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Inner Space

Salman Rushdie's *Shame* provides only one instance of insight into main character Sufiya Zinobia's thoughts. This singular glimpse into her thoughts strikes an unusual chord, especially considering the novel is largely concerned with Sufiya's life and actions. Sufiya creates a metaphysical representation of space and spatial relationships inside her own mind. She plays in this safe mental space as if it were a dollhouse. She is able to put characters, images, and objects in the dollhouse, as well as remove them. She displays her creativity through the invention of new material inside her dollhouse that does not exist in reality. This privileged access to Sufiya's inner space of thought reveals how she creates her identity, or sense of self, only through her inner Mind Space, and not in the external world - that place she calls "everywhere."

Sufiya's spatial construction of a safe room in her mind allows her to escape there to avoid and enhance her reality. Rushdie writes, "She likes it now that she is sometimes left alone and the things can happen in her head, ... when people are present she never dares to take the things out and play with them in case they get taken away or broken by mistake" (224). This illustrates how disconnected she is from the external and the people in her life, and how she seeks to escape from the outside world.

She wants to be alone. She does not identify herself in context to the external, physical, tangible world, but only through the images she stores in her mental playhouse.

Only “the favorite things” have a place in this special vault (224). She protects the space, the objects, and herself from the outside world. She uses selective control of her space, allowing only the happy people, images, and thoughts inside. She has a memory of her father as he “Hugs, smiles at, cries over her” (225). She “takes him out of her head and makes him do it over and over, all of it ...” illustrating her perspective of him as an object or doll she removes from her safe mental space to bring into her external perception. This interaction with her father is “one of the best inside-things,” and it comforts her because she is so lonely, sad, and scared in her external reality (225). She shows her lonely hunger for attention and love from her family. She wants to be hugged, kissed, and physically close to her family, but she is denied these simple pleasures.

This section begins in a normal external space, Sufiya’s bed. After she fakes being asleep while Shahbanou is with Omar (a physical relationship she is very confused by that triggers her thoughts), she retreats to her dollhouse and plays. She initially shows her childlike mindset which later evolves into a more adult perspective. She describes the “things” in her private dollhouse space as, “precious fragile toys” (225). She plays with these “toys” and manipulates the characters, images, and ideas. She moves the pieces back and forth between her interior safe space and reality. Her

memories and her constructed imaginative creations are all stored in this dollhouse. They are played with “over and over” whenever she is lonely, sad, or in need of comfort.

Sufiya reveals her creative power by conjuring images that never happened in reality inside this safe space. She creates brand new realities in her mind. She creates an image that “is a thing she has inside that has never happened anywhere else: her mother skips with her” (225). Her mother has been cruel and physically distant from her “shame” Sufiya, and Sufiya must imagine a connection with her mother. She cannot form her identity as a result of real physical contact with her mother in the external world, but she wants and needs that contact in order to understand who she is.

Sufiya attempts to understand her own identity in relation to her mother, but has no real world context, so she invents a toy to play with. She skips rope with Bilquis, “the two of them jump together, fasterfaster, until they are going so fast you can’t see who is who any more, they could be one person held within the circle of the rope” (225). Sufiya both finds and loses her sense of identity in this imagining. She sees herself as part of her mother in her head, but that is not her reality. This confuses Sufiya and it “tires her out to play with this toy, ... because of the difficulty of doing things inside that you haven’t brought there from the outside” (225). She shows how difficult it is for her not to be able to identify herself through her mother in the real world, but only in her imagination. This lack of connection to her most important role model in creating her

sense of self is missing in the outside world, so Sufiya must invent it before even attempting to discover who she really is.

Sufiya selectively controls her dollhouse space. She “packs her head full of good things so that there won’t be room for the other things, the things she hates” (225). Only the happy people, images, and toys are allowed inside, even though the ‘bad toys’ do attempt to intrude (226). She sees flashes of the dark images briefly like, “A picture of herself with dead birds. Who put that there?” (225). She describes the people she loves like Omar, Shahbanou, Bilquis and Raze as “the ant family” as “she waves down” and “the little ant family waves back up” (225). She takes a position of power over these people who have power over her in her external world.

This glimpse inside Sufiya’s inner space reveals her difficulty identifying herself through external spatial recognition and relationships. She reveals her view of “a thing called the world that makes a hollow noise when you knock your knuckles on it ... She knows it is really a picture of a much bigger place called everywhere but it isn’t a good picture because she can’t see herself in it” (225). This distorted, flat concept of her larger world, and her place in it, causes Sufiya to be essentially imprisoned in her own mind. Sufiya shows growth by the end of the passage into a more adult version of herself, but this illustrates how she is still stuck in a strange state between being a child and an adult. She finally returns to her outside world and is back in bed thinking. She returns back to external space, where she is tormented with confusing questions about

her identity in the world. Sufiya Zinobia cannot fully interact with her external space, which leads to an insular sense of identity that disconnects her from reality, because it only exists in her own mind.