

Lady Patricia Naipaul (née Hale, Modern History, 1951)

1932-1996

Profile written by Sarah Curtis FRSA (Classics, 1954)

Patricia Hale and Vidia S Naipaul, the future Nobel Prize-winning novelist, were both aged nineteen when they met in 1952 at Oxford, she at St Hugh's reading History, he at University College, already writing a novel. They married in 1955, to the opposition of both sets of parents and without enthusiasm from Vidia. She bought the wedding ring which she rarely wore. His first novel *A house for Mr Biswas* was published in 1957 while Pat worked as a teacher. The marriage was frail from the beginning and they did not have children but she remained his counsellor, comforter and editor until, after an earlier mastectomy, she died of liver cancer in 1996. She had written to him before they married, "I have absolute faith in your ultimate ability to do something great".

Naipaul's biographer Patrick French has stated that despite Vidia's long liaison from 1972 with Margaret Gooding, it seemed not to have occurred to Pat to separate from him formally and she continued encouraging him and editing his work, sometimes even living in the same house, cooking and caring for him as before. Her unhappiness, however, was clear from her addiction to sleeping tablets and Valium. When in 1995 Vidia knew Pat was seriously ill and asked her what he could do, she told him there was nothing but to continue with his work. On the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *A house for Mr Biswas*, he dedicated the new edition to "Patricia Anne Hale who had served as first reader, editor and critic of his writings".