is possible through the concept of archetypes.

Finally, the main theme that Deleuze and Guattari explore in their analysis which is worthy to study *Prozac Nation* is the concept of ‘becoming.’ They argue that, “the use of language and imagery is a way of exploring the process of becoming the ways in which personal experiences and emotions connect to broader cultural and social structures” (Deleuze and Guattari 243). For example, Wurtzel describes her personal experience with depression and anxiety as a way of connecting with larger societal problems, such as the pressure to conform to societal norms of success and achievement.

The memoir explores the author’s personal battle with depression and her

reliance on Prozac - a medication for treating depression. With the use of detailed descriptions and profound introspection, this study provides an understanding of the psychological state of someone coping with mental illness. The very primary thought of Wurtzel starts with her own understanding of self. "I am what I am: an acutely sensitive, intensely emotional, and very complicated person" (13). This suggests that Wurtzel sees her emotional intensity and complexity as both a strength and a weakness. Her self-awareness and honesty about her struggles with mental illness provide valuable insight into the experience of those who suffer from it. "There is two prime-instinct, life instinct (Eros) and death instinct (Thanatos). Eros drive for survival and Thanatos pull back to depression or death" (Tyson 24). When self-confidence is viewed positively, it fosters the desire to live and enjoy life, which aligns with the life instinct. However, if self-confidence is viewed negatively, it can lead to depression or even the death instinct.

For a better understanding of mental illness let's have insights on the general mental problems. "Depression is the inability to construct a future" (Preciado 249). It illustrates the feeling of desolation and hopelessness that frequently accompany depression. When one's mind is overtaken by gloomy thoughts and emotions, it can be arduous to visualize a way out or a more promising future. This sensation of incapacity may lead to more seclusion and the deterioration of the depressive state. "Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom" (Kierkegaard 13). According to Soren Kierkegaard, anxiety is caused by the overwhelming feeling of having too many choices and possibilities, which stems from the realization that humans are free to make their own decisions but must also face the consequences. This creates a dizzying sensation similar to vertigo as individuals try to navigate their lives while dealing with the weight of their own responsibility. This concept remains relevant today, especially

in Western societies that value personal choice and individualism, where anxiety is a pervasive aspect of modern life. The importance of finding ways to cope with anxiety and accepting the complexities of being human is emphasized.

This speaks to the idea that anxiety arises from the possibilities and choices that come with being free. It suggests that “anxiety is a natural and unavoidable part of the human condition” (Strongman 08). In *Prozac Nation*, Elizabeth Wurtzel experienced anxiety and depression for most of her life, which is understandable given the pressure to make decisions and find a suitable path in life. Additionally, her story highlights the importance of medication, such as Prozac, in managing anxiety and helping people feel more in control of their lives.

The way personality disorders are portrayed and examined in *Prozac Nation* illustrates the intricate connections between mental health disorders, medication, and alternative forms of treatment. “Personality disorder can be defined as variations or exaggerations of normal personality attributes” (Alwin 1). The significance of recognizing an individual’s distinct experiences in managing mental health conditions is emphasized. It is common for people with personality disorders to have other co-occurring mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression. Elizabeth Wurtzel also faced depression and relied on Prozac to cope with her symptoms.

Overall, *Prozac Nation* is a significant reminder of the challenges associated with living with mental illness and the positive impacts of medication and therapy on healing and recovery. Different socio-cultural perspectives on mental health conditions can provide useful insights into their underlying causes and treatment options. Nevertheless, there is no universal solution, and it is vital to evaluate each individual’s distinct circumstances and requirements.

Wurtzel goes into great detail about her turbulent upbringing, which involved

her parents' separation and her mother's subsequent abuse of alcohol and neglect towards her. In one passage, she writes: "My childhood was not happy. I don't know how else to put it. My parents got divorced when I was five, and my mother started drinking. By the time I was six, she'd given up on me. It was like I wasn't even there" (15). Wurtzel is contemplating her family issues and how they impacted her life at a young age. She recalls feeling troubled and affected by her parents' actions when she was only six years old, and acknowledges that no child is equipped to handle such situations alone. This experience created psychological stress that affected the development of her young mind. According to Freud, "depression is a result of repressed anger and unresolved childhood traumas" (Freud 112). Wurtzel has suppressed her feelings of anger and sadness due to the neglect and rejection she experienced as a child, which has ultimately led to her suffering from depression in her adult life. Her childhood experiences, including her parents' divorce and resulting feelings of abandonment and rejection, could have contributed to her unresolved emotional issues. As a result, these internal conflicts have gradually had an impact on both her lifestyle and creative abilities. Thinking about the situation, which she alone could not handle pulls her to mental illness.

As time goes by, Wurtzel begins to exhibit acting out and behavioral issues, and her depression subsequently intensifies. Her mother is unable to comprehend the reason for this or how to handle the situation. The increasing effects of negative emotions and sadness only serve to worsen her depression to a point where she feels suicidal. "I was so sad that I wanted to jump out of my skin" (63). She loses her sense and cannot improve her mental illness. "I had no idea who I was. I had no sense of self. All I knew was that I was sad, all the time" (66). Over time, Wurtzel begins to seek out new ways to find happiness, but she doesn't realize that her desires and needs

are growing. Through her memoir, it becomes evident that Wurtzel never received love from her father, yet she formed a strong attachment to him. Perhaps as a result, she may be searching for a fatherly kind of love in her relationship with her boyfriend. This unconscious search for love makes Wurtzel anxious, as she struggles to understand why she is so attached to her father. Ultimately, this represents a return of her suppressed desires. "The unconscious is the true psychological reality; in its inner nature it is just as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world" (Fraud226). This is to say unconscious is not visible to the world outside but to its inner reality.

According to Freud, mental health issues can be attributed to unresolved conflicts and tensions that stem from childhood experiences. He proposed that the subconscious mind holds repressed thoughts, emotions, and memories, which can be responsible for causing these mental problems. Further, he believed that an individual's past experiences influence their conduct, character, and future decisions. "Depression is a pathological form of mourning- where the love object has been lost as it once had existed in dreams" (Mechanic511). How past experiences shape an individual's behavior, personality, and future actions? Wurtzel talks about her addiction to substances like nicotine, marijuana, and alcohol in her memoir, which can be linked to her unresolved oral fixation stage as per Freud's theory. According to this theory, the oral fixation phase usually occurs during the first year of life, and if the child's needs are not met during this phase, it may result in dependence issues later in life.

Similarly, she engages in self-destructive actions like sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, and suicidal mentation. "I was numb, impervious to feeling, incapable of giving or receiving love" (116). Wurtzel found joy in spending time with her friends,

dancing, and engaging in sexual activities, often accompanied by alcohol, as she craved to experience something. She struggled with inner conflict as her desire to feel clashed with the id's goal of obtaining pleasure by bypassing pain. This internal dispute resulted in her fear of never experiencing emotional again.

Moreover, she is much unknown about her actual desire. She wants to become happy but happiness is going away from her. "I suppose I'm more doomed than most people, because I'm aware of everything I could be doing and I'm not doing any of it" (201). Wurtzel implies that she is being driven by a part of herself that she cannot access or act upon, which can be interpreted as a way of disengaging from her genuine desires and urges. "The closer I got to the truth, the more I realized that the only thing I wanted to do was to turn around and start heading back" (207). In order to protect their mental well-being, an individual may repress uncomfortable or traumatic memories or experiences. Elizabeth may be intentionally avoiding confronting certain realities about her past or present, in an attempt to protect herself from emotional anguish. Despite trying to find joy and forget her history, these efforts have been in vain.

She is in pursuit of a fresh start - a new location, new companions, novel methods of receiving affection and gratification, and a different approach to relishing life. She believes that discovering new acquaintances or environments can bring her comfort. "I wanted to feel something. Anything. I wanted to fill up the void. I wanted to be loved and I wanted to be desired. But nothing seemed to work" (109). Wurtzel is communicating her need for excitement and satisfaction. This need is founded on Freud's notion of libido, which refers to "the psychic energy that drives individuals to seek pleasure and satisfaction" (Freud 368). Her unsatisfied libido results in her looking for Prozac as a method to alleviate her emotional suffering and satisfy her

emptiness. “My body aches with lust. It's like a constant ache. I'm not sure what I'm even lusting after” (110). She is explaining her yearning for physical and emotional liberation. Her unrewarded libido is bringing about physical uneasiness and compelling her to search for sexual arousal. This notion is connected to Freud's conception of the sexual urge as a fundamental motivator of human actions.

“Underneath my fake smile and forced laughter, there's a constant simmering rage. I feel like a tightly coiled spring, ready to snap at any moment” (157). Here, she is explaining how she is struggling to regulate her thoughts and emotions. Theoretically speaking, people's suppressed sexual desires are causing them to feel confined and upset, resulting in a buildup of emotions that they are suppressing. “I wanted someone to want me. I wanted someone to love me. But I didn't know how to let anyone in” (188). This shows a profound longing for companionship and emotional closeness. Her unsatisfied sexual desires are urging her to look for relationships, but her mental and emotional barriers prevent her from establishing significant connections. This internal conflict implies a similarity with the Freudian concept, in which “individuals are torn between their desire for intimacy and their fear of emotional vulnerability” (Wollheim 29). All these dissatisfactions and unfulfilled desires pull back to depression or near to death.

More than this, a symbolic interactionist approach could shed light on much of Wurtzel's personal journey. Her inability to connect emotionally is rooted in being trapped within the symbolic realm, making it impossible to experience real emotions. Her fear of feeling nothing originates from the realization that her experiences are limited by the symbolic realm. Wurtzel had a typical upbringing amidst a broken postmodern family. Her parents split up when she was very young, but their conflicts continued throughout her life. She felt conflicted about which parent to connect with

emotionally - her father was the one she could talk to, and her mother provided for her physical needs. As she couldn't have both of them, she felt torn apart. In this connection, Lacan argue that "depression is a result of a lack of recognition and validation from others" (Lacan 116). According to Lacan, an individual's sense of self is shaped by their interactions with others, particularly their parents. In case these interactions are negative or lacking, the person may find it difficult to establish a stable identity. Wurtzel's past, involving feelings of disregard and desertion, aligns with Lacan's theory. She strives to rise above this, but is unsuccessful in her endeavors.

As a young child, "Ms. Wurtzel was the best little girl in the world, a child filled with promise" (Fricchione 72). The girl was overwhelmed by the expectations of being the ideal child due to the trauma caused by her parent's divorce and ongoing conflicts. Lacan also suggests "the unconscious is structured like a language, that our experiences are stored as words, ideas, and symbols" (Selden 228). Wurtzel frequently discusses her issues with verbalizing her emotions and how therapy was crucial in helping her express herself. She learns to acknowledge and describe her feelings through language, which shapes her self-awareness. Lacan's theory highlights the significance of parental validation in a child's growth, and Wurtzel struggles to earn her mother's approval and affection, possibly contributing to her difficulty in expressing feelings. She also talks about her father's aloof behavior and how it affected her.

From as early as elementary school, she recalls trying out a sad persona to various people such as school counselors, teachers, peers, friends, and even her mother as an experiment. She even wanted them to notice her uniquely. "The desire is always the desire of other, not unique personality. What we desire is what we thought

to desire. Different culture has different symbolic order” (Lacan 167). How she presents herself depends upon whom or which culture she is guided from. “I wanted to be treated like a princess” (79). Her actions display the Lacanian idea that the longing for recognition is what drives desire. She looks for recognition and validation from external factors, like receiving special treatment, to establish her value as an individual. Initially, she could slip in and out of the depressed state she presented but eventually became stuck in it. It was a prolonged period of distress, treatment, hospitalization, unsuccessful relationships, and self-harming behavior before she was able to recover. She writes:

I realized, rather painfully, that the girl I had once been, the one who bossed everyone around, the one who could hold sway over any situation, was simply not coming back. No matter if I ever got out of this depression alive, it made no difference because it had already fundamentally changed me. There had been permanent damage. My morose character would not ever go away because depression was everything about me. It colored every aspect of me so thoroughly, and I became resigned. (84)

She came to think of herself at her core as depressed. “Maybe it’s just the way I am. Maybe I was born under a bad sign” (113). Still, she resents being identified as Elizabeth, resulting in her willingness to go to great lengths to avoid it. She characterizes her depression as a dark wave, like an ocean crashing within her mind. Her experiences as someone who is constantly feeling down deny her the ability to see things in a better light. It’s an endless low devoid of any highs, making it impossible for her to overcome anything. Her memories and emotions cling to her, and she can’t find a way to escape them. She deems the term “madness” as too extravagant to describe what she’s going through, which is rather

a state of boredom, sluggishness, dullness, and wetness. “Depression is insidious, it compounds itself daily until, as she puts it, life becomes like a fog without a key” (Preciado 168). Lacan’s examination of language and identity could offer valuable perspectives on Wurtzel’s personal challenges. Wurtzel’s perception of herself is significantly influenced by the expectations of her social environment and her close connections. Through the lens of Lacan’s theories, it is possible to understand how external factors have shaped Wurtzel’s self-concept, resulting in a failure to express herself authentically and leading to depression.

Wurtzel may come across as someone who lacks self-discipline, but she is aware that she cannot afford to let herself fall apart completely. Her financial situation is not strong enough, her mother’s mental health is not reliable, and she does not have enough support to cushion her fall. Even though she stumbles and shakes along the way, Elizabeth is cautious enough not to let herself hurtle to rock bottom, knowing there is no safety net to break her fall.

At heart, I have always been a copier, I’ve mostly been able to walk around with my wounds safely hidden, and I’ve always stored up my depressive episodes for the weeks off when there was time to have an abbreviated version of a complete breakdown. (116)

Wurtzel has developed a way to deal with her depression that allows her to manage her day-to-day tasks effectively. Her coping mechanism involves suppressing her feelings in order to remain productive even when she is going through a depressive phase. However, this coping strategy may not be ideal because it suggests that Wurtzel is not receiving the required assistance or support to address the root causes of her depression.

Elizabeth’s preferred way of dealing with her internal struggles is to stay

active, to be engaged in physical activities rather than overthinking. However, she realizes that her attempts to find solutions often only result in more problems. One way she has attempted to seek solace is by engaging in sexual activity. “I was desperate for him to touch me” (146). Elizabeth is motivated by the desire for wholeness and contentment, symbolized by the phallus, in her quest for physical intimacy. At the age of twelve, she engages in her first sexual relationship with a seventeen-year-old boy. “I have never had a feeling quite like this before... I feel blessed. I feel that if God has given me this capacity for pleasure, then there must be hope” (52). She eventually realizes that her extreme fixation and reliance on men cause them to distance themselves from her. “The flabby remainder of the self, demands more attention than anyone can possibly give her” (Mechanic 505). She realizes that although she may be in love, it is not sufficient to fix her problems. “I felt like I was always searching for something, but I didn't know what it was” (203). The concept of desire is portrayed as constantly evading and never reachable in the story. The narrator feels a constant sense of discontentment and yearning that is seen as a significant part of human existence in Lacanian philosophy. “I discovered . . . that affection as medicine is highly overrated, that a person as sick as I most certainly was cannot possibly be rescued by the power of anyone’s love” (216). Instead of helping her, the actions or behaviors of her partners only worsened her condition.

She wants love from her parents and family but at the same time she wanted to become alone. “She wanted to be loved, but also wanted to be alone” (Harris 97). In this scenario, the individual experiences an inner conflict stemming from their conscious desires and unconscious desires. The narrator longs for both love and independence, leading to internal tension that reflects the inherent contradiction of

desire according to Lacanian principles. To escape this conflict, the individual turns to drugs and alcohol, leading to negative consequences such as missing important events and disappointing loved ones. Despite her friends enjoying substance use, the narrator finds no pleasure in it. "For me, it was all desperation" (107). Wurtzel felt an urgent need to cope with her depression and mental health problems, which dominated her life. It highlights how mental health struggles can be all-consuming and emphasizes the significance of finding effective methods to handle such symptoms.

The narrator's internal fire symbolizes their most basic and instinctual desires and emotions, which remain hidden from those around them. "I was burning inside and nobody could see my fire" (232). The statement refers to the discrepancy between a person's inner emotions and how they appear to others on the outside. This highlights the struggle of the Lacanian Imaginary, where a person's inner world cannot be entirely reflected in the external world, causing them to feel disassociated and alone. The speaker suggests that our perception of reality is distorted by our active imaginations, making everything seem less tangible. For Lacan, "the imaginary is the realm of fantasy and illusion, where the individual constructs their own sense of self and the world around them" (Lacan 227). This suggests that the reality we experience may not be completely authentic but is rather influenced by our inner thoughts, desires, and fears. As a result, the speaker tries to find a new environment to be content in, experimenting with engaging in sex, drugs, and alcohol, and even attempting to flee from her troubles, but none of these methods provide comfort because they are all shaped by the same cultural influences.

Elizabeth Wurtzel received a diagnosis of "atypical depression" after

experiencing years of unhappiness. This type of depression is characterized by chronic symptoms rather than being periodic and generally begins during adolescence. The symptoms of this condition typically involve a lack of energy, interest, and motivation. “Great sensitivity to periodic, particularly romantic rejection” (Healy 21) is also a key symptom. Among the rest, she was possessing all these symptoms. How difficult it can be to cope with romantic rejection and how it can impact people in unique and challenging ways. For some individuals, this rejection may cause a great deal of pain and emotional tumult, making it essential to seek out support and coping mechanisms to manage these feelings effectively.

Getting diagnosed provided her with a newfound hope and her mother confirmed the diagnosis by acknowledging her depression. Eventually, she was prescribed Prozac, but she didn’t notice any immediate improvement. In fact, she felt like she was deteriorating further, despite being reassured by her doctor that her condition was improving. Unfortunately, she even attempted suicide. “The purest and most deliberate act of hatred, ever committed” (Choo 106). After a while, the Prozac starts to work. “Something just kind of hung in me. Over the next few days, I became alright. I felt safe in my own skin. One morning I woke up, and I really did want to live, really look forward to greeting the day” (292). While she is on medication, she delves into her unconscious and confronts her thoughts and experiences. She discovers the recurring patterns in her behavior caused by past traumas. This helps her recover and heal. This process can be likened to Jung’s theory of individuation, which is all about the journey toward becoming complete. “Individuation is the process of integrating the unconscious and conscious minds to become a self-realized individual” (Jung 271). Jung believed that “mental health problems could arise when individuals are unable to integrate their conscious and

unconscious, leading to the rejection of aspects of the self” (Ryan 68). The analytical psychology methodology strives to bring individuals to the consciousness of their unconscious content and integrate it into their character.

It took her a significant amount of time to adapt to her new identity which was no longer centered on her depression. She confesses to feeling scared of letting go of her depressive state. “The idea of throwing away my depression, of having to create a whole personality, a whole way of living and being that did not contain misery as its leitmotif was daunting” (Healy 22). She was afraid that her identity was fully defined by her depression and that her positive traits were only present because of it. She did not have a sense of self separate from her mental illness. “There are moments when I feel like I am two people: the real me and the me that’s trying to keep it all together” (296). The “inner hero” within a person represents their desire to overcome challenges and achieve greatness. However, when struggling with mental health issues, this inner hero may experience stress and create a sense of inner conflict. Elizabeth Wurtzel, as an example, felt torn between her true self and the version of herself she presented to the world, leading her to question if her friends would still like her if she wasn’t entertaining due to her depression. She had become so attached to her depression that she believed it was what defined her.

Wurtzel faced a change in perspective when she began regularly taking Prozac. She initially believed that she could easily obtain the drug without the need for a prescription. However, the pharmacist informed her that it was necessary to have a prescription from a doctor to acquire the medication. Despite trying to convince the pharmacist based on her past experience with the drug, she was unsuccessful. It became clear to her that she should not rely on Prozac without proper medical supervision. Furthermore, she observed that many people were

taking antidepressants like Prozac as a panacea for various emotional struggles. She realized that no one was exempt from the use of drugs like Prozac.

Despite using Prozac, Wurtzel's life still presented difficulties, including episodes of depression and even suicidal thoughts. She had to pair Prozac with other medications to effectively manage her mental health. "Depression manages to reconfigure itself so that it is more than a matter of a little serotonin I see Prozac not as an end but as a beginning" (306). Wurtzel believed that society was increasingly relying on a simplistic solution to mental health issues - medication. She criticized the medical community for promoting this approach and not properly investigating the underlying causes of mental illness. The over-prescription of drugs like Prozac was concerning to her, as potential side effects and drug interactions were not being adequately considered. Ultimately, she saw the trend of relying on antidepressants as a symptom of a larger societal problem that required a more comprehensive approach to mental health care.

She has mixed feelings about the prevalence of Prozac use in modern America. Although she believes that severe depression, like hers, should be treated with medication, she is unsure about the widespread use of Prozac for mild depression which she believes may be caused by a societal attitude towards depression among young people. She believes that social disorder and the lack of commitment and family structure may contribute to this attitude. "A guardedness, a nervousness, a suspicion of intimacy" (Fricchione 13). According to her suggestion, mild depression may be present. "A natural reaction to a world without the kind of guarantees that our parents expected, a marriage that would last, employment that was secure, sex that wasn't deadly" (301-302). This is a widespread phenomenon that is observed globally, with individuals reacting similarly due to living within the

same societal norms and values. According to Jung, “the collective unconscious is a repository of ancestral and collective knowledge that can be accessed by individuals” (Jung 292). By utilizing this information, individuals can acquire a more profound comprehension of their personal identity and their role in society. “Through the collective unconscious, we can access the wisdom of our ancestors and the collective knowledge of humanity” (Werner36). Through this understanding, she endeavors to record her personal battle with depression as a young woman in the United States. Additionally, she examines broader societal elements that contribute to mental health problems and their extensive impact.

Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of becoming and reterritorialization provide a framework for analyzing personal experiences with depression and anxiety connected to larger societal problems, and the role of medication represents both a returning to established norms and a potential form of personal growth and change with its larger socio-cultural effect. In Deleuze and Guattari’s framework, the exploration of mental health in connection to larger societal structures demonstrates a complex and multidimensional approach to understanding the complexities of the human experience.

In particular, the better reflection of interrelationships between personal experience, mental health, and societal structures, the concept of “becoming” can be applied to the themes explored in Wurtzel’s work. Deleuze and Guattari describe how becoming can shift one’s experiences and emotions into larger cultural and social structures and contexts. Wurtzel’s language and imagery can be analyzed through the concept of becoming. She describes her own struggle with depression and anxiety as a way of connecting with larger societal problems. For example, she writes, “The consciousness of depression is a consciousness of misery... What a rough beast, to

slouch because of such monstrosity. Even in memory it does not clear as after other wars” (116-117). This demonstrates how the personal misery of depression can connect with the broader societal problem of war, and the resulting impact on mental health. The mental health problem of one individual is affected by various societal factors. Deleuze and Guattari would argue that “connection between personal experience and societal problems represents a form of becoming, in which the individual is able to connect their experience of depression to the larger cultural and social structures that contribute to it” (Deleuze and Guattari 216). When Wurtzel went England in search of new place, she reflects that she wants more attention from people around her. But how she presented herself depends upon whom or what culture she is guided from. What she become is how she is guided by her society.

The role of medication, particularly Prozac, is another aspect of the study, which affect larger American society. Deleuze and Guattari analyze concept in the use of medication is seen as a form of reterritorialization. “Reterritorialization is a process of returning to established structures of thinking in self and behavior, regarding society” (Deleuze and Guattari 182). The structural thinking of individual and their behavior change when the culture of using Prozac established. “Prozac as a kind of magic pill that allows me to feel ‘normal’ again but completely as a new form” (207). It is to acknowledge that medication can open up new possibilities for thinking and feeling, challenging established norms around mental health and treatment. Prozac represents a potential shift in Wurtzel’s becoming, allowing her to break from the restrictions of her depressed self and gain control over her emotions. This control of emotions gives her a new sense of self to realize the widespread use of Prozac which hampers the socio-cultural structure in near future.

According to Ms. Wurtzel, she has achieved notable success in treating

depression and similar conditions using medication, with Prozac being the most well-known example. However, individuals may react differently to these drugs - some may not see any change, while others may experience temporary relief but still struggle with their condition and need further medication. In contrast, a notable minority of patients, typically those with milder forms of depression, may experience significant improvements that not only alleviate their mental illness symptoms but also allow them to develop new, positive ways of functioning that differ from their previous experiences.

The broad utilization of these drugs may expose people to added pressures that could greatly restrict their ability to make choices. Ms. Wurtzel compares this situation to the use of steroids by athletes. If your rivals are taking steroids, how much freedom do you have not-to use them? Similarly, people may feel compelled to take these medications to keep up with their peers, which could limit their autonomy and decision-making abilities. “There is always a Prozac taking hypothermic waiting to take your job, so if you want to compete you had better take Prozac too” (273). The broad application of these medications may impose expectations on us to become the type of individual our employer, partner, or social network desires, depriving us of our independence. As a result, we may feel obligated to modify our conduct or character to conform to their expectations, rather than embracing our true selves and making choices that align with our personal beliefs and desires. This could ultimately compromise our ability to act autonomously and leave us vulnerable to external influences and pressures.

Prescribing medication to individuals who have no major medical conditions or only mild symptoms raises significant ethical and societal

concerns. “There are no ethical and social implications of such medications” (Fricchione 18). Medication can sometimes make people who are already functioning normally even better than before. However, this can also alter their perception of reality and make them overly reliant on the drugs. While anti-depressants may provide a more balanced outlook for those who feel overly negative, it may also deprive them of the necessary struggle to come to terms with difficult emotions and gain self-awareness. Therefore, there is a risk of medication taking away the depth and complexity of human experience.

Doctors should not feel at ease prescribing medication that alters a person’s attitudes and behaviors, even if it seems appealing. This is because providing moral and social support that aligns with cultural ideals could have significant social effects, leading individuals to believe that their actions are justified. Some patients have reported feeling morally numb from the support they receive, which has resulted in a diminished sense of responsibility towards society and those who are hurt by their actions.

Personality styles and types are valued differently across cultures and time periods. According to Nemeroff—“during the 19th century and earlier part of the 20th century, industrial societies seem to have favored a personality type that was disciplined, controlled, guilt-ridden, even repressed” (Nemeroff 50). In the 1950s, doctors often recommended tranquilizers and sedatives to women to help them cope with their restricted roles as homemakers and mothers. However, women who receive support from each other can succeed in making their lives more comfortable by building their confidence. The latest understanding may encourage individuals to conform to the modern preference for those who are assertive, morally adaptable, less committed, and not too emotionally invested in

anything or anyone.

If psychiatrists begin to develop drugs that alter not only mood but also attitudes and personalities, there is a risk of becoming numb to the serious social issues that we face as we approach the 21st century. Elizabeth Wurtzel, in her memoir *Prozac Nation*, suggests that mild depression is widespread among young people today. However, instead of accepting this change in society as a natural phenomenon and easing our discomfort, it may prevent us from overcoming these significant social issues.

The current trend of exploring and understanding oneself and others is not just a medical concern but also a social one. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a widespread distrust of biological explanations of personality, and this viewpoint was exemplified by Shaowen Bardzell's arguments. "Human nature is almost unbelievably malleable, responding accurately and contrastingly to contrasting cultural conditions" (Bardzell 03). In a society that values social mobility and equal opportunity, the idea that human behavior is determined by culture and can be manipulated by humans was attractive. The belief was that the more significant the cultural influence on human psychology and the lesser the personal contribution, the more potential for improvement in human psychology. Therefore, building a strong personality and avoiding depression requires a social and cultural understanding of one's self and society.

According to Jenifer Eisenhauer "various coping mechanisms including therapy, support from friends and family, exercise, and writing helps to overcome depression" (Eisenhauer 14). At the beginning, it might require a significant effort to reveal one's deepest fears and worries. But with time, developing healthier relationships with friends and family and facing long-

standing issues can help manage symptoms of depression and provide clarity and understanding of one's thoughts and emotions. Elizabeth Wurtzel, in her memoir, described feeling gratified by her newfound ability to navigate relationships with greater ease. "I am in good control of my emotions . . . I don't get hurt. When I break up with a man, I have no bad feelings whatsoever, and I don't worry about whether or not I am hurting him" (226). Through therapy and her writing, Wurtzel was able to conquer many of her difficulties and eventually achieved a sense of comfort. She experiences a feeling of relief and optimism for her future.

As we get closer to the 21st century, it's becoming increasingly evident that the human psyche can be changed more easily than culture or social systems. However, it's unclear who will be responsible for making these changes and what standards will be used. Prozac and related medications are commonly prescribed, and after just 10 years on the market, they are now the second most widely used drugs worldwide. While psychiatrists do prescribe these antidepressants, general practitioners tend to do so more often. Additionally, anyone can buy these drugs without a prescription from drug stores and supermarkets. When medications are created and distributed with the intention of modifying emotions, attitudes, or interpersonal interactions rather than solely treating or alleviating disease symptoms, we are entering a new era where traditional distinctions between natural and social sciences, moral and social work, social and cultural comprehension, moral and social assistance, psychiatry, biology, and sociology are no longer relevant.

In conclusion, the memoir, *Prozac Nation*, offers an effective demonstration of how psychological theories can be employed in personal stories to enhance comprehension of psychological issues. When analyzing Wurtzel's personal account

using the perspectives of Freud, Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari and Jung, it is evident that her battle with anxiety and depression is not isolated but instead represents some of the fundamental inquiries in psychology regarding human consciousness and identity. The exploration of Wurtzel's story raises fundamental inquiries about the human psyche, including the factors that influence it and how to find the appropriate solutions for psychological concerns. It is evident that psychoanalytic theories focus on the role that early childhood experiences play in shaping one's personality and behavior. Wurtzel shares about her relationship with her parents, specifically her father, being distant and emotionally unresponsive. This lack of emotional support might have contributed to the development of her depression and feelings of inadequacy. Her account also suggests that suppressing emotions and conflicts may result in mental health disorders. She confesses about feeling ashamed and guilty during her parents' divorce and keeping her emotions hidden. This act of repressing her emotions may have added to her depression.

Therefore, the research highlights the cultural and societal factors that contribute to depression, specifically the pressure to succeed, the breakdown of family structures and values, and the prevalence of substance abuse. More than this, their way of leaving, their interpretative environment, social understanding of self, such as increasing economic inequality, structural unemployment, and crisis of contemporary family also contributes to depression among young people in America.

The use of Prozac as an antidepressant is temporary. It is the reflection of dark side of modern American society. The usage of drugs to treat mental illnesses may be more of a response to societal expectations and the absence of better options than a true conviction in its effectiveness. Reliance solely on medication may not be sufficient to address mental health issues. Effective treatment with multidisciplinary approach, including limited use of medication, learning coping skills, cultural understanding of self and society and generating moral and social support, should be applied.

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