

The Shipwreck

Painted in 1850, part of a retrospective of the works of JMW Turner exhibited at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

In Turner's painting *The Shipwreck*
everything leans and moans,

even the glowering clouds.
Three small wooden craft

are flung from the drowning ship.
The striped cap of the sailor at the tiller

looks like exposed ribs,
while in the other life boats

men drape agonized atop one another
and waves hoist

their hummocks of foam.
The young genius, the painter,

lingers lovingly, reaching
over each violent wrench of water.

The Shipwreck is his first large-scale oil,
his palettes and knives and brushes reaching,

desperate, through a vortex of small men
centered on their unfolding disaster,

two dozen hopeless figures
hemmed in by a dense black sky.

Kim Roberts is the author of two books of poetry, *The Kimnama* (Vrzh Press, 2007), and *The Wishbone Galaxy* (WWPH, 1994). Her individual poems have been published in such journals as *Southwest Review*, *Ohio Review*, *Malahat Review*, *No Tell Motel*, and *New Letters*, and she has received writers' residency grants from eleven artist colonies (most recently the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center in Nebraska). She edits the online journal, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly* (<http://www.beltwaypoetry.com>), and co-edits the *Delaware Poetry Review* (<http://www.depoetry.com>).