A socialist can forgive many things:
prison after days at sea
interrogations with small children
hungry from travel
but I’ll never forgive that old Jew
who called the Canadian border
to tell them I’m a communist

I knew him from the same small town
where the factories shot buttons to the sky
where the floors & ceilings of apartments
were close enough to converse
where we never, ever prayed
for fear of heaven
I was there when his mother refused to leave
He was there when mine did the same
From Siberia I heard he was in Uzbekistan
From Uzbekistan I heard he was in Siberia
When we had a death, three miscarriages
news came that he had five, a stillbirth
disintegrating in the earth when he left
I saw him on the ship & I said landsman!
We never spoke the names of the dead
even if they were our mothers
even if they died at the same time

But three days of seasickness
& emotions were running high
It’s possible I spoke out of line
somewhere between Europe and the shore
It’s happened even to the saintly among us
and this yidele, this mamzer
this stick of flesh with eyes
a thousand umbrellas should open inside him
and shatter that sack of bones he calls survival!
To say a socialist is a communist
when you know such a socialist
is only, has only ever been, a socialist
when you rose up in the same roads
and rocked in the same boat
when your mothers
of blessed memory
were killed the same way
can you imagine
this landsman had it in him?