Towards a Nhangga Hermeneutic
Bilarl (sooty bell magpie)

Latti lanā rabbura kurjē

Īlabilalbī

Old woman making a wurli for the rain sings. (Old woman - bilarl)
She asks which way water comes in through the wurli. Inside
young wiana, a dhalgara (young woman married) can't speak and
points out with warda and shows where water comes. By and by
old woman sees nunga bringing mālu. They give the old woman
kuldu and junkia (ribs and thighs) and their own murduru who
can't speak eats plenty. Old woman is their mingari.

One day the nunga mukka comes back. Mingari leaves young woman
(thalbu) and tracks them up. She was sharpening her wana and
by and by she saw Mamu (Devil) catching them. She killed
Mamu with her wana and took nunga back alive.

Nunga young bilal.
Bilarl (scotty bell magpie)

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īlalbilalbī

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Nunga young bilal.
M: We’ve established that she’s singing for the rain [...] and gabigu gulgirn-gadn is singing to the rain.

SW: But I thought that was the continuation of that story about her building that, making that camp because rain’s coming.

M: Well that’s what we were talking about – is she singing the rain? She’s singing a song as she’s … making the shelter

SW: yeah, because of

M: shelter, yeah, yeah

SW: in expectation of the rain coming.

M: So you could just say if you’re looking at the context of the story you could say gabiri marnardu warnina. And that literally means the rain is falling, the big rain ...

PM: See the way that I see it and everyone’s got their own interpret …, not everyone’s got their own, there are a number of interpretations, there’re at least two. The two main ones are it’s raining at the time and that’s why the person inside is pointing to the spot where the water’s coming in or as you say it could be singing for the rain in anticipation of the rain in some sort of ceremonial way there’s a link then between the rain and the bilarl ...

SW: Yeah, I look at it like that [...] like a rain dance you know, she’s singing for the rain.

YW: Doing the rain song, inni?

SW: Yes doing the rain song and she’s making that ngura in anticipation of the rain.

PM: Can I add something here – can I just say as a part of this exercise of translating from the old records into modern Wirangu, or into Wirangu, back into Wirangu, we’ve just got to imagine who gave … and the conditions she recorded it in in Eucla a hundred years ago.

SW: Who, not Daisy Bates … that’s not her story.
PM: She recorded it from a Wirangu person a hundred years ago at Eucla, right?

WM: From a what person?

PM: Wirangu ... at Eucla about a hundred years ago. So what we’re saying is this person may or not have been a strong English speaker. She may have even, I think she spoke some Wirangu herself, and the question is did she record it, hear it in Wirangu and then record it in English. So we don’t really know that but we need to make some allowances for the fact that we room to interpret what’s going on. And just as a rule, I’m saying as a rule if we were to look at another thing that turns up out of the old archive we still need to have this approach where – and this is what I think M’s trying to do well, is feel your way through it ... feel your way through the story and try to fill in those bits as you draw on your own knowledge and your own experience and think ‘right, we can’t look at it exactly as it is written, but we need to fill it in because it’s only partial’.

M: Yeah

SW: Yeah, but it’s not, it’s not, I’m sure it’s not. Because she’s as she’s building the ... well it could be as she’s building the ngura that she’s singing. Just singing you know, any song. It’s got to be to do with what she’s doing

PM: Yeah, so what she’s singing would have a meaning to it.

GM: I agree with SW. I think we’re trying to we’re filling in the gaps of our own cultural knowledge [like?] we’re filling in the gaps of the story. That’s true. What’s happened is that the interpreter has told her in language and she’s written it down in English in a kind of wherever she was in her headspace around that. But because we know there is a story behind it [...] Wirangu being rain cloud singers and the fact that this song is connected to the story connected to the area connected to the dyugur in that area. It is all a part of

SW: [interjects]Culture

M: the story that was captured. Yeah, culture, yeah.
Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the centre of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering; aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.

Walter Benjamin (1992:77)