

How many times can the same story be told? Marguerite Duras's self-translation in her "India Cycle"

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ABSTRACT

While existing scholarship on self-translation has primarily focused on interlingual transfers, this study aims to expand the concept to encompass intersemiotic and intrasemiotic translation by examining how the French novelist and filmmaker Marguerite Duras reworked the themes of loss, death, and memory across both literature and film. Focusing on her "India Cycle" – a series of inter-related novels and films – this study explores and analyses Duras's distinctive approach to repetition while emphasizing her personal motivations for continuously reinterpreting the same narratives across different artistic forms. Ultimately, this paper argues that Duras's self-translation is not merely a repetition of the same, but a creative process that generates new meanings in different contexts, reinforcing the cyclical and fragmented nature of her storytelling. Through this perspective, the India Cycle offers a compelling case for rethinking self-translation beyond linguistic boundaries, highlighting its broader implications for translation studies.

Keywords: Marguerite Duras, self-translation, intersemiotic translation, intrasemiotic translation, India Cycle

Kolikokrat je mogoče povedati isto zgodbo? Samoprevajanje Marguerite Duras v "indijskem ciklu"

IZVLEČEK

Medtem ko se obstoječe raziskave o samoprevajanju večinoma osredinjajo na medjezikovno prevajanje, poskuša ta prispevek v svoj konceptualni okvir zajeti tudi inter- in intrasemiotično prevajanje, ki presega zgolj medjezikovne prenose. Kot predmet obravnave vzame »indijski cikel« francoske pisateljice in filmske ustvarjalke Marguerite Duras, serijo medsebojno povezanih romanov in filmov, v katerih je predelovala teme izgube, smrti in spomina. Študija analizira avtoričin edinstven pristop k ponavljanju in variaciji ter raziskuje razloge za neprestano vračanje k enim in istim temam v različnih umetniških oblikah. Izkaže se, da samoprevajanje pri Duras ni zgolj ponavljanje istega, temveč kompleksen ustvarjalni proces, ki v različnih umetniških oblikah in kontekstih ustvarja vedno nove pomene skozi fragmentarno, ciklično pripovedno strukturo. S tega vidika »indijski cikel« odpira prostor za premislek o samoprevajanju, ki sega onkraj jezikovnih meja, in prevprašuje širše implikacije tega pojava za prevodoslovje.

Ključne besede: Marguerite Duras, samoprevajanje, medznakovni prevod, znotrajznakovni prevod, indijski cikel

1. Introduction

Marguerite Germaine Marie Donnadiou, better known as Marguerite Duras (1914–1996), was a French novelist, playwright, essayist, screenwriter, and experimental filmmaker, and remains one of the most significant figures in French literature. Initially recognized as a novelist, her more experimental phase began with *Moderato Cantabile* (1958), which linked her to the *nouveau roman* movement. Duras's novels often lack psychological depth, as they follow no “classical” narrative thread. Instead, her writing is characterized by fragmentation, ellipses, silences, and almost magical, incantatory repetitions, creating a distinctive “Durassian” rhythm, whereas her filmic style is marked by minimalism, fragmentation, and a radical disconnect between image and sound, creating an evocative, hypnotic atmosphere where absence, memory, and desire take centre stage.

The term “India Cycle” is commonly used by critics to refer to a group of Duras's literary and cinematic works. The series comprises three novels – *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964; English translation *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, 1986), *Le Vice-consul* (1966; English translation *The Vice-Consul*, 1987), and *L'Amour* (1972; English translation *L'Amour*, 2013) – as well as three films – *La Femme du Gange* [Woman of the Ganges] (1974), *India Song* (1975), and *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* [Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta] (1976). Additionally, two dramatic texts that were never put on stage, *La Femme du Gange* (1973a) and *India Song* (1973b), are sometimes also included (Blot-Labarrère 2011, 1726).

These works are interconnected both stylistically and thematically, sharing similar settings, personages, narrative structures, a poetic and elusive style, recurring literary and filmic figures, and motifs of alienation, love, longing, loss, and death (see de Chalonge 2005). All of these works refer to an “original trauma”, first introduced in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, where the protagonist, Lol, is abandoned by her fiancé, Michael Richardson, at a dance in the town casino in S. Tahla. He leaves with another woman, Anne-Marie Stretter, who later reappears as a central figure in *Le Vice-consul* and *India Song*.

Lucy Stone McNeece (1996, 47) describes *Le Ravissement* as the opening movement of the elegiac composition of the India Cycle, with the subsequent works functioning as memories of this almost dream-like event (Stone McNeece 1996, 31). *Le Vice-consul* shifts the focus to an Indian setting and the story of Anne-Marie Stretter, while *L'Amour* returns to the site of the dance in the town of S. Tahla, concluding the novelistic triptych and paving the way for the films. Among the cinematic works, *La Femme du Gange* serves, to some extent, as a filmic counterpart to *L'Amour*, exploring

the filmic medium through poetic contrasts, while *India Song*, an “adaptation” of *Le Vice-consul*, interrogates the relationship between the image and sound. The final and arguably most radical work in the cycle, *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, pushes the cinematic form to its limits, ultimately questioning its very nature by keeping the same unchanged audio track from the previous film.

By reinterpreting the same themes, feelings, and narratives, the six works of the India Cycle exemplify a process of artistic transformation in which Duras created a dynamic interplay between her works. While the works in the cycle present different variations on a theme, three of them – namely the novel *Le Vice-Consul* and the films *India Song* and *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* – are even more tightly interconnected through deliberate repetition of same scenes, settings, dialogues, and personages. In what follows, the article will concentrate on these particular three works.

As Maria Africa Vidal Claramonte (2023, 15) observes, repetition has long carried negative connotations in the history of Western thought, and was often perceived as the antithesis of innovation, originality, and creation. However, Vidal Claramonte highlights how contemporary thinkers such as Wittgenstein, Deleuze, and Derrida have reshaped the understanding of repetition, not as a mere reproduction but as a form of difference within the same. She asserts (Vidal Claramonte 2023, 9), quoting Derrida ([1972] 1984, 318), that “[i]terability encompasses two opposite ideas: iteration or repetition and the possibility of alteration. Iterability is not only present in literature and the arts – it is ‘the force behind every form of experience’”.

In art, repetition and variation invite reflection on its creative potential and how a familiar narrative can evolve when revisited in different ways. According to Vidal Claramonte (2023, 2), repetition in art is conceptualized “not as reproduction but rather as the production, modification, and creation of something new”, a perspective that closely aligns with perspectives on translation in contemporary translation studies. Translation studies scholars view translation as movement (Blumczynski 2023), transformation (Raw 2012), and interpretation (Venuti 2012; Stolze 2010) rather than a static act – “something always in motion, as something that must move in order to superimpose new meanings derived from new contexts” (Vidal Claramonte 2023, 3). In this sense, the term translation is also used in this article: as a hypernym, encompassing various forms of transformations and reconfigurations across art, culture, and media.

By analysing selected examples from the cycle, this article seeks to explore Duras’s act of self-translation, delving into how and why she chose to rewrite the same narrative across two distinct art forms: novel and film.

Additionally, it is argued in this article that the theoretical framework of contemporary translation studies provides valuable insights into how repetition in art can function as a creative tool for reinterpretation, emphasizing the ongoing, productive dialogue between artworks. At the same time, I seek to demonstrate that concepts such as intersemiotic translation and self-translation would benefit from a broader, more inclusive perspective that accounts for the complexity of artistic reworking across different arts.

The next section will outline the theoretical framework of this study, defining and revising some key concepts. This will be followed by a presentation of the research questions, the methodological approaches, and an introduction of the corpus. The analysis will then examine selected examples, leading to a discussion of the implications of Duras's self-translation. Finally, the conclusion will address the study's potential limitations, its broader implications, and potential directions for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Intersemiotic translation and intrasemiotic translation

As stated above, in this research translation and repetition are understood within the broader framework of contemporary translation studies, extending beyond linguistic or/and cultural transfers. In his seminal paper "On linguistic aspects of translation" (1959), Roman Jakobson delineated three types of translation: intralingual (or rewording), interlingual (or translation proper), and intersemiotic (or transmutation). While his tripartite model was groundbreaking for translation studies, it has since been critically reassessed for being somewhat restricting and overly narrow for defining translation comprehensively. As Piotr Blumczynski (2023, 15) observes, Jakobson's framework is rooted in "an unshakable assumption that translation is fundamentally and exclusively a matter of language". Although rewording and transmutation are considered forms of translation, they still engage with language – Jakobson, for instance, defines intersemiotic translation as the "interpretation of *verbal signs* by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (Jakobson 1959, 233, emphasis added), but only interlingual translation is classified as "translation proper" and seen as the primary, prototypical object of study. Similar concerns have been raised by Kobus Marais (2018, 7–8, 15), who highlights a fundamental divergence between Jakobson and the semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, despite Jakobson's claim of grounding his tripartite model in Peircean semiotics. While Peirce sought to construct a semiotic theory encompassing all sign systems, Jakobson ultimately privileged verbal signs above all others, thereby excluding nonverbal transfers from his framework. Although the term intersemiotic translation can, despite Jakobson's definition, be extended to include

transfers between two nonverbal sign systems, transformations within the same sign system remain largely unaddressed.

To fill this gap, some scholars have introduced new concepts aimed at capturing these intra-systemic processes. Gideon Toury (1986, 1113) introduced the term “intra-semiotic translation” to describe transformations that do not neatly fit into Jakobson’s three categories. For instance, while a transformation from a novel to a ballet can be considered intersemiotic translation, an intrasemiotic translation would involve two different versions of the same ballet. Umberto Eco (2001) and Henrik Gottlieb (2008) then offered more nuanced classifications, though the concept remains relatively unexplored in translation studies. One notable interdisciplinary example is the study by Jaanika Anderson and Maria-Kristiina Lotman (2018), which applies a translation studies framework to analyse Roman emulations of Greek art in the collections of the University of Tartu Art Museum as a case of intrasemiotic translation.

Given that this research adopts an expanded understanding of translation as a process of movement, transformation, and interpretation, it is fitting to adopt the proposed distinction between intra- and intersemiotic translation for conceptualizing transfers in Duras’s *India Cycle*. This broader framework allows for a more inclusive examination of the dynamic processes at play across her literary and cinematic works.

2.2 Self-translation

Since the *India Cycle* consists of works written or directed by the same author, the concept of self-translation (or auto-translation) naturally comes to mind. However, self-translation remains somewhat overlooked in translation studies (see Grutman 2020; Montini 2010). As Montini (2010, 307) points out, comprehensive studies on the subject are scarce, often limited to analyses of individual authors such as Nabokov or Beckett, research on minorities and exiled writers, or personal accounts of self-translation. More significantly for this study, despite the expanding definition of translation to encompass various forms of transfer in semiotic sense, self-translation is still predominantly framed as a purely linguistic and/or cultural practice, primarily associated with writers or poets translating their own texts. Grutman (2020, 514, emphasis added) defines it simply as “either the process of translating one’s own writings into another *language* or the product of such an undertaking”. Similarly, Montini (2010, 306) refers to Anton Popovič’s (1976, 19, emphasis added) foundational definition, which describes self-translation as “the translation of an original work into another *language* by the author himself”. With the exception of studying comics (for example see Van Dijk 2024; Dybiec-Gajer 2023), few scholars have examined self-translation

in this broader semiotic sense, encompassing transfers that are not only linguistic in nature. One such notable exception is the work of the semiotician and translation studies scholar Dinda L. Gorlée (2023), who conceptualizes self-translation as a process of interpretation, transformation, and re-signification, proposing the term “transduction” to describe the process wherein an author reinterprets and transforms their work across different artistic mediums. She further recognizes its intersemiotic dimension, arguing that when an author rewrites their own work, meaning is actively transformed and reborn in new artistic contexts.

This perspective aligns with the broader understanding of translation proposed in this article. Accordingly, the term “self-translation” will be employed in this expanded sense, encompassing the ways in which Marguerite Duras reinterpreted and reshaped her own work across different art forms. Some aspects of Duras’s self-translation – or self-adaptation – have already been explored by various scholars. For example, Lucy Stone McNeece (1996) examined the role of art and politics in the *India Cycle*, while Sirkka Knuutila (2011) focused on the function of traumatic experience within the series. Renathe Günther (2001) provides an in-depth analysis of Duras’s cinematic works and the interplay between her written and visual texts, and Danica van de Velde (2018) concentrates specifically on her cinematic self-adaptations. What remains relatively unexamined, however, is the potential reading of Duras’s self-translation practices through the lens of translation studies, while simultaneously expanding the term of self-translation itself beyond strictly linguistic boundaries. The research reported in this article attempts to address this gap.

A more in-depth exploration of Duras’s work will follow in the subsequent sections.

3. Methods and material

3.1 Methodological approach

Existing scholarship on self-translation has traditionally centred on interlingual translation, with a predominant focus on the motivations behind this practice. As Rainer Grutman (2020, 516) notes, “much research has gone into analysing the reasons – personal or political, aesthetic or economic – why some writers embark on this adventure while others, in comparable circumstances, do not”. When self-translations are studied in literary contexts, they are often associated with certain distinctive features. A common claim, made by writers and literary scholars alike, is that they are “freer than other translations” (Grutman 2020, 517). This research will similarly structure its analysis around the motivations for self-translation and its concrete techniques employed, while considering the concept of self-translation in

its broader semiotic sense. It will focus on Marguerite Duras's India Cycle, addressing two research questions:

1. How is self-translation in the India Cycle executed on a micro level? What translation techniques does Duras employ?
2. How does Duras herself conceptualize self-translation?

The first question focuses on *how*, investigating the techniques and ways in which intra- or intersemiotic self-translation is carried out on a micro level. Selected examples from the India Cycle will be analysed, comparing how Duras translates recurring themes of death, loss, and memory – three central motifs in her work – across different pieces within the cycle. For brevity, the analysis will be limited to three out of six works in the cycle: the novel *Le Vice-consul* and the films *India Song* and *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*.

The second question addresses the *why*, examining Duras's understanding of this practice and investigating her motivations for repeatedly reworking the same narrative across different literary and cinematic forms. Even though she was an artist rather than a theorist, Duras often reflected thoughtfully on her own creative processes. The analysis will therefore draw on paratextual sources such as selected interviews, forewords, and other non-fictional writings.

3.2 Presentation of the corpus

The following chapter is a brief presentation of the three works of the India Cycle that will be analysed in the following sections.

Le Vice-Consul is a fragmented novel set in colonial India that interweaves the story of Anne-Marie Stretter, a French diplomat's wife, with the mysterious and violent actions of the Vice-Consul Jean-Marc de H., who has been transferred from Lahore back to Calcutta for shooting at lepers. The novel's pivotal scene – a reception at the French Embassy in Calcutta – serves as a space where the characters' emotional dislocation and latent tensions come to the surface. Running parallel to this storyline is the journey of a wandering Cambodian beggar woman, presented in a blend of first- and third-person narration, whose passage through the text echoes the themes of abandonment, exile, and marginalization that pervade the novel where the narrative unfolds in a disjointed and often opaque form.

India Song, originally written as a radio play and later adapted into a film, revisits the same characters and setting, but shifts the focus to Anne-Marie's emotional desolation and her relationships within the decaying world of the colonial elite,

conveyed through a haunting off-screen narration and a melancholic soundtrack by Carlos d'Alessio.

Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert, often considered a companion piece to *India Song*, reuses the exact audio track of the earlier film but replaces its images with slow-moving shots of empty, decaying interiors of the same shooting location, creating an abstract meditation on absence, memory, and cinematic repetition. Together, the three works form a tightly knit sequence that blurs the boundaries between literature and film, narrative and atmosphere.

4. Analysis

This comparative analysis will examine the themes of death, loss, and memory in the three selected works of Duras's India Cycle through two key dimensions: the death of Anne-Marie Stretter and music as a catalyst for evoking the past. These two themes are deeply interwoven, often indistinguishable from one another, yet they hold particular significance in Duras's work and may offer insight into the characteristics of her self-translation.

4.1 Comparative analysis: translation techniques

4.1.1 *The death of Anne-Marie Stretter*

Anne-Marie Stretter's death (or rather suicide), first introduced in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, is foreshadowed when she is described as someone who "[a]s she thus appeared, so later would she die, with her desired body"¹ (Duras [1964] 1986, 6). In *Le Vice-consul*, her fate remains ambiguous, though the possibility of a suicide pact with her lover is occasionally suggested: "No one would be surprised if they were found dead in bed together one morning in a hotel in Chandernagore, after a night at the Blue Moon. If it were to happen, it would be during the summer monsoon. People would say: 'No reason at all. They simply lacked the will to live'" (Duras [1966] 1987, 120). By the novel's end, she is last seen walking "unhurriedly towards the beach" (Duras [1966] 1987, 159), perhaps drawn by the chant of the Cambodian beggar.

While her death is not explicitly confirmed in the novel, *India Song* – the work most closely connected to *Le Vice-consul* – reinterprets it more strongly. Marguerite Duras herself spoke about the "real" Anne-Marie Stretter that she knew from her childhood

1 Unless otherwise noted, all French translations cited are drawn from existing published English editions.

in French Indochina (see e.g., Duras 2011a, 1623–24; Duras 2001, 65) and the decision to “kill her” in the film, as she was, in a way, obsessed with her: “I lived a kind of mad love for this woman and kept starting the same film, the same book over and over again, and I told myself: ‘She must die.’ That’s how it was. Because she moved me so much,” she said on April 10, 1981, at a meeting in Montreal (cited in Clavaron 2006, 118, my translation). *India Song* opens with the scene of an Indian servant lighting incense and placing fresh flowers on the piano lid beside a photograph of the deceased, seemingly a young Anne-Marie Stretter, while the piano version of the main theme is playing in the background. This scene is not a flashback, but instead past and present merge before the viewer’s eyes as Anne-Marie Stretter, whom we know to be dead, later appears to dance before her own “altar” at the ball in her residence. Her death is also recalled just after the scene with burning incense and a photograph in the dialogue between two anonymous female narrators, who observe that “he” (likely her lover, Michael Richardson) left India after her passing and that she is buried in the English cemetery in Calcutta. In this way, it seems that the entire film unfolds before our eyes as a memory relived endlessly, blurring the boundaries between temporal planes and reinforcing the cyclical nature of loss and recollection. A similar collapse of past and present is also present throughout the text in *Le Vice-consul*, where it is reflected in the fluid interplay between the *présent indicatif* (present tense) and occasional shifts into *passé composé* (past simple tense). However, at the end of the film, Anne-Marie Stretter appears lying on a sofa in her dimly lit hotel residence, dressed in a black bathrobe, while Carlos d’Alessio’s melancholic piano soundtrack plays in the background. Slowly, like a spectral presence, she rises, smells the flowers on the coffee table, then drifts away, disappearing down the corridor. In the following scene, over a lingering shot of a villa park, two anonymous narrators, present only as voices, recount her departure, noting that she stayed out for a long time before concluding, against the distant sound of waves: “On the beach they found the dressing gown”.

Duras retains the entire audio track (*bande-son*) – encompassing all sound elements, including dialogue, music, and ambient noise – from *India Song* in *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, with the latter set in the same location only a year later. However, while *India Song* was set in the opulent interiors of the Rothschild mansion, its successor presents only ruin, decay, and disintegration, emptied of any human presence. As the camera lingers in long, almost motionless shots of decayed palace and its surroundings, unaltered dialogues and music from *India Song* play in the background. Past, present, and future collapse into a single space, creating the impression that what the viewers once witnessed in *India Song* has now faded into a distant memory. Anne-Marie Stretter’s death transcends her own, becoming a pervasive, all-encompassing presence.

As Lucy Stone McNeece (1996, 130) observes, Duras constructs the relationship between image and sound dialectically, relying on counterpoint and discontinuity. This technique, first introduced in *La Femme du Gange*, involves the use of *la voix off* – a voiceover detached from the image – creating a fundamental disconnect what is seen and what is heard. In this way, one could even speak of two separate films: a “film of the voice” and a “film of the image” (see Günther 2002, 25; Stone McNeece 1996, 106). According to Stone McNeece (1996, 106), the “two films” steer the viewers away from the dramatic plot and on-screen action, encouraging them to become aware of other details – namely, space and its surfaces, textures and light, the sonority and poetic quality of the words spoken by disembodied voices, the music, gestures, and so on. Reflecting on *Son nom de Venise*, Duras once remarked (Duras 2011a, 1627–28) that she was “moving toward a kind of cinematic no man’s land, where there will no longer be any correlation between sound and image, toward a kind of fragmented cinematic time...” As a result, referentiality and identification with the action become problematic, and the film resists any conventional effect of reality. As Stone McNeece (1996, 130) asserts, Duras’s principal strategy, as in *La Femme du Gange*, is to dethrone the image as the primary vehicle and heighten the use of offscreen sound. While this strategy is already present in *India Song*, in *Son nom de Venise* the schism between sound and image is pushed to the extreme, further destabilizing the viewer’s sense of temporal and narrative cohesion.

At the film’s conclusion, just as Anne-Marie Stretter’s bathrobe is mentioned, the scene shifts from the abandoned interior to a tranquil sunset over the sea, accompanied by the song of Cambodian beggar, mirroring the opening of *India Song*. Moments before this, one of the film’s rare depictions of human figures appears: Anne-Marie Stretter, dressed in black and gazing into the distance, her stillness evoking a photograph more than a living presence, much as the photograph in the opening of *India Song*.

4.1.2 Music: Remembrance of things lost

As noted, in Marguerite Duras’s films, the audio track – or “film of the voice” – receives as much attention as “film of the image”. It is never merely decorative, illustrative of the action, or a superfluous element, and instead it functions as an “autonomous signifier” (Gaspari 2007, 201; see also Mossière 1992, 77) within the artwork. Music, as a crucial component of the audio track, plays a significant role in both films, whereas in the novel, where music cannot be played or heard, it emerges as a persistent reference, a symbol imbued with meaning.

In numerous occasions in the novel there is a mention of a certain piano song, or “that old tune ‘Indiana’s Song’” (Duras [1966] 1987, 78) which the Vice-Consul, Jean-Marc de H., one of the main characters of the novel and the two films, whistles during

his walks around Calcutta. Moreover, the reader learns from bits of narration in the novel that he used to play that song as a child in France: “Yes, long ago, at night, yes, a child used to pick out with one finger a tune that sounded like ‘Indiana’s Song’” (Duras [1966] 1987, 23). At the Ambassador’s reception, the smiling Vice-Consul is listening to a song being played at the ballroom; “[t]he tune, ‘Indiana’s Song,’ evokes the memory of that lonely, dark, abominable act” (Duras [1966] 1987, 79), a reference of his episode of madness when he fired at lepers in the Shalimar Gardens. The song is clearly emotionally and symbolically charged, and represents all that he has lost in his life: his childhood, his home, his love, his career. The song is also a symbol for his naïve image of India and all the hopes he fostered about his future, possibly different life in the colony: “Someone recalls: He whistles ‘Indiana’s Song’ in the grounds. [...] ‘Indiana’s Song’ was all he knew about India, until he came here”, says an anonymous voice (Duras [1966] 1987, 116). In both films the name of the song changes to “India Song”, after which one of the films is titled. Though references to this particular song are very common, in both films the Vice-Consul remarks: “I listen to ‘India Song’. I came to India because of ‘India Song.’”

For Anne-Marie Stretter, music is also laden with nostalgia and memories of her youth in Venice. In *Le Vice-consul*, we read:

Anne-Marie X, seventeen years old, tall and fragile, at the Venice Conservatoire. She is sitting her final examinations, playing the Schubert work that George Crown [her friend from Calcutta] likes. She is the white hope of western music. The applause is deafening. The richly dressed audience congratulate this beloved child of Venice. He thinks: who could have imagined her in India? (Duras [1966] 1987, 149)

In contrast, in the film one of the anonymous voices observes: “In Venice, already, very young, eighteen years old, music, to the point of madness. Until a sort of suicide, already,” while the camera fixes on a photograph of young Anne-Marie Stretter on the piano lid. Even after arriving in India, she continues to play the piano (“They can hear her a long way off. No doubt she plays the piano every evening here, as in Calcutta” (Duras [1966] 1987, 149)), perhaps as a way of holding onto her younger self, full of hopes and aspirations. The novel also suggests that Anne-Marie Stretter was once familiar with and even played “Indiana’s Song”: “The black grand piano is shut. On the music-stand there is a score, also shut” (Duras [1966] 1987, 21–22). However, in *India Song*, while the piano is present in the ballroom, the score is absent, and she admits while dancing with the young attaché that she has been playing less and less in recent years because “a sort of pain is linked to music ... for some time now, for me”.

In this sense, the title of *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* takes on a particular significance, directly evoking Anne-Marie Stretter's past in Venice and imbuing the film with an additional layer of meaning.

India Song is also the title of the film's theme song, a slow, nostalgic and yearning piece to which the two protagonists dance their only dance during the reception, the film's climactic moment. The entire score for *India Song* was composed by Argentine composer Carlos d'Alessio, whom Marguerite Duras met in late 1973. She initially commissioned him to compose a piece titled "Blue Moon" for her first film, *La Femme du Gange*. However, during the filming of the radio play *India Song*, "Blue Moon" was renamed "Indian Song", a title it retained in the film (see de Chalonge 2011, 1876). D'Alessio's composition sought to evoke the atmosphere of 1940s Argentine dance music, which, unlike the modern Western repertoire, featured "a repertoire of remnants of old songs" (Duras 2001, 92). In the same interview, Duras remarked that this music felt "very natural" to her, like a "flow of blood" that completely liberates the body (Duras 2001, 92).

The sense of nostalgia for what has been lost is even more pronounced and brought to the extreme in *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*. Slow theme songs and their piano variations alternate with faster-paced Charlestons, rumbas, and tangos, which, when played over images of the ruined and decayed remains of a once-opulent mansion, evoke distant echoes of a long-lost era. If in *India Song* the characters sometimes appeared as spectres, moving with slow, dreamlike gestures, in *Son nom de Venise* they exist only as distant echoes. All that remains of them are their disembodied voices, the lingering soundtrack, and two almost entirely motionless, photograph-like shots of Anne-Marie Stretter alongside an unidentified woman (possibly the actress Nicole Hiss). The film, stripped of almost all human bodily presence, pushed themes of absence, loss, and memory to their absolute limits.

4.2 Paratextual analysis: *Réécrire*

Duras, besides her literary career, turned to adapting her own literary works for film in the late 1960s. This shift followed her earlier involvement in notable cinematic projects, such as her role as screenwriter for Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). She found the cinematic adaptations of films made by other directors "unbearable" and felt that they "betrayed the novel I had written" (Duras 1992, 13). In an interview with Leopoldina Pallotta della Torre (Duras and Pallotta della Torre 2016, 85), she further stated that these adaptations distorted her texts by "appropriating stories or re-inventing them" and attempting to "fill the gaps in the written text", thereby stripping

the words of their intensity. Moreover, Duras's gradual transition from the novel to theatre and eventually to film was facilitated by her distinctive writing style, as many of her literary works (e.g., *Moderato Cantabile*) are structured around dialogue (see Günther 2002, 14, 18). As Dominique Noguez (1992, 9) observes, it was perhaps the "great naivety" with which she approached the unfamiliar world of cinema – as a writer rather than a trained filmmaker – that enabled her to do work entirely on her own terms, shaping film according to her own vision of its technical possibilities and, in doing so, transcending conventional cinematic boundaries.

However, it seems that this was not her only motivation. As Diana Koloini (2023, 101) notes in the preface to Slovene translation of Duras's final book, *Écrire* (1993; Slovene translation *Pisati*, 2023), "rewriting" or *réécrire*, *redire* as she called it in French, became her chosen creative mode and a central theme of her late self-reflection. "I have said it before and I will say it again, because it is never the same. It must be said again," Duras asserted (cited in Alazet 2007, 63, my translation). For her, a text could only be completed through variation and repetition – processes that brought it closer to its intended meaning. As Koloini (2023, 101, my translation) puts it, "to write is to copy, but not as a repetition of the same thing, but precisely as a process of reworking, of inventing the new".

In this sense, repetition and the continual retelling of the same story and its repercussions are fundamental to the India Cycle. Sirkka Knuuttila (2011, 16) identifies the cycle as the most illustrative fictional example of Duras's artistic method – one that continuously reshapes the same theme across different genres and media. This approach, she argues (Knuuttila 2011, 30), stems from Duras's deep-seated drive to develop new artistic devices when revisiting and reconfiguring her haunting, dream-like scenes. At its core lies the story of Lol V. Stein and, more specifically, the defining moment of her madness at the dance in S. Tahla, when Anne-Marie Stretter takes her fiancé, Michael Richardson, away. This pivotal event serves as the narrative impulse (Stone McNeece 1996, 31), catalyst, or generative force (Murphy 1984, 122) for the entire cycle. Echoes, fragments, and traces of this original trauma reverberate throughout the novels and films, resurfacing at different narrative levels and within varying contexts. These works are bound not only by the memory of the dance in S. Tahla, but also by an enduring undercurrent of loss and longing, so typical of Duras's opus.

For Duras, *réécrire* was not merely an act of repetition but, above all, an exploration of new narrative dimensions and possibilities within what had already been expressed – existing paradoxically as both the "same" and the "different". At the same time, she acknowledged that these variations could not exist without the pre-existing text. This idea is clearly articulated in the preface to her play *India Song*:

The characters mentioned in this story have been displaced from the book *Le Vice-consul* and projected into new narrative territories. It is therefore no longer possible to bring them back to the book or to read *India Song* as a cinematographic or theatrical adaptation of *Le Vice-consul*. Even though an episode from that book is taken up here almost in its entirety, its integration into the new narrative alters its reading, its perception. In reality, *India Song* follows *La Femme du Gange*. If *La Femme du Gange* had not been written, *India Song* would not have been either. (Duras 2011b, 1521)

Even though Duras did not frame her work within theoretical paradigms, it is noteworthy that she touches on some key theoretical concerns in a brief essay titled “Translation”, particularly regarding the question of the interpretative nature of translation:

A translated text has been translated by someone based on a first reading which is always just as personal as the writing, and which can never be erased. Is it possible to talk about a musical translation? We talk about musical interpretations. It’s a shame that when we talk about translation, we stop at its literal meaning. As if meaning could only be found in texts, and not in music. Doesn’t the convention of respected meaning in fact propagate backwards ideas that work against the liberty of a text, against its breath, or its madness? (Duras 2019, 38)

Through this reading, it becomes clear that Duras understands translation – a form of repetition – as inherently interpretive and capable of crossing linguistic and medial boundaries. This aligns with her own practice of rewriting, which she consistently described as a means of generating something new: a renewed exploration of the same narrative under shifting formal and material constraints.

Marguerite Duras also asserted on various occasions that there was an inner impulse that made her write the same story over and over again. When talking about the making of *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, the final film in the India Cycle, she even mentioned a kind of “discomfort” (Duras 2011a, 1628) and “dissatisfaction” (Duras and Pallotta della Torre 2016, 86) that she felt for months after the completion of *India Song*. She felt that she had not said everything she wanted to say in this film, and that the thing was not yet finished. For this reason, she used the unaltered audio track of *India Song*, which had already been recorded, almost entirely in *Son nom de Venise*. In the new film, the audio track accompanies slow, long takes of the ruined and empty Rothschild mansion where she had shot her previous film a few years earlier. In doing

so, she created a powerful counterpoint between the soundtrack, where we hear the voices and music from the dance at the Ambassador's residence, and the space where the dance took place, but which is now completely abandoned and deserted, with no living creature left in it. "What is initiated in *India Song* – death, showing death – is accomplished in *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*", Duras said in a conversation with Dominique Noguez (2001, 109). She added: "*Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* is, for me, the most important work I have created in cinema" (Duras 2001, 106).

5. Discussion

This study aimed to broaden the understanding of self-translation as a process of creative repetition and reinterpretation, extending its scope beyond traditional linguistic boundaries to include inter- and intrasemiotic contexts – an aspect often overlooked in translation studies. By examining self-translation in selected works of Marguerite Duras's India Cycle, this study explored multiple dimensions of the phenomenon, addressing its micro- and macrolevels. The questions it aimed to answer were: What translation techniques does Duras employ? And how does she conceptualize her own practice of self-translation?

The analysis was twofold. The first part examined the translation techniques employed in three of the six works in the India Cycle – the novel *Le Vice-consul* and the films *India Song* and *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*. This analysis focused on a comparative exploration of the motifs of death, loss, and memory, with a particular attention to two key elements: the death of the protagonist Anne-Marie Stretter, and the role of the music.

Knuuttila (2011, 36) describes Duras's use of repetition as a technique that both guides and disrupts the reader's interpretative process by playing with similarities and differences, layering and re-layering meaning. By reworking the same metaphorical and metonymic elements across novels, plays, and films, Duras constructs a verbal and audiovisual network of accumulating significance, ultimately elevating them to an emblematic level. Her style blends subtle, indirect storytelling with explicit self-reflexive techniques. Probably the most evident technique in Duras's self-translation is her exploration through the dissonance between sound and image. The soundtrack, as an autonomous and meaning-laden signifier, plays a crucial role in this process. The same scenes and narratives from the novel and the two films are reinterpreted in new artistic contexts, at times pushed to their extremes. Anne-Marie Stretter, whose fate remains uncertain in *Le Vice-consul*, is said to disappear into the sea in *India Song*, where her death is subtly conveyed through the cinematic merging of past

and present, leaving spectators uncertain what the images on the screen really depict. However, Anne-Marie Stretter is only definitely “killed” in *Son nom de Venise*, where she exists solely as a memory – a disembodied voice on an audio track from *India Song* playing over the decayed interior of what was once a sumptuous mansion – and a still, ghostly, photograph-like presence, appearing at the very end of the film.

In *Le Vice-consul*, music serves as a motif and symbol of nostalgia and the past lives of Anne-Marie Stretter and Jean-Marc de H., while in *India Song* it becomes fully realized through Carlos d’Alessio’s melancholic soundtrack, which the viewers can experience directly. Music is not only mentioned in dialogues, but also heard in the background and visually represented through dance and images of closed piano. In *Son nom de Venise*, the relationship between sound and image becomes more intense, as the music from ballroom reception is now projected onto an uninhabited interior, heightening the sense of absence and loss. The three works thus remain in constant dialogue, continuously generating new meanings.

Another layer of explanation emerges through an examination of Duras’s own reflections and experiences with self-translation. The motivation behind her self-translation seems to be three-fold, shaped by both external and internal factors. The author repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with cinematic adaptations of her novels by other directors, feeling that they “betrayed” her writing style. Additionally, she was drawn to experimentation and the interrogation of artistic boundaries, not only in literature but also in film, continually questioning the conventions of both novelistic and cinematic forms. While her films, except for *India Song*, were not commercially successful, that was never her primary aim. “The reality reproduced by classical cinema has never been of any interest to me. Everything is said too much, shown too much—an excess of meaning in which, paradoxically, the context becomes impoverished,” she clarified in an interview (Duras and Pallotta della Torre 2016, 76). Finally, Duras felt an internal compulsion to “rewrite” and tell the same stories repeatedly, such as that of Anne-Marie Stretter, a character who made a profound impression on her in childhood.

In this sense, Duras’s self-translation is a dynamic, dialogical, and transformative process that goes beyond mere repetition or duplication. These intra- and intersemiotic reiterations serve as an evolving interrogation of the limits of artistic expression and a powerful tool for incessant reinterpreting and reimagining the recurring themes of loss, absence, and memory that have preoccupied her throughout her work.

To answer our research questions: Duras employs techniques such as repetition, dissonance between sound and image, metaphorical and metonymic layering, and recontextualization across media to reinterpret narratives and generate new

meaning. The analysis of paratextual material revealed that she views self-translation as a deeply interpretative and creative process driven by a desire for artistic control, experimentation, and the need to continually revisit and reimagine certain narratives and characters.

6. Conclusion

As Nergaard and Arduini (2011, 11–12) argue, new objects called “translation” will continue to emerge, reshaping and redefining existing concepts. By expanding the notions of self-translation and intersemiotic translation while addressing the gaps in the current literature, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how meaning is not only created but also transformed and transmitted across different artworks and contexts. In doing so, it fosters interdisciplinary dialogue and encourages further exploration of diverse translation phenomena.

While the analysis has highlighted the multifaceted ways in which Duras used self-translation as a tool for artistic exploration, it also raises several questions and points to avenues for further research.

One potential drawback of the proposed methodological model, while inclusive, is that it necessarily leaves out certain readings and aspects of Duras’s work. One promising direction for future analysis thus lies in the exploration of feminist and postcolonial dimensions within Duras’s self-translations. The *India Cycle*, which revolves around the haunting stories of three main characters (the Cambodian beggar-woman, Anne-Marie Stretter, and Jean-Marc de H.) in 1930s India, can be examined through both postcolonial and feminist theoretical frameworks. Analysing the tensions among cultural identity, loss, and collective memory in the context of inter- and intrasemiotic translation would add new layers and offer a broader perspective on Duras’s practice of self-translation.

Moreover, since traditional research on self-translation has largely focused on interlingual translation, incorporating insights from intra- and intersemiotic translation contexts could provide a valuable complement. In this context, investigating whether the techniques and motivations behind different types of self-translation differ or overlap would provide a fresh perspective and open a promising direction for future research. Examining these borderline translation phenomena would not only shed light on their specific mechanisms but also broaden our awareness, prompting a reassessment of fundamental concepts in translation studies.

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