

Immigrants

The starving horses were left behind
in the black fields.

A cousin promised to give them oats
and keep an eye on the house
in case we were back, but
no one ever rode the ship
the other way.

The horses would die
because the cousin needed the oats
for her children.

Margaret cried,
and Robert put a rock
from the field in his pocket.

Thomas would forget
and John would remember
the smell of peat and the mist
in the hills over the river.

The ship was small for so many.

I was sick from the waves,
massive as mountains.

Weeks passed and the sea did not relent.

A baby was born. Twenty-seven died.

In New York harbor,
they wouldn't let us get off.

Not for two days, and then only

those who had no fever. When

finally we were allowed to go,

my brother dropped his rock

in the water, and my sister

cried again as I pulled her hand

until we stepped off the plank

onto wet cobblestones,

slippery as promises under

our sea weary feet.