

PROLOGUE

AFTERMATHS

The future diminishes as the past grows, until the future has completely gone and everything is past.

—SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*

At one level, my central concern in *Omens of Adversity* is with time or, rather, with *temporality*, with the lived experience of time passing—the social relation, more precisely, between past (the time of memory), present (the time of conscious awareness), and future (the time of anticipation). It seems to me that, though in a still inchoate way, a new time-consciousness is emerging everywhere in contemporary theory.¹ Not surprisingly, perhaps, a fresh resonance has attached itself to Augustine and his perplexed anguish in the face of the unyielding *aporias* of temporal experience—the nonexistence of the past, the not-yet of the future, the fleeting instant of the present—by contrast with the divine transparency and constancy of eternity. In the memorably obsessive reflections that comprise book eleven of the *Confessions*, which trace his motivated and exacting path of existential self-questioning, these *aporias* constitute for him the immeasurable and ineliminable paradox of the being and nonbeing of time. And, of course, at least in the picture he draws of the soul's temporal distention (*distentio animi*) across the three dimensions of presentness—the presence of the past, the presence of the present, and the presence of the future—Augustine does not so much re-

solve the seemingly intractable problems of time as render them, in a *vivid* phenomenological way, all the more eloquent, all the more intense.²

Admittedly, though, my concerns in *Omens of Adversity* are not with the *whole* of this ontology of temporal presence (even though Augustine’s anxious sense of diminishing futures, captured in my epigraph, haunts the conceptual landscape of my preoccupations here).³ Inevitably, perhaps, I have a somewhat narrower focus than this—namely, the temporality of the aftermaths of political catastrophe, the temporal disjunctures involved in living *on* in the wake of past political time, amid the ruins, specifically, of postsocialist and postcolonial futures past. What interests me about these catastrophic aftermaths is above all the untimely experience they have provoked of a more acute *awareness* of time, a more arresting *attunement* to the uneven *topos* of temporality. They have provoked, if not an experience of time as such (whatever that might mean), then certainly an accentuated experience of temporality, of time as *conspicuous*, as “out of joint” (as Hamlet unnervingly put it). It is an experience of time standing *away*, so to speak, from its conventional grounding and embeddedness in history, its modern handmaiden, so that time and history, once barely distinguishable, seem no longer synchronized, much less synonymous—as though time had found itself *betrayed* by history, or that history now confronted us as inauthentic time, the irreversibly lapsed time of our former anticipations of political futurity.

I have written before—in *Conscripts of Modernity*—of something of this sense of the out-of-jointness of time, in reference to the seeming waning of the “longing for total revolution” that framed and animated the great modernist politics of emancipation, including (indeed, especially) its anticolonial and socialist forms.⁴ Skeptical of the historicism that plotted the story of past–present–future as a kind of Romance (in terms Hayden White made famous),⁵ I suggested that perhaps what our present solicits from us most urgently is an attunement to *tragedy*, to the sort of appreciation of contingency, chance, *peripeteia*, and catastrophe that a sensibility for the tragic aims to cultivate and enliven. The occasion for that thinking was my rereading of C. L. R. James’s classic story of the Haitian Revolution in *The Black Jacobins* and his late re-rendering (in the second, revised edition of that book) of the figure of his protagonist, Toussaint Louverture as an explicitly tragic hero. In *Omens of Adversity*, I turn this sense of the out-of-jointness of time to connected but extended purposes. The

idea and importance of tragedy, we will see, remain crucial to my concerns, but here I am interested less in tragedy's place in an overall reading of colonial and postcolonial history than in its usefulness for thinking about the *temporality of action*—the temporality of *political* action, especially. In the earlier book, I was concerned more with reading tragedy as a strategy of historical criticism; here I want to mobilize its resources and sensibilities for an approach to the pervasiveness of collisions in human actions in time. And where in the earlier book I was anxious to construct the space of visibility, so to speak, for the work of tragedy as such, here, by contrast, I take much of that work to be done and *begin* with tragic time to open a discursive space for a wider critical labor and a broader dispersion of concerns—with ruin and memory and generations, for example, as well as justice and forgiveness. But still, as in *Conscripts of Modernity*, it is revolution and revolutionary action that hold my attention in *Omens of Adversity*, that provide the essential conceptual-political terrain for my theoretical preoccupations. This is so because, as James says in his preface to *The Black Jacobins*, revolution offers an ideal, if rare, vantage from which to consider the nature of historical-political action since “society is at boiling point and therefore fluid,” and so renders human action, not so much more true as more vivid.⁶ But it is also because, as Hannah Arendt says in *On Revolution*, the idea of revolution has been a founding paradigm for the modern organization of political time, for connecting old endings to new beginnings and, therefore (I would add), connecting our dissatisfactions with the past to our hopes for alternative futures.⁷

In *Omens of Adversity*, I take as my historical occasion another Caribbean revolution, one that while less remote, temporally, than the Haitian Revolution, is still, perhaps, less present to our political memories and theoretical imaginations—namely, the Grenada Revolution (1979–83). If the Haitian Revolution is treated in some quarters now as though it were part of a story of universal freedom, the Grenada Revolution, by contrast, has largely been relegated to the margins of historical amnesia. The rise in the Grenada of the 1970s of the New Jewel Movement (NJM) as a revolutionary political organization aiming at state power is part of a wider story of the rise of Marxist-Leninist political formations in the Caribbean region during this period.⁸ Indeed, it is part of an even wider story of the radicalization of the Bandung project in the Third World, as postindependence political movements opted for the revolutionary overthrow of exist-

ing neocolonial regimes.⁹ These were years when revolutionary futures were not merely possible but *imminent*; not only imminent, but *possible*. Thus, the success of Maurice Bishop and his comrades in the leadership of the NJM in overthrowing the tyrannical rule of Eric Gairy in March 1979 was, in its way, a world-historical *event* in the modern history of revolutions, and certainly an unprecedented event in the political history of the Anglophone Caribbean. It was a revolutionary beginning, undoubtedly, a euphoric leap into the future. Like many Caribbeans of my generation I have a vivid memory of exactly where I was on the morning of 13 March 1979 when the news broke in on us: I was sitting in a lecture at the University of the West Indies, Mona, where I was working toward my undergraduate degree. But it was the beginning, also, though we could not see it then, of a sort of *end*. Not merely the beginning of the end of the particular story of the Grenada Revolution itself (although in retrospect it can be argued that the seeds of that were sown early), but the beginning of the end of a whole *era* of revolutionary socialist expectation—indeed, of revolutionary socialist possibility. Because when in October 1983 the Grenada Revolution collapsed, as a consequence of party conflict within and US military intervention from without (another moment vividly inscribed in my generational memory), the global conditions of possibility for *any* postcolonial socialism were already in steep—irreversible—decline. The 1980s marked the effective end of Bandung in any of its varied postures of nonaligned sovereignty.¹⁰ It was almost already the “end of history,” as it would come to be called. The leadership of Ronald Reagan in the United States and of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom had given impetus to a reformed and smugly confident liberalism—neoliberalism—armed with the militant determination and the military re-territorializing power to roll back what was now perceived as the “moral evil” of communism. And in the wake of their evident success—the irreversible collapse of the Soviet Union and its system of allied states—there arose, as a seemingly single and natural horizon, the new utopia of liberal democracy, its dogma of human rights, and the disciplining and governmenta-lizing technologies to urge and enforce its realization. In a real sense, the Grenada Revolution was the first casualty of the rise in the Reagan era of a belligerent neoconservative anticommunism. Therefore, in 1984, as the prison doors at Richmond Hill closed on the Grenada 17 (those of the party and army leadership of the Grenada Revolution accused of, and tried and

convicted for, plotting and carrying out the murder of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and his colleagues on 19 October 1983), they also *foreclosed* any possibility of return to the Cold War structure of ideological antagonisms that shaped their Marxist politics of anti-imperialism and socialism.¹¹ Their era had vanished, and now they were like leftovers from a former future stranded in the present. So that paradoxically, perhaps, in the wake of their trial—an explicitly Cold War event—these former revolutionaries would be obliged to undertake to save themselves from hanging and, subsequently, to seek to have their sentences overturned in a political world *redefined* in a new jargon of authenticity that no longer admitted the legibility, much less recognized the legitimacy, of their former political ambitions, their former political languages, their former political lives.

Thus, from the tragic action that brought about the downfall of the revolution to the regime of transitional justice that refigured the revolutionaries as criminals (the arc of my preoccupations in this book), the collapse, and aftermaths of the collapse, of the Grenada Revolution seem to me an exemplary instance of a larger phenomenon of global transformation and, therefore an exemplary terrain on which to think through aspects of the contemporary aporia of the crisis of political time. This is the discursive space of *Omens of Adversity*.

For moderns, temporality preeminently has been an experience of the unfolding of *historical* time. As is well enough known, modern historical time—the collective time of nations and classes and subjects and populations—has been organized around a notion of discrete but continuous, modular change, in particular, modular change as a linear, diachronically stretched-out *succession* of cumulative instants, an endless chain of displacements of before and after. Such succession, moreover, is progressive: change *is* improvement. Change, therefore, not only has a formal, built-in rhythm of movement and alteration but also a built-in *vector* of moral direction. Secular Enlightenment change is pictured as temporal movement in which, with regular periodicity, the future overcomes the past, and in which the present is a state of expectation and waiting for the fulfillment of the promise of social and political improvement. In the modernist Hegelian-Marxist version of this story of the march of historical time, change is imagined not only as successive and progressive, but

also as *revolutionary*. That is to say, it is governed by a logic of dialectical reason (however de-spiritualized and upended); the gradual evolution of successive forms of the present gives way in an eschatological moment to a utopian future in which the alienated, reified time of capitalism is overcome, and socialist humanity finally coincides with the time of its historical destiny. This is the awaited end of history, when time is at once realized and canceled. I believe that a deep *rupture* has occurred in this form of experience. There is, I think, a profound sense in which the once enduring temporalities of past–present–future that animated (indeed, that constructed, even *authorized*) our Marxist historical reason, and therefore organized and underwrote our ideas about historical change, no longer line up quite so neatly, so efficiently, so seamlessly, so instrumentally—in a word, so *teleologically*—as they once seemed to do. That old consoling sense of temporal *concordance* is gone. The present as time, as a temporal frame of meaningful experiential reference, no longer appears—as it was once prominently pictured as appearing—as the tidy dialectical negation of an oppressive or otherwise unwanted past, and it is hard to continue imagining the present as though it were merely waiting for its own dialectical overcoming in a Hegelian-Marxist story of futurity understood as the ready horizon of Universal History. The existential rhythms of that enduring relation between past, present, and future have been broken—or, at least, they somehow have been very significantly interrupted. So much so that now remains from the past stick unaccountably to the hinges of the temporality we hitherto relied on to furnish ourselves with the confidence that we are in fact going somewhere—somewhere other and maybe *better* than where we currently are. Time, in short, has become less yielding, less promising than we have grown to expect it should be. And what we are left with are *aftermaths* in which the present seems stricken with immobility and pain and ruin; a certain experience of temporal *afterness* prevails in which the trace of futures past hangs like the remnant of a voile curtain over what feels uncannily like an endlessly extending present.¹²

This sense of a stalled present, a present that stands out in its arrested movement, is no doubt one reason that Walter Benjamin has become a literary-philosophic figure of such resonance, and his work has seemed so prescient, so evocative, and so timely for contemporary discussions about time and history. For Benjamin, as we know, as the European 1930s grew more perilous, a central, urgent intellectual-political task was to sub-

vert the prevailing historicist philosophy of time and the conformist assumptions about change drawn from it (by social democrats and Marxists alike) and to provoke—indeed, to will—an *untimely* temporal sensibility for the future in the present. This is the role played in his thought by the theological idea of the “messianic” and “messianism,” especially in that memorable work, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” where its function is to help disabuse the present of the illusion of a future that is waiting elsewhere than the possible, graspable, *now*.¹³ The Benjaminian intuition was of the out-of-jointness of time in history, or of time *with* history. Indeed, one way to elaborate the sense I am pointing to of a conspicuous, arresting disjuncture between history and time—or between historicity and temporality as phenomenal planes of experience—is to pay attention to a curiously under-discussed early essay by Giorgio Agamben on time that draws inspiration precisely from this Benjaminian attunement to the contingencies of event and temporality.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, in this essay the starting point for Agamben’s reflections on time in Western philosophy (part of a larger reflection on catastrophe and modern experience) is the distinction Benjamin makes between the progressive, empty, and homogeneous time of versions of historicism and the ecstatic, momentous, and untimely time of the messianic coming. Agamben appreciates that in this work, Benjamin is pointing to an uncanny sense of divergence between the *experience of time* and the *expectations of history* and, more than this, to the hegemonic *occlusion* of temporality by rigid conventions of historicity. For Agamben, this disjuncture has broader philosophic implications for thinking time and history. “Every conception of history,” he writes, “is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated.”¹⁵ Notably, then, the problem of time and the problem of history are thought of here as *irreducible* to each other; they are connected, undeniably, but not necessarily identical. A distinctive temporality is always embodied in—while not being the simple mirror of—each imaginary of history. The assumption that time and history are identical—or, anyway, that what plainly matters is time *as* history, as opposed to some other plane of temporality—has been a pervasive one in modern political thought, including, of course, Marxist political thought. Indeed, this is partly what is at stake here for Agamben. “Even historical materialism,” he laments, “has until now neglected to elaborate a concept of time that compares with its concept of

history.”¹⁶ And this omission has had profound conceptual implications for Marxism as a practice of criticism (and therefore for such Marxist revolutionary movements as will concern me in this book) inasmuch as it has “been unwittingly compelled to have recourse to a concept of time dominant in Western culture for centuries, and so to harbour, side by side, a revolutionary concept of history and a traditional experience of time.”¹⁷

Now, Agamben’s exploration of the question of time and of the discordance between time and history (much like Paul Ricoeur’s later, more systematic inquiry into time and narrative) is meant to be *philosophic* in the sense that he is principally concerned with developing a more adequate normative account of time than currently exists.¹⁸ What account of time, for example, might do justice to Marx’s exemplary conception of history? This is Agamben’s question. Thus, he hopes to find, “scattered among the folds and shadows of the Western cultural tradition,” the elements of a different and more active and decisive conception of time.¹⁹ Scanning that tradition, he thinks he can just about discern some of these elements, for example, in ancient Gnosticism, in which there is an experience of time that is radically opposed to both the Greek idea of a circular time (now largely defunct as experience) and the Christian notion of a linear time (the modern secularization of which is crucial to Enlightenment conceptions of time, including Marxism’s). The time of Gnosticism, Agamben says, is “an incoherent and unhomogeneous time, whose truth is in the moment of abrupt interruption when man, in a sudden act of consciousness, takes possession of his own condition of being resurrected.”²⁰ It is easy to see in this formulation the pursuit and playing out of a whole Benjaminian motif of “now-time,” the *kairos* in which a favorable moment is grasped in its finite, unrepeatable potentiality.²¹ It opens a conceptual path that enables Agamben to solicit allusive intimations of Heidegger’s way (owing famously to Augustine and Kierkegaard and Dilthey) of displacing the continuous time of “vulgar historicism” and of gesturing, at least, at a notion of being as “primordial temporalization,” as having the capacity for seizing the moment as an “authentic” experience of *temporalizing* time.²² Thus, for Agamben, a new conception of time will have to be built not only out of Gnostic and Stoic sources but out of Benjaminian and Heideggerian elements, as well.²³ Yet within the frame of this preoccupation, Agamben is less interested in whether or to what extent Benjamin’s insight of temporal out-of-jointness might be inextricably linked to his particular

historical-political *context* of crisis; that it may be something about the nature of his *problem-space* that made time stand out in the conspicuous way that it did. To be sure, Agamben is explicitly aware of Benjamin's context of catastrophe (he cites the moment of the Nazi–Soviet nonaggression pact of 1939 that is well known to be the immediate political context of “Theses on the Philosophy of History”), but this awareness forms only a *muted* background to his reading of the philosophic content of Benjamin's grappling with time.²⁴ Agamben is not, for example, interested in drawing a connection or contrast with the temporal sensibility of his own historical conjuncture. For me, by contrast, the historical question is crucial because that cognitive-political context of Benjamin's registers precisely the sense in which time has become conspicuous to him as discontinuity with history, as no longer assimilable by history, in a moment of revolutionary failure and attendant social-political catastrophe.

Benjamin's catastrophic present is, of course, not ours. But something of the unease about time, and about the uncertainty of just how to think productively about the temporality of past–present–future in the wake of the fin de siècle collapse of the communist project, can be discerned in a number of theoretical discussions in more recent decades that nevertheless bear a Benjaminian trace. Consider, for example, Jacques Derrida's memorable intervention—in *Specters of Marx*, and “Marx & Sons” especially—concerning the haunting presence of ruined time, “messianicity without messianism,” and its corollary, the indestructible futurity of a “justice-to-come.”²⁵ Here, turning self-consciously toward the question of the spectral *afterlife* of Marx in the very moment of the visceral, global crisis of the inheritance of Marxism, Derrida brings together a number of themes that are directly pertinent to my concerns throughout this book. Among them are the tragic out-of-jointness of the present as time and the conspicuousness of temporality relative to history it has engendered; the loss of the promise of communist revolution as the horizon of political emancipation; and the relation between the modern longing for revolution and the prospect of social, political, and economic justice.²⁶ Needless to say, I am not going to rehearse here the whole prolix discourse that constitutes the already widely commented-on reflections in *Specters of Marx* or the reply to his critics in “Marx & Sons.” And I am also not going to offer anything like an “interpretation” of Derrida's views on time and history.²⁷ What interests me, rather, is the *registration* in this work of the palpable

sense of dissolution of the political temporality of former futures and the profound indication we have of Derrida *groping*, uncertainly, toward the answer to an implicit demand for a new sensibility of time, politics, and justice that responds to his new, unsettled present. Consequently, it is unimportant to my concerns whether we agree or not with his specific formulation, what the truth-values might be of his final answer to the problem of time.

Not unlike for Agamben, but in a very different conjuncture from the one that framed *Infancy and History*, for Derrida in *Specters of Marx* and “Marx & Sons” modern political thought (especially Marxist thought) has been constrained by a model of time as “conjoined”—that is, as linear, homogeneous, teleological time. Against this conventional conception (and again, not unlike Agamben), Derrida commends a model of “dis-jointed” time, “time out of joint,” that disrupts the dependable linearity of chronological time (the “objective” time, say, of Marxist historicism) and urges the prospect of an *atemporal* futurity—that is, the time of un-timely events, of futures to come that are irreducible to any ontology of time.²⁸ If we adopt this perspective, he suggests, futures will always be open—yet undecidable and heterogeneous—possibilities. The conception of time that governs this open futurity, Derrida calls “messianic” or, more precisely (to underscore its paradoxical character), “messianicity without messianism.” Note, then, that while this “messianicity” connotes a “universal structure of experience” in relation to events that are “to come,” it is, Derrida insists, nevertheless non-utopian, which is to say that it does not conform to the teleology of historical materialism. Rather, messianicity is said to refer, “in every here-now, to the coming of an eminently real, concrete event, that is, to the most irreducibly heterogeneous otherness. Nothing is more ‘realistic’ or ‘immediate’ than this messianic apprehension, straining toward the event of him who/that is coming.”²⁹ So conceived, messianicity describes a “waiting without expectation” that is also an “active preparation, anticipation against the backdrop of a horizon, but also exposure without horizon, and therefore an irreducible amalgam of desire and anguish, affirmation and fear, promise and threat.”³⁰ In whatever way we gloss the precise meaning of Derrida’s idea of messianism here, what seems to me most compelling about the *speech act* that constitutes his carefully wrought intervention is his inchoate apprehension, first, of the *loss* of the old metaphysical security of futures to come (an

apprehension without nostalgia, of course, given the demeanor of deconstruction); and the speculative apprehension, second, that the present as ruined time establishes a philosophic *demand* to reassert (for Derrida is not constructing an argument in these texts so much as he is offering a number of perspicuous propositions) a *futural* claim. The idea of messianicity without messianism is Derrida's tentative *answer* to this perceived philosophic-political demand.

Especially interesting here to readers of Benjamin's own wrestling with the problem of time and history is Derrida's resolute disavowal that his non-utopian way of thinking about messianicity owes something of generative significance to Benjamin's idiom.³¹ This may seem puzzling. Derrida maintains, first, that whereas Benjamin's messianism retains the trace of its specifically Jewish sources, his conception of messianicity without messianism is instead a secular idea, clearly disconnected from any theological resonances.³² Secular and *therefore* "what?" one is tempted to ask. It is far from clear. Derrida holds, second, that whereas Benjamin's conception of "weak messianism" can be linked to a particular historical context (the Hitler-Stalin pact), his messianicity without messianism is *beyond* history. It constitutes, Derrida writes, a "universal, quasi-transcendental structure" that is "not bound up with any particular moment of (political or general) history or culture (Abrahamic or any other); and it does not serve any sort of alibi, does not mime or reiterate any sort of messianism, does not confirm or undermine any sort of messianism."³³ Some may well doubt this motivated reading of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," but from the point of view of my circumscribed concerns here, what is useful to note is the way in which Derrida marks his difference with, and distance from, Benjamin and the performative force with which he does so. For Derrida, Benjamin's messianic idea of a temporality that is irreducible to any ontology of homogeneous, empty time is limited by its Jewish metaphysics, and by the urgent circumstances of the historical moment. But it may not be obvious to even the most sympathetic readers that the genealogy of Derrida's own formulations (here and elsewhere in his oeuvre) could be devoid of some trace of the Judeo-Christian tradition within which his philosophic project as a whole is formed. And it will be plain to any attentive reader of *Specters of Marx* that it is itself framed by a (self-consciously) determinate occasion for speaking—namely, the collapse of "really existing socialism" and the triumphalism with which it was

met by philosophic ideologues such as Francis Fukuyama, whose *The End of History* can be read as offering a panoramic picture of its ideological age, the aspiration to a final assimilation of time into Universal History.³⁴ Because what is hard *not* to recognize about the respective catastrophes of political time inhabited by Benjamin and Derrida is that in some relevant sense where Benjamin's personal and figurative ending was followed by an "after" of philosophic and political renovation (one instance of which is Derrida's thought itself), it is as yet uncertain what possibilities of "afterness" might follow, or might be extracted from, the historical conjuncture of Derrida's ends.³⁵

Again, I want it to be clear that my point in reflecting on Derrida in this way is not to challenge the ambiguous suggestiveness of his idea of messianicity without messianism so much as to underline the *strain* with which it registers the apprehension that time is out of joint and therefore has become visible as a philosophic and political *problem*. We may now better appreciate Agamben's earlier prescient (explicitly Benjaminian) reflection that embodied in the conception of history that we moderns have taken for granted, and by which we have ordered our experience of past-present-future, there is an unexamined conception of time. Once self-evidently convergent, time and history—or temporality and historicity—now seem to be diverging from each other. In a certain respect, one might say that in the very moment that history has seemed so resistant to change, so unyielding, time has suddenly become more discernible, more conspicuous, more at odds, more palpably *in question*—as though the ends of history somehow marked the beginnings of time. *Omens of Adversity* aims to engage this apprehension of temporal insecurity and uncertainty.

It seems to me that the sense of the present as ruined time has had profound and far-reaching implications for how we think about our moral-political predicament—including, of course, our postcolonial and post-socialist predicament, my main concern in this book. Indeed, across a wide swath of contemporary intellectual discussion there have been significant—more or less subtle—shifts in theme and emphasis that signal this peculiar crisis (or, at least, conspicuousness) of time. Witness, for example, the rise to some prominence over the past two decades or so of the scholarly preoccupation with "memory" and "trauma" and their connection

with each other. A large and rapidly growing literature deals with precisely this theme.³⁶ Now, obviously neither memory nor trauma is a new area of intellectual concerns in itself—it is enough to call to mind the names Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, and respective work such as *Matter and Memory* (1911) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), to recognize this. But it seems to me that the problem of memory and trauma, and of their interconnection, has received a new impetus and urgency—and, perhaps, a new conceptual *pertinence* and *orientation*—in the current historical conjuncture. Curiously, it is precisely when the future has *ceased* to be a source of longing and anticipation that the past has become such a densely animated object of enchantment.³⁷ After all, not so long ago, in comparative terms, the past was largely conceived as a storehouse of *disenchantment*; it existed to be *overcome*, not to be excavated and memorialized. *Then*, the past had temporal significance only insofar as it was tethered to the engine of history driving inexorably toward the future. *Now*, by contrast, the past has loosed itself from the future and acquired a certain quasi-autonomy; far from being dependent upon any other time, it seems now to exist for its own sake, as a radiant source of wisdom and truth. Now it is not the future that stands in need of liberation from the present, but the past. It is, of course, in such a context of seeming temporal reversal that the concern with the generative effects of psychic trauma becomes entirely intelligible, even unavoidable. In a sense, psychological trauma is nothing but a past that will not go away, a past that returns, unbidden, involuntarily, to haunt or unsettle or somehow mangle the present. As Freud suggested, trauma is a memory disorder. Again, not so very long ago, what the past produced was social oppression and inequality, economic exploitation, and political discrimination—that is, forms of injustice in the relations that constitute a community. Then, the past was a *social* fact; now, however, it is a *pathological* one. The past is a wound that will not heal. What the past produces now are inward, psychic harms and injuries to an individual sense of self and a collective sense of identity.

The rise of a preoccupation with memory and trauma as pivotal concepts for discerning the lineaments of the temporal relation between past and present is itself connected to—is in some sense, in fact, a *condition* for—another crucial shift in contemporary theoretical discussion central to this book's concerns: the rise to prominence of the idea of *reparatory* or *restorative* justice (alongside the more established dimensions of distribu-

tive and punitive or criminal justice) and, with it, the techniques of “truth and reconciliation” and political forgiveness. Memory and trauma, and their temporal coordinates, are at the center of the idea of reparatory justice, itself an aspect of the larger tectonic shift that has produced our age as one defined by human rights.³⁸ In the wake of the vaunted end of the ideological battle of the Cold War era and the rise of liberal democracy as the single, absolute horizon of political civilization, the human rights project of reparatory justice has seemed an essential, inescapable element in settling intractable conflicts of the past in the present and facilitating the “transition” from varieties of authoritarian rule. Indeed, reparatory justice is often seen precisely as a dimension of *transitional* justice.³⁹ During the era of the ideological and political rivalry between capitalism and communism, the justice or injustice of political actions was often described and adjudicated (in part, at least) by reference to a systemic social-moral imaginary that established a normative standard of right and wrong. Justice was not unconnected to moral truth, of course, but such moral truth inhabited a world of explicitly competing universalities. Now, by contrast, all of this seems self-evidently unacceptable; indeed, it all seems patently mistaken. The only truth today is that every human being has the right to a *perspective* on what is true. Therefore, arguably, there is no single point of view that can monopolize or guarantee the truth for all. What counts now is each *story* of what is true. Truth, so it is said, is “socially constructed” within narratives of identity and community, with varying relations to structures and powers of authorization.⁴⁰ Consequently, since there is no longer an overarching meta-truth by which to judge the injustice of the past (no master narrative, for example, of the class determination of social injury), victims and their persecutors are urged to adopt an attitude of *reconciliation* toward each other; they are urged to reconstruct the past in such a way as to enable them to conjure a reasonable, shareable, *modus vivendi*. Reconciliation is the *summum bonum* of reparatory justice. To put it another way, because the present can no longer be overcome for a future of emancipation, there has to be an *accommodation* with the past. Truth and reconciliation and its central idiom of “forgiveness” are the names of a moral politics for an age characterized by being stranded in the present.

To say all this, of course, is not to dismiss outright the scholarly interest in memory and trauma and reparatory justice and political forgiveness as mere ideological false consciousness or, for example, as the mere theoretic-

cal self-consciousness of our neoliberal age. It may be this too, but it may not be *only* this. To my mind, the preoccupation with trauma and memory and justice and forgiveness are symptoms of the larger crisis of time and temporal experience. Therefore, whatever our suspicions, hesitations, they need to be argued over, argued *through*, reflexively, to determine what their critical, untimely, yield can be. This, anyway, is a task I undertake in *Omens of Adversity*.

Revolutions are consummately about time. So too, perhaps, are their collapse and destruction. As I have said, in *Omens of Adversity* I take up these concerns with time and ruin and aftermaths on the historical-political terrain of the collapse of one revolution: the Grenada Revolution, in many ways the world-historical revolution of my Caribbean generation.

On 19 October 1983, the Grenada Revolution came to a sudden, violent end. It was barely four-and-a-half years old. The relatively small group of revolutionaries who constituted the leadership of the Marxist-Leninist party, the NJM—among them, Maurice Bishop, Bernard Coard, George Louison, Unison Whiteman, Kendrick Radix, Hudson Austin, and Selwyn Strachan—had ushered in the revolution on 13 March 1979 by forcibly toppling the repressive and tyrannical regime of Eric Gairy, who had dominated Grenadian politics almost uninterruptedly since he burst upon the scene in the early 1950s.⁴¹ Gairy was a shrewd, charismatic, and self-regarding leader who had made a name for himself in the early years when he confronted the British colonial authorities, demanding better working conditions for poor, largely agricultural workers; organizing demonstrations and strikes; and inspiring the burning of the detested estate great houses, that painful legacy of colonial plantation slavery—“sky red,” as the blazes from these incendiary acts of popular indignation were called.⁴² But once power accumulated in his hands, initially as a member of the Legislative Council (1951–57), then as chief minister (1961–62), premier (1967–74), and, finally, prime minister of independent Grenada (1974–79), Gairy had shown himself to be a corrupt and openly self-aggrandizing politician inclined to rule the country by patronage, when possible, and by fear and intimidation and violence when necessary.⁴³ The NJM’s revolution brought Gairy’s tyranny to an end.⁴⁴ Under the leadership of the People’s Revolutionary Government, a range of social, economic, and political re-

forms were inaugurated that are widely regarded as having had a significantly positive impact on the country's development.⁴⁵ By all accounts, the revolution was immensely popular with the urban and agricultural working poor. In particular, its undisputed leader, Maurice Bishop, was said by virtually everyone to possess to a remarkable degree a dynamic and magnetic personality, an ability to translate hard political concepts into ordinary language, and, above all, an ability to inspire people with a sense of urgency and purpose and of historic destiny.⁴⁶ More than anything else, revolutionary Grenada was an unprecedented symbol of the possibility of breaking with the colonial and neocolonial Caribbean past, and of hope for egalitarian change and social and political justice. Nothing like it had taken place in the Anglophone Caribbean. The Grenada Revolution was an *event*, and Grenada soon came to stand as an inspiring instance of a small nation-state willing to defy the dictates of US imperialism in defense of its right of self-determination. As Bishop put it in one of the many speeches for which he became justly famous, "No country has the right to tell us what to do or how to run our country, or who to be friendly with. We certainly would not attempt to tell any other country what to do. We are not in anybody's backyard, and we are definitely not for sale."⁴⁷ It was ordinary language spoken to ordinary people. But it was a radical declaration of defiant purpose.

By 1982, however, signs of stress and strain had started to show. Internal dissent met with draconian measures from the revolutionary state, especially in the wake of the terrible bomb blast at Queen's Park, St. George's, on 19 June 1980, which killed three schoolgirls and injured a large number of people. It was a graphic indication of the lengths to which the revolution's political enemies were willing to go, and the revolution had powerful enemies from the outset. Indeed, the administration of US President Ronald Reagan, which had succeeded that of Jimmy Carter in early 1981, was openly hostile to the People's Revolutionary Government, actively blocking foreign aid, refusing diplomatic recognition, fomenting destabilization, and even planning invasion.⁴⁸ It was an open secret that the United States wanted to destroy the Grenada Revolution.

However, the deeper problems lay within the revolutionary party itself. By late summer of 1983, a crisis around the structure of leadership was paralyzing the internal organs of the NJM and disabling its capacity to function coherently as the vanguard of the revolution. A sharp de-

bate emerged that—obliquely at first, then, eventually, very pointedly—implicated Prime Minister Maurice Bishop as lacking the requisite qualities of a *party* leader. Given the Leninist nature of the party, none of this internal quarreling was public knowledge. But when the hugely popular Bishop was placed under effective house arrest for allegedly spreading a false rumor that his colleagues Bernard and Phyllis Coard had threatened his life, the conflict was thrown into the open. It precipitated mass protests and demonstrations in support of Bishop and *against* the party, and especially against those associated with Bernard Coard, the presumed mastermind of a subversive plot to undermine and displace Bishop. Freed by one of these organized demonstrations on the morning of 19 October 1983, Bishop and a large number of his supporters converged on the headquarters of the People’s Revolutionary Army at Fort Rupert (subsequently returned to its colonial name, Fort George), where they proceeded to relieve the soldiers of their arms and to open the armory and distribute weapons among civilians. Meanwhile, from another base—Fort Frederick, a short distance away—the army’s leaders sought to enter into talks with Bishop’s associates, but after being rebuffed, the young day-to-day commander Ewart Layne made a decision to dispatch troops to retake Fort Rupert. When they arrived at the steep entrance to the fort, however, the soldiers (many riding on the outside of the armored vehicles, evidently not expecting serious resistance) came under fire, which killed their commanding officer, Cadet Conrad Meyers. A fierce gun battle ensued in which scores of men, women, and children were killed or wounded, until Bishop ordered one of his associates to negotiate a surrender to avoid further bloodshed. Having brought the fort back under their control, members of the army detained Bishop and seven of his associates—namely, Unison Whiteman, Jacqueline Creft, Fitzroy Bain, Norris Bain, Evelyn Bullen, Evelyn Maitland, and Keith Hayling—who were taken to the inner courtyard of the fort and, under circumstances that have not yet been incontrovertibly established, shot to death.

This catastrophe effectively brought the Grenada Revolution to an end. As people, staggered at the thought of their beloved prime minister being killed by his own soldiers, and bewildered and terrified at what the immediate implications might be for their lives and livelihoods, sought to digest what had taken place, the army established a ruling military council (the Revolutionary Military Council) under the command of General

Hudson Austin. The council's immediate concern was to restore calm and order (if not quite legitimacy) and try to stave off the military invasion from the United States they knew was being planned in Washington. Their diplomatic efforts were to no avail, however. On 25 October 1983, against the express wishes of his close political and ideological ally Margaret Thatcher, the prime minister of the United Kingdom, President Reagan ordered the launch of Operation Urgent Fury, ostensibly to rescue US citizens studying at the medical college and to restore democracy.⁴⁹ The invading forces (some ten thousand) met more resistance from the remnants of the Grenadian army and militia than they expected, taking fully a week to gain effective control of the country and to announce the official cessation of hostilities, which occurred on 2 November 1983.⁵⁰ Having established military ascendancy, the US forces began to round up and detain the remaining leaders of the NJM and of the People's Revolutionary Army. By the end of the first week of November, they had all been arrested and taken into custody. The principals of the party and army were initially held incommunicado aboard a US naval vessel and in packing crates at the airport under the supervision of the Caribbean Peacekeeping Forces brought in to do police work for the United States.⁵¹ Subsequently, they were turned over to the authorities at the prison at Richmond Hill, not far from the capital, St. George's.

The capture of the party and army leadership, who would soon come to be called the Grenada 17, marked not only the official end of the Grenada Revolution but also the formal beginning of the investigation into the killing of Maurice Bishop and his colleagues on 19 October. This was undertaken in conditions of widespread shock as a consequence of the collapse of the revolution and the US invasion, as well as in a context of intense Cold War "psychological" propaganda conducted by the US Armed Forces Psychological Operations department, which sought systematically to negate the popular experience of the Grenada Revolution; criminalize and vilify the detained leaders of the party and army; and, as Richard Hart puts it, create "a state of mental, and consequently physical, resignation to the domination of the region by imperialism."⁵² Military personnel from the Caribbean Peacekeeping Forces carried out the preliminary questioning of the prisoners. There is strong evidence that torture was used to extract confessions from the prisoners.⁵³

In April 1984, twenty members of the NJM and the People's Revolu-

tionary Army were charged with the murder of Maurice Bishop and seven others, and in August of that year, after a preliminary examination, nineteen of the accused were committed to stand trial in the Grenada High Court. Eventually, seventeen would be brought to trial. At the preliminary inquiry, the prosecution offered evidence that Bishop and his associates had been shot to death by members of the People's Revolutionary Army. But it was clear from the beginning that these soldiers were not the principal targets of the judicial proceedings. Their main purpose, rather, was to secure the criminal conviction of the surviving leaders of the revolution, "thereby teaching the people of the region a lesson," as Hart puts it, "and ensuring that, in the foreseeable future, no revolutionary overthrow of an established government would be attempted."⁵⁴ The prosecution alleged that the members of the Central Committee of the NJM went to Fort Frederick after Bishop was released from house arrest and there decided that he—Bishop—should be killed. The problem, however, was that there was no credible evidence to support this allegation. The only evidence was the testimony of Cletus St. Paul, Bishop's former chief security guard, who was being held in custody in connection with the charge that he had attempted to create unrest by circulating a false rumor on Bishop's behalf. According to St. Paul, he saw Central Committee members give the directive to retake the fort and liquidate Bishop and his colleagues. As the presiding judge underscored, this testimony was the principal basis of the prosecution's case, even though no one besides St. Paul told the story he did.

Nevertheless, it was precisely on the basis of St. Paul's evidence and such "confessions" as were extracted from the detainees that the jury was invited to find that the Central Committee members had met and decided that Bishop should be eliminated. Notably, the accused did not participate in their trial; early on, they instructed their defense team to withdraw from the case on the grounds that the court before which they were ordered to stand trial, the Grenada High Court, was unconstitutional and that the proper forum for hearing the case was the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court. On 4 December 1986, at the conclusion of a trial shot through with blatant partiality and systematic legal irregularities and in an atmosphere of ideological coercion in which the accused were painted as little more than vile political thugs, the main defendants (Hudson Austin, Dave Bartholomew, Callistus Bernard, Bernard Coard, Phyllis Coard, Leon Cornwall, Liam James, Ewart Layne, Colville McBarnette, Cecil Prime, Lester

Redhead, Selwyn Strachan, Christopher Stroude, and John Ventour) were found guilty of multiple counts of murder and sentenced to hang. This had been almost a foregone conclusion. The rank-and-file soldiers alleged to have fired the fatal shots (Andy Mitchell, Vincent Joseph, and Cosmos Richardson) were convicted of multiple counts of manslaughter and sentenced to fifteen years of imprisonment for each count, with certain of the sentences to be served consecutively.

The Grenada 17 launched and waged a long, difficult campaign to have their convictions quashed and to vindicate themselves of the crime of which they were convicted. Needless to say, from within their confinement, the resources at their disposal were meager, and the pro-US political climate in the region following the wider collapse of the socialist project was resolutely unsympathetic to their efforts. For their part, the political members of the Grenada 17 maintained that while they clearly bore *part* of the moral and political responsibility for the events that led to the deaths of Bishop and his associates, they did not bear the whole responsibility and, most important, they were not *criminally* liable. This is a position they have consistently held throughout their ordeal. On 14 August 1991, the death sentences of the fourteen principal defendants were commuted to life in prison. On 7 February 2007, after a long struggle to have their case heard, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the United Kingdom impugned the constitutionality of the original death sentences and ordered the resentencing of the thirteen named appellants.⁵⁵ And on 4 September 2009, the last of the Grenada 17—among them, Bernard Coard—walked free from Richmond Hill Prison, having served more than a quarter of a century for a crime that is still to be diligently investigated and impartially adjudicated.

On a Caribbean scale, anyway, the Grenada Revolution of 13 March 1979 was world-historical (in a way, one might imagine, that the Haitian Revolution was in 1804 and the Cuban Revolution was in 1959). More important, perhaps, it was *generationally* historic in the sense that, for the generation who made it or who recognized their identity in it (the Caribbean generation of 1968, so to call it), the revolution was not merely the vindication of an ideological truth—say, the doctrinal truth of Marxism. It was also, and more poignantly, the vindication and culmination of a certain organization of temporal expectation and political longing.⁵⁶ Generations, we will see, form a crucial dimension of temporal experi-

ence of past-present-future. Consequently, the collapse of the Grenada Revolution in October 1983, and the US-led invasion that followed it and that laid the basis for the trial and conviction of the Grenada 17, are not merely incidental moments in Caribbean political history. They constitute a *watershed* event in the generational experience of time and history—a traumatic ending and an aftermath without end. This apprehension of its significance shapes the overall approach I adopt in this book. Thus, in *Omens of Adversity* it is not my purpose to try to reconstruct a whole history of the revolution or of the circumstances that surrounded its demise; the violent death of its popular leader and his associates; or the trial, conviction, and eventual release of those who were found guilty of murder and conspiracy to commit murder on 19 October 1983. The definitive political history of these catastrophic events is waiting to be written. Whether it will be—whether it *can* be—written, remains to be seen. This book has a different, perhaps a somewhat more circumscribed, project. It aims, in an admittedly partial way, to be a contribution, written through selective aspects of this particular Caribbean catastrophe, to a wider critical discussion of the ethical-political experience of the temporal “afterness” of our postcolonial, postsocialist time.

I have divided the four chapters that constitute *Omens of Adversity* into two parts. This is not to suggest any deep discontinuity; it only registers certain affinities between the two chapters in each part of the book that, to my mind, draw their preoccupations together more intimately. Time, of course, is my overall theme throughout, because, as I have already suggested, it is the alteration in our experience of time, the reorganization of our sense of the temporal relation between anticipated futures and remembered pasts that has seemed to me fundamental for thinking through a range of contemporary issues. But the question of time and the experience of temporality arise differently in each of the chapters as I range across an arc of preoccupations from tragedy to justice that is itself pertinent to me. For tragedy and justice undoubtedly are connected. After all, the greatest fictive models of literary tragedy—Sophocles, say, or Shakespeare—are deeply concerned with the problem of justice. What else is Oedipus’s action of self-blinding in the wake of his unwilling murder of his father and marriage to his mother, or Antigone’s defiance of Creon in

burying her brother, but acts that open and problematize the question of justice? And what else is Hamlet's dilemma, the moral-intellectual fatigue that seems simultaneously to drive and paralyze him, if not his inability to decide whether or how justly to avenge his father's murder?

Part I, "Tragedy, Time," is concerned overall with time, mimesis, tragedy, and action. That action unfolds in time is one fundamental and intractable source of tragedy, and revolutionary action unfolding in time—the multiple, public, passionate, polyvalently motivated actions initiated in specific political conjunctures—is especially vulnerable to tragic collision. But the intelligibility of action's temporality is a function of mimesis in the sense that the time that unfolds an action is assimilated into experience insofar as it is rendered as a narrative.

Chapter 1, "Revolution's Tragic Ends: Temporal Dimensions of Political Action," is an exploration of the relation between tragedy and the temporal frame of political action. Tragedy arises from the fact that the well-intentioned actions of willing and self-determining agents are pervasively vulnerable to contingency and therefore to outcomes that are never predictable or entirely knowable in advance. Tragedies, in other words, do not merely *happen*, although they do seem very much to befall us; they are a consequence of action or, rather, of a plurality of concatenating actions. Tragedies, moreover, are often not merely the outcome of just any action or type of action but of the collision of actions that are *one-sided* in their attachment to their own justifications (their pathos, as Hegel would say) and consequently unyielding to the justifications of others. By their very nature, Raymond Williams and C. L. R. James suggested in different ways, revolutions are political fields of such collisions of action and, consequently, of potential tragedy. It may not be surprising, then, that the collapse of the Grenada Revolution is widely regarded as a tragic event. But curiously, even in the work of the most important and acute of its scholarly analysts, the idea of tragedy is largely decorative; it has no generative *conceptual* content—it does no discernible *theoretical* work. Part of the problem, it seems to me, is that in this work, the register of the historical analysis of the structure and practices that brought about the catastrophe of the revolution, however illuminating in its own right, nevertheless has tended to obscure another vital one—namely, the register of the *temporality of action* and, therefore, the constitutive fragility and instability of human action in time. (This is, recognizably, a line of thinking that

owes variously to Benjamin and Arendt.) Thus, for example, the question of the moral and political emotions (hubris, hamartia, anger, shame, resentment, envy, fear) and accidental temporalities (reversals, contingency, luck) has been overlooked as merely incidental to the inquiry into what brought down the four-and-a-half-year-old revolution. Yet it is precisely these dimensions of human action—the *alterities* of the moral and political emotions, the colliding contingencies of acting in time—that show that our ineluctable inability to shield ourselves from tragedy by our reasons may be a pervasive feature of human action, and of *political* action more so than any other. So it seems to me that the intuition that the conflict between Maurice Bishop and the Central Committee of the NJM can be thought about in terms of tragedy is worth fuller exploration. Certainly, the collision of reasoned actions that led to the deadlock around the unanimous decision on joint leadership, and the subsequent equally reasoned actions that conducted these actors into an armed confrontation that led to their personal and political doom, invite an inquiry into the temporality of tragic action. This is what this chapter is concerned with; it re-describes the final weeks of the Grenada Revolution, paying close attention to the conundrums and predicaments of action among actors whose pathos disabled insight into their one-sided wills and drove them inexorably to a tragic collision. But it is also propelled by a wider speculation—namely that, paradoxically, tragedy may be a price for our political freedom, and therefore that modesty and responsibility ought to be central elements of a critical political sensibility.

Chapter 2, “Stranded in the Present: The Ruins of Time,” is concerned with the artifices and figurations of temporality by which we order our experiences of endings, especially *catastrophic* endings, such as the sudden, violent collapse of a popular revolution. At the center of my concerns here therefore is the relation between narrative and time, or with narrative (as Paul Ricoeur would have it) as an exemplary response to irresolvable aporias in the experience of time. Principally, I am interested in fictive models of temporal experience. The chapter engages the problem of fictive temporality through a reading of two successive novels by Merle Collins, *Angel*, published in 1987, and *The Colour of Forgetting*, published in 1995. Both novels are concerned with the traumatic collapse of the Grenada Revolution, but each approaches this untimely event through a different model of narrative time and therefore shapes a different “sense of an ending.”

In *Angel*, a Bildungsroman with resonant affiliations with a tradition of West Indian women's writing, Collins constructs a social-realist story of progressive (but also generational) time leading up to the triumph of the revolution and followed soon after by its reversal or peripeteia in catastrophic implosion. The protagonist of the story, the eponymous Angel, is a self-conscious revolutionary participant and a survivor of the disorienting demise of the revolution and the violence of the US military invasion that comes in its wake, and she finds herself in the end at a sort of temporal *standstill*, stranded in a postrevolutionary present that has nowhere to go. By contrast, we will see that *The Colour of Forgetting*, as though responding to the temporal dilemmas of the first novel, is shaped by different generic affiliations—namely, allegory, and fundamentally recasts the sense of the ending of the revolution. Its narrative temporality is driven less by the linear mimesis of character development than by the metaphysical or symbolic order of *repeating* time. Within its allegorical economy, the collapse of the Grenada Revolution is conceived not as the catastrophic end of a teleological history of progressive crisis and change but, rather, as merely one signal episode in a larger and recurrent story of generations of conflict and perseverance and survival in what is now figured as the cyclic pattern of a history whose very *logic* and *grammar* is catastrophic. My aim in drawing this contrast, I should say, is not to offer up allegory as intrinsically superior (whatever that might mean) to the Bildungsroman in its fictive organization of time, but to suggest why paying attention to generic dimensions of mimesis might enable us a wider range of temporal dispositions and story forms in the face of catastrophic ends.

In Part II, “Memory, Justice,” I turn my attention in the direction of other renderings of the aftermaths of political catastrophe. Time remains the inexorable existential context of my inquiry. And tragedy's trace still lingers. But memory now figures the temporality of the experience of loss and mourning and hope, and the question of justice frames my horizon. I take these to be conjoined, for not only might there be justice in the persistence of remembrances of harmful pasts, but in some quarters of contemporary political theory, memory is now seen as a crucial aspect of what justice demands as a measure of repair.

Chapter 3, “Generations of Memory: The Work of Mourning,” is concerned with thinking about the contrast between mourning and melancholia in relation to generations of remembering the catastrophic loss of

a political project. (In a certain sense, this carries on the theme of generations and the temporality of generations that is crucial to the previous chapter.) Specifically, I am interested in the contrast between a generation that lives the (political, personal) loss as its own immediate experience and memory and a generation that lives it at a generational *remove*, in an existentially mediated way. How do successive generations remember the same catastrophic event? This is my principal question. I focus in this chapter on one figuration of loss that exemplifies the traumatic *after*-life of the collapse of the Grenada Revolution—namely, the loss that centers on the haunting absence of the disappeared body of Maurice Bishop. More than any other single person, Bishop embodied the ideals and hopes of the Grenada Revolution. In death as in life, his body is a political emblem, and the absence of its remains is a tangible reminder of the cruel unresolvedness of the revolution's collapse. Without it, there seems no possibility of bringing closure to the terrible end of October 1983, at least for the generation that lived the rise of the revolution as the horizon of its longing and for whom its collapse is remembered in embittered disappointment and melancholic fixation—at best, in painfully ambivalent nostalgia, and at worst, in a blind desire for revenge. In this chapter, I contrast this generation's paralysis with what I take to be the work of reparative remembering and mourning represented by the endeavor of a small booklet titled, *Under the Cover of Darkness*, written by a group of secondary-school boys in Grenada, the Young Leaders, and published in 2002. This remarkable booklet documents the students' project to find out what happened to the bodies of Bishop and his seven colleagues killed at Fort Rupert on 19 October 1983; they were hastily burned and buried by members of the People's Revolutionary Army and vanished shortly after their exhumation during the US invasion and occupation. What interests me about *Under the Cover of Darkness* is not only the astonishing investigative labor that turned up hitherto unknown (or forgotten) facts about the sequence of events concerning the bodies, and the clear implication of a plot to conceal or disappear Bishop's remains especially, but also the text's status as an intervention in an abject memorial space. I read the booklet as a kind of *speech act*, as the performance by these schoolboys of a refusal to surrender to the paralysis and doomed silence of their parents' generation. By reopening the question of the missing bodies from a generational location defined by "postmemory," the Young Leaders initiate a kind of remember-

ing drained of their parents' melancholic affective demands and suggestive of what a reparative mourning for that terrible loss might now entail in postrevolutionary circumstances.

Chapter 4, "Evading Truths: The Rhetoric of Transitional Justice," is concerned with thinking about aspects of the post-Cold War regime of liberalism and the ways in which it frames talk about what justice demands in the wake of the collapse of forms of so-called illiberal rule. These, we ought to remind ourselves, are the aftermaths not only of right-wing military dictatorships or exclusionary racial authoritarianisms but also of the Bandung project, those uncertain attempts by postcolonial states to imagine and pursue modes of self-determination beyond the dictates of empire (whether the former colonial powers or the contemporary US imperium). Since the end of the Cold War, the distinctions among them have almost completely vanished, *all* now being subsumed in the new totalizing category of "totalitarianism," liberalism's catchall for its political Others. Now that fascist and communist forms of totalitarianism have been vanquished, we are told, liberal democracy has emerged as the only acceptable direction of political futures—as the *single*, indisputable standard of civilization by which political legitimacy can be judged. This, of course, is not merely the outcome of the global assimilation of liberal democracy as a new ethical-political norm, the new self-image of the age; it is the outcome of the credible military force of the United States of America that has adopted the role of imperial evangelist for liberal democracy. *This* is the ideological space of the rise of "transitional" justice as the legal mechanism by which to engineer the transformation of non-liberal or illiberal predecessor regimes into liberal ones. In the new context of liberal transition, what justice demands may indeed entail legal punishment for the commission of particular crimes, but this punishment will be directed not merely at the legally culpable individuals but also at the political regime itself, of which these alleged perpetrators are only representatives. Whereas the crimes committed by representatives of liberal democratic regimes—torture, for example, or mass murder—are deemed mere exceptions perpetrated by rogue individuals, the crimes committed by representatives of non-liberal regimes are deemed to define the illiberal character of the regimes themselves. Here it is the form of state that is rogue. Transitional justice is the name of a post-Cold War development in liberal justice that, through the political technologies of successor trials

and, above all, historical truth commissions, aims to draw a line between the illiberal past and the *liberalizing* present. Commissioned remembering to construct the truth of what happened in the past, it is argued, is the basis for the “reconciliation” of victims with their perpetrators within a liberalizing political time. Against the backdrop of this (to my mind, often cynical) rhetoric of transitional justice, chapter 4 considers the case of the Grenada 17, the former members of the revolutionary regime and army who stood trial for, and were convicted of, the crimes of murder and conspiracy to commit the murder of Maurice Bishop and his colleagues on 19 October 1983. They were, as Amnesty International aptly described them, among the last Cold War prisoners. I suggest that this successor trial was little more than a show trial, a politically motivated exercise aimed not at impartially investigating the truth of the killings but at sending an unambiguous warning to Grenada and the wider Caribbean about the consequences of pursuing revolutionary self-determination. Then, taking up the truth and reconciliation process that followed the trial by a decade and a half (while the Grenada 17 were still in prison), I suggest that this exercise was not only an implicit acknowledgment of the failure of the prior trial to determine the truth of the events of October 1983 and bring closure to that historical period, but also little more than an exercise in politically motivated evasion. It certainly served neither the purpose of disclosing a full and truthful account of what took place on that fateful day and why, nor that of justly reconciling an admittedly conflicted society.

Finally, to shape at least one sense of an ending to *Omens of Adversity*, the epilogue, “The Temporality of Forgiving,” offers a brief reflection on forgiveness, a virtue that has become a kind of leitmotif in contemporary moral-political discussions of catastrophic aftermaths. I take up Hannah Arendt’s well-known suggestion that the nature of human action, specifically its constitutive *uncertainty* and *irreversibility*, invites us to regard forgiveness as a necessary moral virtue. Forgiveness, it seems to me, brings the temporality of action very much into relief—not as the means of repressing unreconciled resentments, but as a reflexive attitude of critical recognition of the intractable agonism and risk of action, especially political action. The members of the Grenada 17 have all now been released from prison. But have they been released from their moral debt? Are we so certain of owing nothing to *them*? As I point out, the Grenada 17 have apologized for their role in the events of 19 October 1983 and sought for-

giveness for the pain and suffering they caused by their actions while they led the revolution. But what of their suffering and pain? If, as I and others have suggested, the trial of the Grenada 17 was an utter travesty of justice, who bears responsibility for what *they* have endured? With whom does the moral burden of forgiveness lie? Who decides?

These chapters, it is easy to see, are meant to be exploratory. They constitute, together, an effort to capture *dimensions* of the political present that in some significant measure are the protracted aftermaths of the catastrophic collapse of revolutionary futures past and the re-hegemonization of the world by a cynical imperial and neoliberal agenda. These chapters seek to work in and through the experience of time, the temporality of past-present-future, because it seems to me that one arresting, if not altogether transparent, feature of our present is the strange out-of-jointness of time—an out-of-jointness that makes time itself pervasively conspicuous. The ghost of Augustine wanders among us. We are suddenly more aware than before that action—political action, say—is not merely historical in the familiar contextual senses. It takes place in time, is temporal, temporalizes, and is therefore always vulnerable to contingency and conflict that are not always reversible. We are suddenly more aware than before of just how much, and how uncannily, fictive models of time shape our experience of the past in the present and our expectations for the future. We are suddenly more aware than before of the temporality of generations, of experiences shaped by successive and overlapping locations within the passage of social time. We are suddenly more aware of how the collapse of emancipatory futures frames our imagining of what justice entails. So that in some respects, at least, these chapters form an arc of interconnected preoccupations stitching together the time of tragic action with the time of just repair. Finally, these chapters invite us to remember the Grenada Revolution. Written less as a comprehensive reconstruction of its historical rise and fall than through aspects of its catastrophic collapse and aftermaths, they invite us to unlearn some of our most cherished conceits about what counts in the scholarly scales of geopolitical relevance. We are obliged to remember the cynical “success” of truth and reconciliation in postapartheid South Africa, not its cynical failure in postrevolutionary Grenada. Yet an island, too, is a world and therefore world-*historical*.

The Grenada Revolution was undoubtedly flawed. It was politics, after all: on the whole, worthy men and women acting in concert and in conflict and in full exposure of the public realm to shape a more just and egalitarian world out of the colonial and neocolonial past, and with limited resources to hand. They succeeded. They failed. It was revolution, timely and untimely—a past revolution of our better selves.