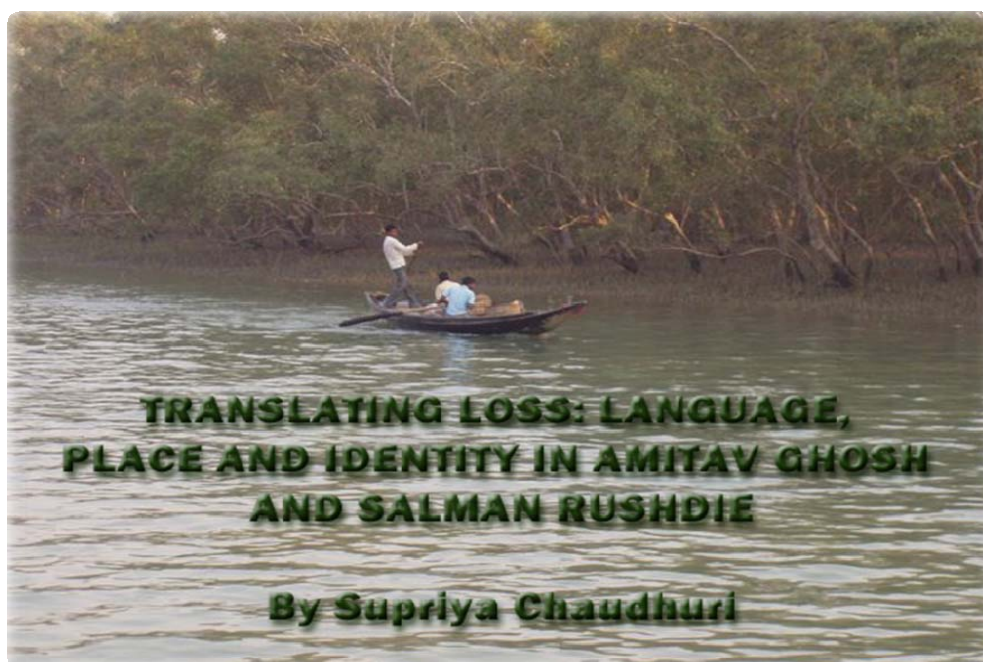




UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio
e Letterature straniere comparate
Sezione di Anglistica



Introduction: Professor Marialuisa Bignami

**FRIDAY, MARCH 20
10.30 A.M.**

P.ZZA S. ALESSANDRO 1, AULA A4

Looking forward to your presence

TRANSLATING LOSS: LANGUAGE, PLACE AND IDENTITY IN AMITAV GHOSH AND SALMAN RUSHDIE

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THE ABSTRACT: 'The only language of loss left in the world is Arabic', wrote the Kashmiri poet Agha Shahid Ali as he commenced a poem in English. The landscape of his poem, a *ghazal* written in English, the language of his translated sensibility, is inscribed, therefore, with the signs of a desolated homeland, the home where memory lives and speaks another language.

In this discussion, I will examine how two writers from the Indian subcontinent, Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie, use language to mediate a sense of place in their writing, especially when that place is viewed under the sign of loss: either as threatened, or as already beyond recovery. My focus will be on two novels, Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005): works written close together, but strongly contrasted in terms of style, politics, language and treatment of landscape.

I will lead into my discussion with some observations on a European novel which is also deeply concerned with language and place, Milan Kundera's *Ignorance* (1999). One of the principal difficulties of linguistic representation in the new English literatures is that of recording experiences undergone through the medium of one language in another. It is a problem constantly present to the sensibility of the local (rather than global) reader, whose discomfort with the medium is like an impediment caused by involuntary translation.

I would like to argue that underlying its rich and complex treatment of persons and places, Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* offers also a consideration of language, not only as the instrument or mediation of sensibility, but as a site, a *habitus*. His central character is himself a translator, one who earns his living by a mechanical but necessary activity. Read through the filter of Kanai's sensibility, the representation of persons and places in *The Hungry Tide* never seems to acquire full determination; it remains provisional, even inexact, as if gesturing towards a fullness it can never possess. I would like to contrast this deliberate indeterminacy with the apparent linguistic plenitude of Rushdie's novel, where we do not care what language the characters are speaking, because it is always Rushdie speaking. I would suggest that this plenitude covers an absence: the absence of any real sense of place, the absence of Kashmir.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR: *Supriya Chaudhuri is Professor of English and Co-ordinator of the Centre of Advanced Study at the Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India. She works mainly on European Renaissance literature and on Indian literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, with strong interests in the novel, theory and cinema. Presently she is a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Research in Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge, and Overseas Fellow at Churchill College.*