

V. S. NAIPAUL AND WORLD LITERATURE

V. S. Naipaul is a major and controversial figure in postcolonial and world literature. This book provides a challenging and uncompromisingly honest study that engages with history, genre theory, aesthetics, and global literary culture, with close reference to Naipaul's published and archival material. In his fiction and creative histories, the definition of the modern idea of world literature is informed by the importance of an artistic ordering of perception. Although often expressing ideas that are prejudicial and morally repugnant, there is an honesty in his writings where one finds extraordinary insights into how life is experienced within colonial structures of power. These colonial structures provided no abstract unity to the field of literary expression and ignored vernacular cultures. The book argues that a universal ideology of the aesthetic, transcending time, regions, and languages, provides world literature with a unity that is possible only within a critical universal humanism attuned to heroic readings of texts and cultures.

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For
Nalini
Rohan
Paras
and
my late Mother Lila
अफ़सोस के साथ

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Acknowledgments

Taking his cue from a remark by W. H. Auden, Lionel Trilling observed that “a real book reads us.”¹ Trilling had added that he had been read by T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Proust. This book makes a similar declaration, as in writing it I have been read by V. S. Naipaul. The task of being read to by a major writer required time and dedication and I must begin by thanking the Australian Research Council for a three-year Discovery Grant (2017–2020) that gave me time to undertake research in the Tulsa Naipaul Archive deposited in the University of Tulsa McFarlin Library, and in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin. I want to thank in particular the University of Tulsa Dean of McFarlin Library Adrian Alexander, his secretary Sandy Henderson, the archivist and librarians of the Tulsa McFarlin Library, and the archivists of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center for their generosity and care throughout my stay. I am grateful to the Dean of the McFarlin Library for permission to reproduce sections from the Tulsa Naipaul Archive. The notes I made in the Tulsa Naipaul Archive were given form and meaning by Dr Jasmine Dean. Without Dr Dean’s analytical skills these notes would have remained scattered and disjointed. I wish to place on record, with grateful thanks, the advice on stylistic matters given over many months by my close friend Marion Campbell, herself an accomplished Australian novelist and essayist, who carefully edited the entire manuscript. The two readers of Cambridge University Press provided helpful information, on both accidentals and substantives, with remarkable clarity and precision, even when, in some instances, they disagreed with my interpretations. The editors of the series in which this book appears – Professors Debjani Ganguly and Francesca Orsini – remained a source of inspiration throughout the editing of this book. In this context, I want to thank Ray Ryan, senior commissioning editor at Cambridge, for taking a personal interest in the project and Edgar Mendez, senior editorial assistant, for answering my endless queries with such grace and

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Rather late in the writing of this book I came to know Mr Mark Pereira, director of 101 Art Gallery, St James, Trinidad. He not only introduced me to Michel Jean Cazabon's *East Indian Group* but also sent me a complete facsimile reproduction of V. S. Naipaul's collection of Mughal, Rajasthani, and related miniatures. I want to thank him for his generosity, especially towards someone he had never met. In the early 1990s, Vidia and Patricia Naipaul had purchased Michel Jean Cazabon's painting (originally exhibited in London in 1886 as part of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition).² It is a slightly stylized representation of a coolie couple and their young child, a girl of two or three, standing in front of their thatched hut. It is an idyllic scene, serene in every sense but mannered in its composition. Cazabon's painting and the personal reflections scattered throughout this book would have been understood best by a very special group of people, Fiji Indians all, who share my experience as grandchildren of indentured labourers or *girmitiyas*. They are Praveen Chandra, Krishna Datt, Sudesh Mishra, Satendra Nandan, Som Prakash, Sachi Reddy, Divakar Rao, and Subramani. And beyond this group there were always my brother Hirday Mishra and my sister, the late Shiro Shankar, in whose company reading Naipaul's phenomenal work *A House for Mr Biswas* always touched "a nerve of memory."

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