

On Translating

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This cluster is comprised of an interview with Chelva Kanaganayakam on his myriad translation projects and the poet R. Cheran's reflection on the translator's emotional labor involved in translating difficult pasts. It also includes the last poem Chelva Kanaganayakam translated from Tamil to English—Cheran's "Sundari" written on September 11, 2013 for Sunila Sundari Janet Abeysekera. I hope that this cluster will facilitate an appreciation of how the politics of aesthetics and public pedagogy have become central to the cultivation of civic agency. As Kanaganayakam reflects on his role as translator of Sri Lankan Tamil literature into English and Cheran meditates on his poetic practice—the difficulties of translating loss, grief, and ongoing trauma through the medium of poetry—we encounter the translator as mediating our knowledge of that suffering and violence through the English language. The poet's struggle to bear witness to specific histories of violence is replicated in the emotional labor of the translator as he strives to translate for non-Tamil readers those difficult pasts, histories, cultures, and memories.