



FORGIVENESS

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Matthew Ichihashi Potts, author of *Forgiveness: An Alternative Account*, calls the act of forgiving another who has done a serious wrong “incredible” (New Haven: Yale UP, 2022, 10). Forgiveness requires remembering trauma, facing its reality, and then mourning. It may include rage, but forgiveness “foreswear[s] vengeance” and “reject[s] retribution” (10). It does not require repentance by the offender. It may or may not include reconciliation, and it may or may not be a faith-based response.

In the three novels and one novella that we will read together, *Eden Mine* by S.M. Hulse, “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin, *Jazz* by Toni Morrison, and *There There* by Tommy Orange, the problems the characters face are complex, and so too are the ways they cope and make sense of their trauma.

Eden Mine begins, “My brother’s bomb explodes at 10:16 on a late April Sunday morning.” The protagonist, Jo(b) Faber, has had so many people and institutions to forgive from early in her life, and she seems to have reached acceptance until her brother Samuel’s act forces her to face reality that she has avoided.

More familiar, “Sonny’s Blues” “is also about siblings who have been raised in the same household and have experienced many of the same traumas. Yet only Samuel and Sonny follow nonconformist paths that place them outside their families. Samuel and Sonny cause their siblings to re-examine their memories and judgments.

Jazz is an expansive novel. Morrison explores forgiveness within a family and a community. Set in New York during the Jazz Age with references to jazz and the blues, an unnamed narrator tells the related stories of Violet and Joe, a married couple from the South, and Dorcas and her Aunt Alice.

Historical context is also important in *There There*, probably the most challenging of the four works. For Urban Indians, past actions demand remembrance and re-evaluation, even though, as the narrator says, “We are the memories we don’t remember, which live in us, which we feel . . .” (10). Urban Indians come from all over the country “to be together” at the Big Oakland Powwow where the separate stories of the twelve characters come together (135).

In “Diving into the Wreck,” Adrienne Rich offers this possibility:

I came to see the damage that was done
And the treasures that prevail.

Alongside painful memory and mourning, the works we will read move partially and haltingly toward the healing that can come from also seeing “the treasures.”