

# Three Poems: 'A Ship in Distress', 'A Christmas Carol for the Carers', 'The Service of my Baba's Windows'

Angela Costi

## 'A Ship in Distress'

*after artwork no. 37 folio 20 of Shipwreck (1) Sketchbook 1803-10 by J M W Turner*

*study (a)*

I wish it was a ship I saw instead of Mamma  
on her side with her massive naked thigh afloat

the rest of her in deep trouble gurgling up the storm  
of a day filleting then frying then serving fish

she rolled the bucket brimming and splashing  
slapped the mop and churned the grit to be good

the floor greasy from deep-fried oil  
slipped her into the swell of grime

worked her arms like a captain's command  
when the mast breaks and the sails tear

*study (b)*

when she fell

it was slow

as if pulled down by a long sweeping line across a page  
she lay there

willing herself to rest  
with clenched teeth

knowing her daughter's scream  
would save her from drowning

---

artwork 37 folio 20 of Turner's Shipwreck (1) sketchbook c.1803-10 accessed:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/jmw-turner/joseph-mallord-william-turner-a-ship-in-distress-r1139189>

## A Christmas Carol for the Carers

*and for Eleni Costi who has advanced Alzheimer's  
after A Christmas Carol, films 1938, 1984, 2009*

### *Pitch*

the miserly multi million man is on rerun  
year after year after repenting his ways  
not before humiliating the poor,  
this year we watch another movie  
starring an unknown with casual work on a usual day  
two hours before she is scheduled to stop  
and go home to plastic green branches  
trying to hold red baubles, falling  
on her children's second hand gifts

### *Trailer*

Androulla Dimitriadis is driving too fast  
for a quiet street, receives a call from her manager  
puts him on speaker without slowing down  
    Schedule change  
    Now?  
    Head out to Mrs Costi, needs showering  
the car slides to a stop  
grinds its gears as it circles back

### *Premiere*

the camera pans out from steering wheel to freeway  
brimming with fuel's adrenalin  
with carers navigating past semi trailers on roundabouts  
dark tunnels across bridges to reach  
a door in time to open a flashback  
    The young woman is softly stepping into the dimly lit room  
    commanding calm as she calls *Eleni Eleni*  
    On her knees, picking the crumbs from the carpet  
    Eleni looks up  
    and the light on her face shows joy

## The Service of my Baba's Windows

*i.m. Kostantinos Costi, born in Kyrenia, Cyprus 1936. Before his home  
became Turkish occupied, he left in the mid-1950s. As Cyprus was a  
British colony during his youth, he spoke three languages: Cypriot  
dialect, English and Greek. He died in Melbourne 2023.*

*My last view      μόνο αυτό το δέντρο I love*

from his wheelchair, his eyes do all the climbing

when  
the grand Melaleuca taps the glass with a branch

this is not the tree of his young fear, spying on soldiers  
chasing his sister  
it is the tree that visits him each and every day

there are so many others in the large building  
he calls *Prison*  
they too are sustained by a window's care

he tells the story of the giant cat who pounces  
leaves  
*This γάτα sees the ghosts looking out*

his blind is up for the moon to shed light  
on a scream he heard  
*It could be a possum or the γάτα, or a woman*

*Ημουν χαρούμενος happy to sit on my καρέκλα*  
*getting my pension growing my κήπο*

he hogs a room of the brick veneer house  
with a window that takes most of one wall

the curtain is tied back, constrained at frame-side  
like an old friend who pops in uninvited with sad news

there is no vista of plump grapes entwining passionfruit  
no boundless boat spreading a net for swordfish

these are views for his father who was swamped by regrets  
this window mediates his mood with fragments of shade

shows him how the toil of dirt in that patch is one potato  
for him to fatten wash peel mash then lavish with gravy

*My souvla ετοιμάσα*  
*the way ο πατέρας μου taught me*  
*our οικογένεια was young and alive*

the frame is awash with his cousins competing  
to air their Cypriot laments while his wife threads

her torso through pockets of relatives with tray after  
tray of fetta drizzling, haloumi sizzling, pita swaddling

the lamb, oregano wafts with the smoke of charcoal

as whiskey is gulped, wine is sipped and water is left

lonely he becomes a tall man at his window, turning  
his arms into flags, waving at them to go to his table

laden with memories from his Yiayia and Pappou

*Sit Eat Drink Talk*

*only of what θυμόμαστε*

*That work broke my back*

she ignores his sigh as she unties the curtain  
instantly his κήπο vanishes into crimson

in the early morning, he lifts the layers, peaks and  
dares the clouds to hail inclement as his legs ache

when baby-blue gazes back he grunts, searching for the keys  
to drive him from his garden bed of garlic tomatoes and basil

at the bench waits the hardboiled egg, and a smirk of grey  
parts spring's weather into laying bricks or laying down

he barracks for the wind as it rallies branches to fight  
gulps coffee then phones his boss *I'm not coming in*

*My first time in the νοσοκομείο the nurses were καλοί*

he was possessed by a zest to dance  
away  
his grieving wounds

before the stones pulped his kidney, he  
drank  
the zivania and smoke of rebetika

the electric bed allows him to goggle  
the *Fancy*  
Fitzroy Gardens made for polite curtsy and bow

his stitches itch with tubes hitched to make him piss  
still his days  
are filled with grand-dame elms fanning his brow

he totters to the sill creaking out a whistle for  
*Parrot*  
red orange blue swoops past, while he holds his breath

*My first job was εντάξει I could make them smile  
I was a baby sixteen years old*

window smears a lash at DAGOS  
TAKING OUR JOBS as he learns  
to fry eggs and bacon for officers  
who grunt their orders at him

the sky is dark as they  
make him catch their pence  
after he says *Thank you sir*  
without a trace of accent

when the last customer leaves  
he sneaks a smoke or a candy  
looks at the *Sexy* rows of cars  
chooses the one for dreaming

*In Kyrenia the θάλασσα  
was outside  
looking in*

he folds the curtain around  
his hiding body  
pressing face  
on glass  
his  
*Mama*  
calls his name as he smiles  
at the ζουλατζιά  
with its thousands of red berries  
he won't pick any  
they are meant for looking  
in a home  
where a window  
is valued  
more  
than a painting

### **Author Bio**

**Angela Costi** is the author of five poetry collections. Her most recent, *An Embroidery of Old Maps and New* (Spinifex Press, 2021) won the Book Prize for Poetry in English, Greek Australian Cultural League 2022. Her sixth manuscript, *The Heart of the Advocate* is scheduled for publication with Liquid Amber Press, 2025. She is known as Αγγελική Κωστή among the Cypriot Greek diaspora, which is her ancestry. She is based in Naarm.