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## Postcards from Babel

Is it coincidence that Warsaw saw the worst of the war?  
Or that all the shrapnel of the *heart* lies scattered in the *earth*?  
Mostly the world is not happening in our language.  
Beside a fountain in a hillside park in Catania, Sicily,  
a boy and girl face each other in a dialect of the sea.  
As he steps toward her smiling, she steps back, uphill,  
pushing his hands away without quite letting go, a smile  
breaking like a wave across her censure. Mirrored in words,  
a pantomime, they will walk her step by step uphill backwards  
so slowly the curving six-meter path around the fountain  
it will take five minutes before they disappear into the horizon  
of what was I saying? The old ladies on a bench outside  
Soviet-era towers on the outskirts of Moscow traffic hide  
memories in sounds strange as acorns, but they might  
just be praising Putin or calling all the young girls whores.  
We forget, or never knew, there were 300,000 axis soldiers  
on the small island of Sicily in the Summer of 1943.  
Only in Italian and Spanish does the word for Winter so closely  
resemble the word for Hell. And only in English does the sound  
used to raise a neighbor's barn also raze a city to the ground.  
In Poland, the worst of the war was *najgorsze z wojna*,  
and could have been anywhere. I walked through Warszawa,  
its old town rebuilt from 18th century paintings of Bellotto  
(after the Germans turned every block of uprising to rubble)  
to where the trains parked at the edge of the walled ghetto.  
In the tenth century, when the exiled Jews first entered  
the fertile valleys of the Vistula, they kept hearing the word  
"Polin" on everyone's lips, which in their own language  
meant "rest here." And there they would.