Naipaul’s Use of Space and the Divided Self in The Mimic Men

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V.S. Naipaul represents Ralph Singh in The Mimic Men as unable to experience himself as together with others or at home in the world. Instead Ralph is represented as unhoused and in-between spaces. The idea of space becomes increasingly representative of the divided self as it is manifested through named spaces and vaguely defined spaces. Unable to feel at home anywhere Ralph opts to live increasingly within the space of his imagination.

Named spaces are specific and locatable while vaguely defined spaces tend to be relative to other spaces, are more inexactely described and encompass abstract and imagined spaces. Exploration of the divided self as it is manifested in both specific and vaguely defined spaces is done through close textual analysis of specific sites or buildings, such as division between houses in childhood which contributes to his sense of homelessness. The examination of the use of prepositions and locatives which inform the analysis of how the character is oriented in space facilitates a discussion of the disparity that is inherent in existing in simultaneous imagined and terrestrial spaces. Analysis of the way that space is used in Naipaul’s The Mimic Men reveals a protagonist that is dislocated in relation to the world, others and himself.

BIO

Andra Ramdeen is an Mphil in Literatures in English student at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine. She also received her undergraduate degree from UWI. She is currently doing research on the construction of the divided self in VS Naipaul's fiction.