

THE SIGNS OF REAL FOR THE REAL IN RIZWAN AKHTAR'S *THE DEATH OF PRIVACY*

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the markers of authenticity—"the signs of real"—in Rizwan Akhtar's The Death of Privacy. Drawing on Baudrillard's theory of simulacra alongside existentialist insights, the study explores how Akhtar's poem critiques the proliferation of artificial constructs in modern society while advocating for a reclamation of genuine human experience. Through a close reading of key symbols, such as the ever-ticking clock, the cunning insect, and the contemplative lizard, the analysis reveals a deliberate juxtaposition between simulated realities and the enduring essence of nature and existence. The poem emerges as a meditation on the erosion of authenticity in a world dominated by commodified simulations and superficial pursuits. Ultimately, the paper argues that Akhtar not only exposes the hollow veneer of modernity but also invites readers to seek and affirm the real—the natural, the timeless, and the profoundly human—as a pathway to transcend alienation in contemporary life.

Keywords: Authenticity, Real, Simulacra, Baudrillard, Existentialism, Modern Society, Artificial, Constructs, Alienation, Nature

INTRODUCTION

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries, primarily in Europe, and became a dominant intellectual force in the mid-20th century. It focuses on the individual's existence, freedom, and the search for meaning in an often indifferent or absurd universe. Existentialist thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, and Martin Heidegger have profoundly influenced literature, art, and psychology (Sartre 22; Heidegger 89).

The concept of "the signs of the real for the real" can be traced to philosophical and literary theories that explore the relationship between reality, representation, and perception. This idea is particularly relevant in the context of postmodern and existentialist thought, where the boundaries between the real and the simulated often blur. In Rizwan Akhtar's "The Death of Privacy", the poem's imagery, symbolism, and tone can be analyzed through this lens to uncover how the poem interrogates the nature of reality and the ways in which it is mediated by external forces (Baudrillard 6; Lacan 53).

The concept of "the real" has been explored by philosophers such as Jacques Lacan and Jean Baudrillard. Lacan distinguishes between the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, where the Real represents that which is unmediated and beyond language or representation (Lacan 53). Baudrillard, on the other hand, discusses the idea of simulacra, where signs no longer refer to reality but instead create a hyperreality that replaces the real (Baudrillard 6).

In literature, the tension between the real and its signs often manifests through themes of alienation, loss, and the search for authenticity. Writers like Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka explore the absurdity of human existence in a world where the real is often obscured by layers of meaning and representation (Camus 45). In Akhtar's poem, the erosion of privacy can be seen as a metaphor for the loss of the real. The speaker's struggle to maintain personal boundaries reflects a broader existential crisis, where the real is constantly under threat from external intrusions. The line, "I became a museum of loss," suggests that the speaker's sense of self has been reduced to a collection of signs and relics, pointing toward Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality (Akhtar 2).

The poem's vivid imagery, such as the "fat lizard on the wall" and the "green oceans calm in a parietal eye," creates a surreal landscape that blurs the boundaries between the real and the imagined. The lizard, often associated with stillness and observation, can be seen as a sign of the real, while the "tick-tock of clock" represents the mechanical and artificial forces that mediate our experience of reality (Akhtar 2).

The relentless passage of time, symbolized by the "tick-tock of clock," underscores the transient nature of the real. Heidegger's concept of temporality, where human existence is defined by its finitude, is relevant here. The poem's depiction of time as a disruptive force highlights the fragility of the real and the ways in which it is constantly eroded by external pressures (Heidegger 234).

The speaker's reference to the "relic of your lips on my face" evokes a sense of nostalgia and longing, pointing toward the role of memory in mediating our experience of the real. Memory, in this context, becomes a sign of the real, a way of preserving what has been lost. However, the poem also suggests that memory is fragile and subject to distortion, as evidenced by the speaker's description of becoming a "museum of loss" (Akhtar 2).

Rizwan Akhtar's "The Death of Privacy" can be read as a meditation on the signs of the real for the real, exploring how external forces and the passage of time erode our sense of self and our connection to the real. Through its vivid imagery, rich symbolism, and existential themes, the poem captures the tension between the desire for authenticity and the inevitability of loss. By examining the poem through the lens of philosophical and literary theories, this analysis highlights its engagement with the nature of reality and the ways in which it is mediated by memory, time, and external pressures.

Existentialism—a philosophical movement centered on individual freedom, choice, and the search for meaning—offers a potent framework for analyzing literary works that grapple with modern human dilemmas. Rizwan Akhtar's "The Death of Privacy" is rich with imagery and symbolism that evoke themes of alienation, the absurdity of existence, and the confrontation with mortality. This paper examines the poem through an existentialist lens and proposes a systematic framework for its analysis.

Rizwan Akhtar's poem "The Death of Privacy" is a haunting meditation on the fragility of human privacy, the inevitability of loss, and the existential vulnerability that accompanies the erosion of personal boundaries. Through vivid imagery, such as the "creepy tick-tock of clock" and the "fat lizard on the wall," Akhtar creates a surreal yet deeply relatable landscape where the private self is constantly under siege. The poem's fragmented structure and evocative language reflect the disintegration of privacy in a world that increasingly judges and intrudes upon the individual (Akhtar 2).

The theme of privacy and its erosion has been a recurring subject in contemporary literature, particularly in the context of technological advancements and societal changes. Scholars such as Foucault (1977) have explored the concept of the "panopticon," where individuals are constantly under surveillance, leading to a loss of privacy and autonomy. Akhtar's poem resonates with this idea, as it depicts a world where "demons waited at my door," symbolizing the external forces that threaten personal boundaries (Foucault 201).

In the realm of poetry, the use of natural imagery to convey existential themes has been widely studied. For instance, ecocritics like Garrard (2012) have examined how poets use nature to reflect human emotions and vulnerabilities. Akhtar's depiction of "green oceans" and "old patient trees" aligns with this tradition, as these elements serve as metaphors for calm and resilience, contrasting with the "abrupt gales" that disrupt the "shrine of privacy" (Garrard 45). The motif of loss and memory in Akhtar's poem also echoes the works of modernist poets like T.S. Eliot and Sylvia Plath. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) and Plath's "Ariel" (1965) explore

the fragmentation of identity and the haunting presence of the past, themes that are central to “The Death of Privacy”. Akhtar’s line, “I became a museum of loss,” evokes a similar sense of nostalgia and disintegration, suggesting that the loss of privacy is intertwined with the loss of self (Eliot 15; Plath 23).

Finally, the poem’s exploration of time and mortality aligns with existentialist philosophy. Heidegger (1927) argues that human existence is defined by its temporality, a theme reflected in Akhtar’s use of the “tick-tock of clock” as a symbol of the relentless passage of time. This motif underscores the inevitability of privacy’s demise, as time erodes all boundaries and exposes the individual to external judgment (Heidegger 234).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative textual analysis approach to examine Rizwan Akhtar’s “The Death of Privacy”. The analysis focuses on three key aspects: imagery, symbolism, and tone. The study identifies and interprets the visual, auditory, and tactile imagery used in the poem. For instance, the “fat lizard on the wall” and the “green oceans” are analyzed for their symbolic significance and their contribution to the poem’s themes (Akhtar 2).

The paper explores the symbolic meaning of key elements in the poem, such as the “tick-tock of clock” (time), the “shrine of privacy” (personal boundaries), and the “museum of loss” (memory and nostalgia). These symbols are contextualized within the broader themes of privacy and vulnerability (Akhtar 2). The tone of the poem is analyzed to understand how Akhtar conveys emotions such as anxiety, nostalgia, and resignation. The use of enjambment, fragmented syntax, and repetition is examined to determine how they contribute to the poem’s overall mood (Akhtar 2).

This paper seeks to explore the thematic and stylistic elements of “The Death of Privacy”, focusing on how Akhtar uses imagery, symbolism, and tone to convey the tension between the desire for privacy and the inevitability of its loss. The poem’s references to natural elements, such as “green oceans” and “old patient trees,” juxtaposed with the mechanical “tick-tock of clock,” highlight the clash between the organic and the artificial, the eternal and the ephemeral. By analyzing these elements, this paper aims to shed light on Akhtar’s commentary on modernity, alienation, and the human condition.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

At the core of existentialism is the notion that “existence precedes essence,” meaning that individuals create their own identities and values through lived experience rather than conforming to preordained roles (Sartre 22). Prominent thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus emphasize that modern individuals face an inherent absurdity—the tension between the desire for meaning and the indifferent nature of the universe (Camus 12). Additionally, Martin Heidegger’s concept of “Being-toward-death” reminds us that acknowledging mortality is essential for achieving an authentic existence (Heidegger 89).

The persistent ticking of the clock in the poem symbolizes the relentless passage of time and the certainty of death. This imagery echoes Heidegger’s assertion that confronting mortality is essential for authentic existence (Heidegger 89). The poem’s depiction of modern society—characterized by insatiable greed (symbolized by the insect) and superficial ambition—mirrors the existential crisis of alienation. In a world where nature is reduced to a managed simulation, individuals lose touch with a genuine sense of being (Akhtar 2).

One of the most striking images in the poem is the “fat lizard on the wall,” which serves as a symbol of stillness and observation. The lizard’s stillness contrasts with the “creepy tick-tock of clock,” suggesting a tension between the natural world and the mechanical passage of time. This juxtaposition reflects the poem’s broader theme of the erosion of privacy, as the lizard’s watchful presence mirrors the intrusive gaze of external forces (Akhtar 2). Similarly, the “green

oceans calm in a parietal eye” evokes a sense of tranquility and introspection, contrasting with the “abrupt gales” that disrupt the “shrine of privacy.” This imagery highlights the fragility of personal boundaries, as even the most serene environments can be shattered by external forces (Akhtar 2).

The poem’s tone is one of resignation and vulnerability, as evidenced by lines such as “I orbit my cheeks with trembling palms” and “I became a museum of loss.” These lines convey a sense of helplessness and nostalgia, suggesting that the loss of privacy is an inevitable part of the human condition (Akhtar 2). By contrasting natural symbols (such as the peaceful fat lizard) with the destructive tendencies of modern man, the poem highlights the absurd contradiction between the pursuit of power and the innate human need for authenticity. The existential challenge is to find meaning amidst these contradictions (Camus 45).

Existentialism teaches that with freedom comes the burden of responsibility. The poem critiques a society that shirks this responsibility by prioritizing control and exploitation over genuine human connection, urging a return to a more authentic, mindful existence (Sartre 22). Clock represents the inexorable flow of time and the looming presence of death (Heidegger’s “Being-toward-death”) (Heidegger 89).

Insect symbolizes the corrupting greed and the inherent absurdity of the modern pursuit of power (Akhtar 2).

Lizard suggests that authentic, hard work—and a connection to nature—offers a counterpoint to the existential alienation experienced by modern man (Akhtar 2). Modernity, characterized by rapid technological advancement, urbanization, and the erosion of traditional values, often creates a disconnection between individuals and their authentic selves. Akhtar’s *The Death of Privacy* critiques the artificial constructs of modernity that distance individuals from an authentic existence and the natural order (Akhtar 2).

The poem’s imagery of the “creepy tick-tock of clock” and the “fat lizard on the wall” juxtaposes the mechanical and the natural, highlighting the tension between modernity and the organic world. The clock, a symbol of industrialization and regimentation, represents the artificial constructs of society that impose order and control. In contrast, the lizard, a creature of nature, embodies stillness and observation, suggesting a connection to the natural order that modernity disrupts (Akhtar 2).

Akhtar’s critique of modernity is further evident in the poem’s depiction of privacy as a “shrine” that is vulnerable to “abrupt gales.” This metaphor suggests that modernity, with its intrusive technologies and societal pressures, erodes the sacred space of individual autonomy. The speaker’s transformation into a “museum of loss” reflects the alienation and fragmentation that result from this erosion, pointing to the broader existential crisis of modernity (Akhtar 2). Rizwan Akhtar is an emerging Pakistani poet of modern era. He wrote a book of poetry named *Lahore I am Coming*. It includes romantic as well as informative and critical poems.

A simulation is an imitation of the operation of real-world process or system. The act of simulating something first requires that a model be developed; this model represents the key characteristics, behaviors and functions of the selected physical system or process. For example, ‘Insect’ in this poem symbolizes greed of human being. Simile in first line of poem represents cunningness of man that how this greedy species warms up itself to be ready for exploitation. Personification of clock represents fast run of time; it’s time of developed man who have no time for others. But a fat lizard is still, it means who really works hard is peaceful. Because lizard represents hard work.

Reptiles are stones of meditation they are natural and real. If green oceans can calm in reptiles, then why there is unrest in this world. Why man is too ambitious to be powerful over other humans. Because modern man wants to control other humans and wants to make them slaves

by using any means. Man developed and conquered oceans and killed kings of jungle, but nature revenged man time after time in the form of plagues, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcano, and pandemics. Patient trees yell, means man had cut the forests which gives him oxygen. Even dead bodies are decomposed by natural elements like bacteria etc. now man is frightened by nature. Man is lamenting elders that they left relic of greed on descendant's face and they are becoming of loss.

Demon is biblical allusion and it represents angel of death which comes to take soul of sinners. At the end of poem, it is clearly shown that man was unaware of his death and hugged life thinking about immortality but reality is different, now time has come to the end. The concept of simulation makes sense in the light of Baudrillard's thinking on symbolic exchange and the privileging of primitive society. For example, in primitive society nature is seen as an original and specific presence which stands in contrasts to culture. In the modern world nature has tended to be reduced to something carefully groomed, managed, policed and tailored to the needs of humans.

For example those spending childhoods in semi urban and suburban environments, early exposure to nature is playing in gardens, and parks, which are simulation of nature and natural world, in the form countryside trimmed down to the dimensions of a mere sample, surrounded on all sides by the vast fabric of the city, carefully policed, and served up 'at the room temperature' as parkland, nature reserve or background scenery for second homes, is in fact a recycling of nature. That is to say, it is no longer an original specific presence at all, standing in symbolic opposing to the culture, but a simulation, a consommé of the sights of nature set back in circulation in short, nature recycled. In concluding above discussion, I think it's reality of man that he forgot his purpose of creation or his purpose of being social animal. Man should obey rules of nature for its survival.

The poem reflects the absurdity of human life as defined by existentialists like Albert Camus. Camus argues that the absurd arises from the conflict between humanity's search for meaning and the universe's indifference. In **The Death of Privacy**, the inevitable decay and loss depicted in the poem mirror this absurd confrontation with a meaningless universe (Camus 45). The "tick-tock of clock" symbolizes the relentless passage of time, a force that underscores the futility of human efforts to preserve privacy and meaning. The speaker's trembling palms and the "mute exchange" that continues while "demons waited at my door" evoke a sense of helplessness and resignation, reflecting the existentialist notion of the absurd (Akhtar 2).

Camus suggests that the recognition of the absurd is the first step toward living authentically. In the poem, the speaker's awareness of their vulnerability and loss can be seen as a confrontation with the absurd. The line, "I became a museum of loss," suggests a recognition of the inevitability of decay and the need to find meaning in the face of it (Camus 45). The poem implicitly calls for individuals to reclaim their freedom and accept the responsibility of crafting a meaningful life. Existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre argue that freedom comes with the burden of responsibility, as individuals must create their own meaning in an indifferent universe (Sartre 22).

In *"The Death of Privacy"*, the speaker's introspection and vulnerability suggest a search for authenticity amidst the chaos of modernity. The "relic of your lips on my face" evokes a sense of nostalgia and longing, pointing toward the importance of memory and relationships in creating meaning. However, the poem also suggests that modern distractions, such as the "creepy tick-tock of clock" and the "demons" at the door, contribute to existential alienation (Akhtar 2). To resolve this crisis, the poem implies a return to authentic values, such as connection to nature and introspection. The "green oceans calm in a parietal eye" and the "old

patient trees” symbolize the tranquility and resilience that can be found in the natural world, offering a counterpoint to the artificial constructs of modernity (Akhtar 2).

CONCLUSION

Bringing together the insights from each step, “The Death of Privacy” emerges as both a critique of modernity and a call to embrace an authentic, existential mode of living. The poem critiques the artificial constructs of modernity that erode privacy and distance individuals from their authentic selves. At the same time, it reflects the absurdity of human life and the inevitability of decay, urging individuals to confront these realities and reclaim their freedom (Akhtar 2). The poem’s vivid imagery and existential themes highlight the tension between the mechanical and the natural, the real and the simulated, and the individual and the societal.

By examining these tensions, the poem offers a poignant commentary on the human condition in the modern world, suggesting that a return to authentic values and introspection is essential for living meaningfully (Akhtar 2). Rizwan Akhtar’s “The Death of Privacy” is a powerful exploration of the existential crisis of modernity. Through its critique of artificial societal constructs, its reflection of the absurd, and its implicit call for freedom and responsibility, the poem captures the tension between the desire for authenticity and the inevitability of loss. By synthesizing these insights, this analysis highlights the poem’s relevance to contemporary discussions of privacy, alienation, and the search for meaning in an increasingly fragmented world (Akhtar 2). Through vivid imagery, rich symbolism, and a tone of resignation, Akhtar captures the tension between the desire for privacy and the external forces that threaten it. The poem’s references to nature, time, and memory underscore its existential themes, offering a poignant commentary on the human condition in the modern world (Akhtar 2).

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