1. Encrypted Memories: Saul Friedländer’s When Memory Comes
The impulse behind Saul Friedländer’s *When Memory Comes* firmly places it within the tradition of the memoir. According to Vivian Gornick, that impulse “originates in a writer’s desire to set a record straight, tell an exemplary tale, bear witness. . . . It shares with fiction writing the obligation to lift from the raw material of life a story that will shape experience, transform events, make large sense of things.” The particular urgency of Friedländer’s desire to make “large sense,” characteristic of the enterprise of memoir, is attributable to the ongoing pattern of discontinuity that marks his life, beginning with his early childhood during the rise of Hitler and continuing into his adulthood in Israel. His history of rupture created in him the “need for synthesis, for a thoroughgoing coherence that no longer excludes anything,” words that call attention to the dual nature of his narrative: it is both an

account of his survival during and in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and a meaning-producing endeavor, conceived in the hope that telling his story will alter the experiential pattern out of which it originates.2

In the tradition of the Bildungsroman, Friedländer’s narrative begins at his birth and concludes with what could be seen as the end of his youth, his arrival in Israel. Woven into this account is an ongoing discussion of issues relevant to the place and time of his writing: Israel, 1977. What we are given, then, is two stories; one about Friedländer’s childhood under Nazism and immediately after, and another about the adult narrator’s search to uncover the themes running through his history up to the narrative present. In striking ways the project is reminiscent of The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, by Friedländer’s compatriot Rainer Maria Rilke. In that text, which Friedländer describes as “moving” and “mysterious,” the protagonist must write his way out of his childhood, in order to release himself from its emotional grip (56). Moreover, in their complex chronological structures, both narratives resemble weavings meant to integrate disparate experiences into a synthesized pattern.

Here are the biographical facts of Friedländer’s history relevant to the analysis that follows. (For clarity, I present these facts as a chronology.) Friedländer was born on October 11, 1932 (a date he does not include).3 His father was vice president of a German insurance company in Czechoslovakia. His mother’s family came from the Sudetenland. Typical of many assimilated bourgeois Jews, the family considered itself German and never anticipated the developments that led to the rise of National Socialism in Germany. For a few months in 1938, Friedländer attended a private English school. On March 12, 1939, when it became evident that Hitler would occupy the country, the family left for Hungary but turned back when they reached the Moravian town of Brno only to find that the Germans had already arrived. Because of the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the family left once again and went to Paris. Friedländer, seven at the time, was placed in a home for Jewish children in Montmorency. After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, the family moved to the spa town of Néris in the arrondissement of Montluçon, where they remained for two years. In July 1942, when the French began to arrest foreign Jews, Friedländer’s parents sent their son into hiding; however, in their panic to do so, they chose a Jewish children’s home.

2. Friedländer, When Memory Comes, 114. Subsequent references are included in the body of this text.
The very night of his arrival, there was a roundup of children older than ten. The gendarmes announced that they would return for the rest of the children the next day, and Friedländer was immediately brought back to his parents in Néris, who then placed him in Saint-Béranger, a Catholic boarding school. His parents, unable to find a place of refuge, remained briefly at the Montluçon hospital, where Friedländer’s father had been admitted for a worsening ulcer. Then, without further options, they attempted to cross the border into Switzerland. “[S]ometime” in October 1942, Friedländer was transferred to a school in Montneuf (93). In September 1943 he went back to Saint-Béranger, where he remained until the end of the war. His parents not having returned, he continued on at the same school for a few months, until he went to live with an appointed guardian and his family. After the war Friedländer learned that his parents had been arrested at the Swiss border and deported to Germany, where they died under circumstances Friedländer does not discuss. In August 1946 Friedländer was sent to a Zionist summer camp in the Jura Mountains, and at sixteen, he left for Israel to fight for the newly formed Jewish state.

Friedländer was forced to assume a series of new names corresponding to the shifts in the places of his asylum. As a young boy before the war, he was called Pavel, or at home, the diminutive Pavliček. He became Paul, “from Paris to Néris,” and later, upon his conversion to Catholicism, in Saint-Béranger, Paul-Henri Ferland, to which Marie was added at his baptism (94). When he went to Israel, he became Shaul, and then Saul. Of these name changes he writes, “[I]t is impossible to know which name I am, and that in the final analysis seems to me sufficient expression of a real and profound confusion” (94). As Friedländer indicates, the confusion of names reveals a deeper confusion, configured in the following image as an internal splitting: “[P]erhaps I am the one who now preserves, in the very depths of myself, certain disparate, incompatible fragments of existence, cut off from all reality, with no continuity whatsoever, like those shards of steel that survivors of great battles . . . carry about inside their bodies” (110). Whereas the first expression of Friedländer’s “confusion” expresses the discontinuity of self through an image of a sequential difference (the changes in name), the second description posits that discontinuity as the result of an intrapsychic conflict (incompatible fragments preserved deep within the self). As such, it links Friedländer’s identity as a “survivor” not to his having been a hunted and hidden Jew—in 1944 the Vichy militia had literally come looking for him—but to an ongoing, internal, post-Holocaust battle. The language
of the following passage reinforces the image of Friedländer’s self as a site of embattlement: “We Jews erect walls around our most harrowing memories, and our most anxious thoughts of the future. Even a story complete to the last detail sometimes turns into an exercise in hiding things from ourselves. These necessary defenses are one of the chief features of our most profound dread” (75). The passage situates the battle within Friedländer as occurring on the terrain of memory, understood as an impermeable space of enclosure. By the same token, the representation of storytelling as a process of building enclosures is qualified by the associative connotations of the metaphor itself, as the notion of “hiding” is evocative of Friedländer’s survival as a hidden child. The metaphor thus stages the very movement of symbolic disclosure or revealing that Friedländer’s storytelling will perform as it erects walls around memory, thereby suggesting that the “harrowing memories” and “most anxious thoughts” that his story attempts to wall in will also seep out in the text’s building blocks of figural language. These textual images of fortification, hiding, burial, and defense indicate that creating a coherent self through memoir-writing will take place through a process of figuration that both erects intrapsychic fortification and allows hidden “things” related to childhood to become visible. The optical metaphor is an apt description of the capacity of Friedländer’s story both to hide unbearable memories and to make the hidden things visible, under cover of figural discourse. The question is: which things?

Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s theory of encrypted memory is useful in thinking about this question. According to Abraham and Torok, memories become encrypted when the subject who has experienced the loss of a love object cannot find the language in which to acknowledge the loss. Instead of words of mourning, which externalize loss in a form that can be shared with others, the subject creates a walled-off psychic space where the lost object is installed and, most importantly, where it continues to exist, undead, within the subject. This process, known as incorporation, engenders in the subject a fantasy world with its own, encrypted existence. Abraham and Torok indicate that such fantasies are designed to “repair” the traumatic damage inflicted by the loss of the love object. They develop only in cases in which the subject’s relationship

4. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok write, “We can conclude therefore that the primary aim of the fantasy life born of incorporation is to repair—in the realm of the imaginary, of course—the injury that really occurred and really affected the ideal object. The fantasy of incorporation reveals a utopian wish that the memory of the affliction had never existed or, on a deeper level, that the affliction had had nothing to inflict.” The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of
with the object was characterized by a “love totally free of ambivalence” that ended only because of the occurrence of the traumatic event.\(^5\)

Encrypted fantasies also contain an element of secret shame that is associated with the lost object, which it is the task of the fantasy to hide, precisely in order to preserve the love object. In Abraham and Torok’s words, “Crypts are constructed only when the shameful secret is the love object’s doing and when that object also functions for the subject as an ego ideal. It is therefore the object’s secret that needs to be kept, his shame covered up.”\(^6\)

Abraham and Torok emphasize that because the subject is also convinced of the object’s innocence—the object did not bring on the trauma—whatever aggression is contained in its fantasies of incorporation is an extension of the aggression that the object genuinely suffered—death—which caused the traumatic separation. Of these encrypted fantasies Abraham and Torok write, “Sometimes in the dead of the night . . . the ghost of the crypt comes back to haunt the cemetery guard.”\(^7\)

Abraham and Torok’s theory of incorporation opens up ways to formulate how Friedländer’s memoir articulates loss even as it erects fantasies that silently reveal responses to loss that cannot be integrated into the dominant narrative. In what follows I will address two key memories, located in the middle of the text—a position suggestive of their psychic centrality—that stage the dynamic of hiding and revealing.

The first memory concerns what was to be the last time Friedländer saw his parents. Friedländer recalls that in Saint-Béranger, he experienced everything “through the filter of a single thought, a single desire, a single drive of my entire ten-year-old being: I had to rejoin my parents at any cost. It was more than distress or nostalgia: it was a physical need, so to speak, and nothing could stand in its way” (84). Impelled by this primordial need, Friedländer runs away to the Montluçon hospital in search of his parents:

I climbed up four flights of stairs, opened the door, and threw myself into my mother’s arms.

There are certain memories that cannot be shared, so great is the gap between the meaning they have for us and what others might see


\(^{6}\) Ibid., 136.

\(^{7}\) Ibid., 131 (italics in original).
in them. Undoubtedly the words exchanged in this hospital room were, objectively, simple, everyday ones: a child’s pleas, and adults’ promises.

. . . Could I be dragged away from them a second time? I clung to the bars of the bed. How did my parents ever find the courage to make me loosen my hold, without bursting into sobs in front of me?

It has all been swept away by catastrophe, and the passage of time. What my father and mother felt at that moment disappeared with them.

(85–88)

The child throws himself into his mother’s arms; the adult narrator expresses his inability to impart in words the meaning of this moment. On an explicit level, then, the scene commemorates the present and future impossibility of communicating the significance of this reunion.

The scene’s conclusion reads: “of this heartbreak [déchirement] there remains only a vignette in my memory, the image of a child walking back down the rue de la Garde, in the opposite direction from the one taken shortly before, in a peaceful autumn light, between two nuns dressed in black” (88). This “vignette” cannot possibly be an unaltered recollection of an event, because the child is visualizing himself in the memory, whereas a young child characteristically directs his attention to the outside world rather than focusing on himself.

9. See Sigmund Freud: “[I]t contradicts all that we have learnt to suppose that in his experiences a child’s attention is directed to himself instead of exclusively to impressions from outside. One is thus forced by various considerations to suspect that in the so-called earliest childhood memories we possess not the genuine memory-trace but a later revision of it, a revision which may have been subjected to the influences of a variety of later psychical forces.” *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, vol. 6, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), 47–48.

symbolic pieces of Friedländer’s torn-apart self. That the nuns wear the black color of mourning suggests that they stand for the death—the tearing apart—not of Friedländer’s parents, but of the child himself.

But what secret fantasy does this scene of deadly tearing express? On the one hand, the image of the torn child can be read as a barely disguised expression of Friedländer’s feeling that leaving his parents—not only once, but “a second time”—was a trauma that felt like he was dying. But in the logic of incorporation, cryptophores pertain not to the subject’s feelings but to the shame of the lost objects that the subject has incorporated into himself. Encrypted fantasies “are constructed only when the shameful secret is the love object’s doing and when that object also functions for the subject as an ego ideal.”11 The question pertinent to Friedländer’s cryptophoric fantasy is: what parental shame is rectified through the fantasy of the dying child?

It is significant that Friedländer frames the scene of parting in terms of his need, which “nothing could stand in [the] way” of, to be with his parents. His need is so deep that he cannot remember a time when he was not anxious about being separated from his parents. In his words, “The fear of being abandoned: I am unable to account for its deepest origins” (13). The opening line of the memoir even suggests that his anxiety about abandonment precedes him: “I was born in Prague at the worst possible moment, four months before Hitler came to power”: Hitler, the cause of danger, is a presence in Friedländer’s life even before his birth (3). Still, Friedländer’s anxiety proved ineffective in preventing the separation from his parents. But what is more significant in terms of the meaning of the fantasy is that Friedländer’s parents proved unable to protect their son, either from his anxiety or from the very thing his anxiety was designed to defend against, namely, abandonment. Their deaths rendered them incapable of making good on their promise that the family would, in the future, be intact. This, I would suggest, is the reason for their shame.

Given that fantasies of incorporation are a means of resuscitating the ego ideal, Friedländer’s screen memory of tearing apart must in some way serve to rehabilitate the image of his parents as having had sufficient strength—“courage” is his word—to protect their child from separation, notwithstanding the fact that in reality the family was destroyed. To this end, the fantasy both acknowledges the reality of his parents’ deaths and fulfills the impossible, counterfactual, wish that his parents had had

11. Ibid., 131.
enough courage not to force their child to separate from them. It does so by creating an image of the child and parents as together in death. That is, in fantasy Friedländer is able to die in order to remain united with his parents, who were murdered shortly after the reunion scene in the hospital.

In addition to symbolizing the tearing apart of the child, the final image of the scene—three figures walking together—can also be understood as expressing the fulfillment of Friedländer’s wish that the family of three had remained intact thanks to the courage of his parents. Symbolically splitting himself in fantasy, Friedländer thus succeeds in his effort both to shield his parents from a shame born of their having split up the family and, in his attempt to negate the outcome of their decision, to have done so by bringing them together in death. In this the fantasy represents Friedländer’s impossible gift of courage to his parents, impossible because postmortem.

The fantasy is also Friedländer’s gift to himself, insofar as it manifests a consoling, if provisional, effect of cryptophores: their capacity to “undermine anyone who would shame their object. They neutralize, as it were, the material instruments of humiliation, the metaphors of dejection. . . . [I]t is not simply a matter of reverting to the literal meanings of words, but of using them in such a way—whether in speech or deed—that their very capacity for figurative representation is destroyed.”

The screen memory renders the peace that this annulment of the metaphor brings through the image of the child who walks “in a peaceful autumn light [sous une paisible lumière d’automne]” (88) [85]. By the same token, reinscribed into the image of peace is death, insofar as the peace is evocative of the phrase “to rest in peace” (reposer en paix), and because the light of autumn bears associations with a time of dying. Finally, the image serves to suppress the associative link between heartbreak (déchirement) and self-reproach dwelling in the phrase déchiré par le remords, “tortured by remorse or self-reproach.” As such, it indicates the fantasy’s capacity to foreclose Friedländer’s feelings of guilt about the death of his parents.

Finally, after the episode in the hospital, Friedländer develops a symptom that signifies the annulment in “deed” of his parents’ shame. He begins to sleepwalk, like a living ghost from the crypt. “To avoid being humiliated,” he binds himself to his bed in Montneuf, an act which, he writes, “did keep me where I belonged” (95). The means of managing his

12. Ibid., 132 (my italics).
symptom belies its apparent success in keeping him in his place, insofar as symbolically it reverses the actual outcome of the hospital scene when, without success, he “clung to the bars of the bed.” Now, through this haunting repetition of the scene, the fantasy’s intention of keeping the son tied to his parents can be realized.

The second central memory of the text is of a “crisis,” which directly follows his memory of binding himself to his bed (95). In Montneuf, Friedländer is ten years old, though he does not remember whether he arrived “just before or just after” his tenth birthday (94). He writes, “I became sadder and sadder: in one way or another, I was going to let myself die” (99). He waits until he develops a fever and then, while on a walk with schoolmates and a teacher, falls behind the group and wades into the ice-cold waters of a brook. He is pulled out of the waters. In a passage shortly before this scene, Friedländer indicated that his parents had sent a telegram from the concentration camp at Rivesaltes shortly before their deportation. What he omits to say is that his parents were transferred from Rivesaltes to Drancy; they were among the 1,000 Jewish children and adults transported, on November 4, 1942, from Drancy to Auschwitz, where they were killed.14 Legible in the name “Rivesaltes” is rive (riverbank), a word that links Friedländer’s attempted suicide by the riverbank to his parents’ deaths.15

A Freudian reading would understand the attempted suicide as a symbolic act of displaced aggression whose intended objects were the deceased parents. But the logic of incorporation dictates another object-al configuration: “Melancholics seem to inflict pain on themselves, but in fact they lend their own flesh to their phantom object of love.”16 As such, the suicide attempt can be understood as a deed that stages the fantasy of reunion with his dead parents. The narrative placement of this crisis shortly after Friedländer’s discussion of his parents’ arrest suggests that the increasing duration of Friedländer’s separation from his parents lends greater urgency to his need to conceal the shame of their helplessness through drastic acts. His deepening consciousness of his parents’ impotence may also explain why he quotes a written eyewitness account

14. Serge Klarsfeld writes, “When [Convoy 40] arrived in Auschwitz on November 6, 269 men were selected for work and received numbers 73219 through 73482. . . . Ninety-two women received numbers 23625 through 23716. The remaining 639 people were immediately gassed. There were only four survivors, all men, in 1945. . . . None of the 92 selected women survived.” Memorial to the Jews Deported from France 1942–1944 (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1983), 328–29. The names “Jan Friedlander [sic]” and “Elle Friedlanderova [sic]” appear on the “List of Deportees, Convoy 40,” on page 331.

15. My translation.

of the Jews’ final days in the Swiss town where they were arrested. The account states, “‘Switzerland lets in the old, the sick, the families with children. The others are sent back across the border and into the hands of soldiers!’” (89). By way of commentary Friedländer poses a question that casts doubt upon the soundness of his parents’ judgment: “If I had accompanied my parents, would we all have gotten across the border?” (89).

Friedländer had expressed these same doubts earlier in the narrative in connection with his memories of his father in Néris. He writes,

> [O]ften my father foundered in a sort of wordless sadness . . . I occasionally wish that he had been unable to think things through, that he had been too sick to do so. Otherwise, he could not have helped but bow to the evidence: his faith in complete assimilation had been mistaken; his failure to recognize the Nazi danger total; his confidence in France ridiculous. We should have been in Palestine or Sweden, like my uncles and my grandmother, at least out of Hitler’s reach. Doubtless the worst thing of all in those days was to go on waiting, reduced to complete passivity. (55)

Friedländer’s wish that his father had been sick so that he would not have been able to overthink the family’s situation bespeaks the same counter-intuitive logic as his wish to be dead in order to remain with the parents: in each case it is an attempt to reinforce the ego ideal at the expense of life itself.

Regarding the presence of aggression in the fantasy, Abraham and Torok note: “If there is any aggression at all, it is shared between the love object and the melancholic subject in being directed at the external world at large in the form of withdrawal and retreat from libidinal investments.”17 Given the aggressive significance of the withdrawal of libidinal investment, it is noteworthy that Friedländer does not register the care bestowed on him after his attempted suicide. He writes about his memories of recovery, “[T]he reality of the daily care given me . . . or Madame Chancel’s attentiveness has almost disappeared, whereas these scenes conjured up in my delirium are still as plain as day to me” (100). He does, however, recall that in the room in which he recovered, “Madame Chancel [the directress] installed herself near me, behind a screen, and a long bedside watch began” (100).

17. Ibid., 137.
One “paradoxical memory” stands out from that time: a fantasy based on a memory of an event four years earlier, when, on the train from Czechoslovakia to Paris, he had become separated from his mother (100–101). Of the recurrence in fantasy of the incident, Friedländer writes,

Panic, real panic, overcame me. I began to run from one car to the other, doubtless in the wrong direction. . . . My delirium made the corridors endless and the faces became threatening: I screamed in terror and, if only because of the croup, felt that I was suffocating to death. But suddenly, by a miracle, I was saved: my mother, who had set out in search of me, appeared. I ran to her, threw myself in her arms sobbing, felt the coolness of her fingers on my face . . . I opened my eyes: it was Madame Chancel stroking my forehead to calm me. (101–2)

Immediately after recounting this memory, Friedländer says that for many years he could not speak or write about his childhood memories; they “appeared to be buried” (102). Even so, the delirium rehearses the transition he will eventually make from silence into language. The dream’s contents show that Friedländer has been able to retrieve early memories of his mother as a protector, the role she played before the traumatic separation. The achievement of connection to these early experiences is reflected in the sign it brings, the scream that produces Madame Chancel.

The scream is Friedländer’s first act of communication, an externalization of his feelings about his loss. It takes him out of his isolating “delirium” and places him on the threshold of “‘a community of empty mouths,’” that is, of individuals who partake in a compensatory sharing of loss through language.\(^\text{18}\) As the first speech act of his postsuicidal “rebirth,” the scream announces the presence of uncontainable emotions without specifying what they are. In this it is emblematic of Friedländer’s text as a whole, which also externalizes uncontainable emotions through figural speech that conceals as much as reveals those emotions. In this context it is significant that the text is not temporally unified: it ceaselessly shifts from the narrative present to a variety of pasts. Its time frame is also not firmly delimited: though Friedländer indicates through dated entries that he composed the text in Jerusalem from June through December of 1977, the first entry does not bear a specific date. Similarly, the final entry does not coincide with the narrative present, as it

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 128.
concerns Friedländer’s arrival in Israel on the ship *Altalena*. I understand these temporal ruptures as signifying that the work of synthesis through externalization is interminable.

In the following passage Friedländer reflects upon the relation of his writing to memory:

> When people leave us, one after the other, their presence quite naturally anchors itself and survives in the memories of the ones who remain. . . . From time to time, flowers are put on their graves, and their names are there, engraved in stone, essential symbols, through which different generations maintain the ties between each other, follow each other, and communicate. But for me the break was an abrupt one and it cannot become a part of everyday life. What words could one use to say such things amid the happy triviality of ordinary conversations? (134)

Though Friedländer cannot articulate the meanings of his loss, in recognizing the gap separating language and his feelings he also opens a space in which “absent meaning” may nevertheless be phrased.¹⁹ The incorporation into his text of his parents’ final letters is an example of such phrasing: his parents’ thoughts and feelings may have “been swept away by catastrophe, and the passage of time,” but their voices still haunt Friedländer’s text (88). The dates appearing throughout the text, which mark the time of composition of the individual sections, could be construed as headings written upon letters exchanged across generations. That Friedländer includes his parents’ names, Elli and Jan Friedländer, at the bottom of their last letter—the only place in the narrative where his parents’ names appear together—suggests that Friedlander’s text offers itself to his parents as a metaphorical grave in which to anchor the “headstone” of their letter, in this way serving as a permanent marker of, and resting place for, his parents’ vanished presence.

Toward the end of the narrative, a third haunting figure surfaces among Friedländer’s memories.

> To tell the truth, I have always been hungry. Not in Prague certainly. Those first years left me with memories of abundance. Everyone knows

¹⁹. Friedländer himself cites Maurice Blanchot’s words in an essay on memory: “Whether one considers the Shoah as an exceptional event or as belonging to a wider historical category does not affect the possibility of drawing from it a universally valid significance. . . . ‘Working through’ may ultimately signify, in Maurice Blanchot’s words, ‘to keep watch over absent meaning.’” Saul Friedländer, “Trauma, Memory, and Transference,” in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 262–63.
our national dishes, the knedlík of all sorts that for generations have made the reputation of both Czech and Viennese cuisine, but do you have any idea what “Indians,” sold in the pastry shops of the Old City, were? Balls of chocolate, split in two and filled with whipped cream. . . . (168)

In this moment of “truth” Friedländer admits to a hunger for an object whose color and form recall the figure of the torn-apart child. Thus inscribed within a memory of “abundance,” the confection also points to an earlier memory that discloses the secret source of the pastry’s appeal: during those few months in 1938, when Friedländer attended school, his mother would sometimes wait at the school to bring him home. When she did, Friedländer writes, she would first “take me by the hand and whisk me off to the Café Slavia, right next to the school, to have a huge cup of hot chocolate. We would sit there chatting about everything and nothing. It was then, just a few months before we were to leave Prague, that I discovered how much I loved my mother” (27). Sitting in the most famous café of the Old City, the child enjoys the nourishment of maternal presence. Friedländer’s father is also inscribed into this memory of food as love, specifically in name of the favorite confection the child no doubt tasted in the café: “Indian” recalls the books of Karl May, which Friedländer “devoured,” because of an “insatiable appetite” dating from his eighth birthday, when, he recalls, “my father bought me my first real book” (64).

The torn-apart child thus haunts Friedländer’s memories of home, transubstantiated into a literary symbol that neither lays the child permanently to rest nor openly reveals its origins in the trauma of abandonment. But insofar as the symbol externalizes that body, it opens a space in which Friedländer may move, and fight: on the eve of his departure for Israel, he writes a letter to his godfather and godmother stating: “recent events have awakened a feeling in my soul that had been dormant there for a long time, the feeling that I was Jewish. And I want to prove it by leaving to fight alongside all the Jews who are dying in Palestine” (179). The dying Jewish child returns in this memory as well, not inside, but alongside Friedländer, as he fights for his right to exist as a Jew. This is the very fight his father did not put up. As Friedländer notes,

[M]y father was hunted down for what he had refused to remain: a Jew. What he wanted to become, a man like others, had been taken away from him, leaving him no possible recourse. He was being refused the right to live and no longer even knew what to die for. Much more than an
impossibility of acting, his desperate straits had become an impossibility of being. (56)

Friedländer never “becomes” his father. Instead his text keeps watch on his father’s absent presence. In its capacity to do so, When Memory Comes may play the role Friedländer imagines books played in his father’s life. He writes that for his father, books “perhaps came to form, from time to time, a magic screen against an unbearable reality; they opened up an inner domain of calm and consolation” (56). Perhaps.