Jews, Masculinity, and Political Violence in Interwar France

Richard Sonn
University of Arkansas

On a clear, beautiful day in the center of the city of Paris I performed the first act in front of the entire world.
Scholom Schwartzbard, letter from La Santé Prison

In this letter to a left-wing Yiddish-language newspaper, Schwartzbard explained why, on 25 May 1926, he killed the former Hetman of the Ukraine, Simon Vasilievich Petliura. From 1919 to 1921, Petliura had led the Ukrainian National Republic, which had briefly been allied with the anti-communist Polish forces until the victorious Red Army pushed both out. Schwartzbard was a Jewish anarchist who blamed Petliura for causing, or at least not hindering, attacks on Ukrainian Jews in 1919 and 1920 that resulted in the deaths of between 50,000 and 150,000 people, including fifteen members of Schwartzbard's own family. He was tried in October 1927, in a highly publicized court case that earned the sobriquet "the trial of the pogroms" (le procès des pogroms).

The Petliura assassination and Schwartzbard's trial highlight the massive immigration into France of central and eastern European Jews, the majority of working-class

---

background, between 1919 and 1939. The "trial of the pogroms" focused attention on violence against Jews and, in Schwartzbard's case, recourse to violence as resistance. The assassination of Simon Petliura provides a dramatic entree into some of the principal tensions of these years: the Russian Revolution and countervailing nationalism, immigration, and anti-Semitism. As the quotation from Schwartzbard above attests, he perceived his deed as the opening salvo in the rescue of his people from centuries of persecution.

A dozen years later, another Jewish immigrant to Paris committed a politically motivated assassination. Seventeen-year-old Herschel Grynszpan's killing of a member of the German Embassy staff is far better remembered than Schwartzbard's attack, even though his case never came to trial. It was the shooting of Ernst vom Rath on 7 November 1938 and his death two days later that Hitler brutally exploited to unleash the pogrom of 9-10 November across Germany known as Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass. In the mind of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, Grynszpan's attack signaled a vast Jewish conspiracy, which he would later try to claim was the spark that set off World War II. There is an odd parallel in Schwartzbard seeking revenge for a foreign pogrom, whereas Grynzspan

---

2 The most detailed English language source on the Schwartzbard trial is Saul Friedman, _Pogromchik: The Assassination of Simon Petliura_ (New York: Hart, 1976). As the title indicates, while Friedman discusses the trial in great detail, his primary interest lies in the pogroms of the Ukraine and Petliura's responsibility for those pogroms. There is little on Schwartzbard's anarchist affiliation and so little discussion of French or Jewish anarchism that the word "anarchism" does not even earn a place in the index. Friedman cites not only trial transcripts and newspaper coverage but also Schwartzbard's own autobiography, _Inem loif fun yoren_, published in Yiddish in Chicago in 1933.
unwittingly provoked just such an attack on German Jews. Schwartzbard's case recalled the sanguinary heritage of violence against eastern European Jews between 1881 and 1921; Grynszpan's foreshadowed the Holocaust. There was also the common denominator of Schwartzbard's brilliant French-Jewish lawyer, Maître Henry Torrès, who was also prepared to defend Grynszpan. The two cases diverged most dramatically in their outcomes, since a sympathetic French jury acquitted Schwartzbard, while neither French nor German courts ever tried Grynszpan (he was turned over to the Germans by the Vichy government in accordance with the terms of the 1940 armistice agreement). Both events took place in Paris but registered the impact of the tumultuous politics and prejudices of central and eastern Europe.

The Schwartzbard and Grynszpan cases have usually been seen in the context of Jewish immigration into France, which welcomed more such immigrants than any other country after the United States severely restricted most immigration of Jewish and other eastern and southern Europeans in the early 1920s. By the 1930s, Paris' Jewish population had tripled since the turn of the century; at 150,000 people, Paris ranked behind only Warsaw and New York in the number of Jewish residents. Three-fifths of those Jews were recent immigrants from eastern Europe. Both cases reflected the rising tide of anti-Semitism, and both assassins were provoked by personal experiences of repression. Grynszpan had just learned that his family along with 12,000 other Polish Jews had been precipitously expelled from their homes in Germany. Growing anti-

---

4 Imonti, 213. The Imontis compare the cases of Schwartzbard, David Frankfurter, and Grynszpan.

*Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*
Semitism in France was exacerbated by the fear that Jews were provoking a new war against Nazi Germany.

Besides the contexts of immigration and anti-Semitism, I suggest that these politically charged assassinations can also be explicated in terms of gender. The Schwartzbard and Grynzspan affairs differed dramatically in terms of their portrayal of Jewish masculinity. At the time of his trial, Schwartzbard was a decorated veteran of the French Foreign Legion, wounded in 1916 on the western front, who returned to his homeland after the Russian Revolution broke out and led Jewish self-defense bands. He returned to Paris after the revolution in the company of his wife, living the humble life of a watchmaker but determined to stand up for his people. Grynzspan was still a boy, seventeen years old, barely five feet tall, highly emotional, and quick to anger. Schwartzbard, the veteran and man of action, received praise for rejecting traditional Jewish attitudes of passivity in the face of persecution. Grynzspan's attack was accompanied by rumors of a homosexual affair between himself and his victim vom Rath. It is quite possible that these rumors, true or not, saved his life. The Germans had planned to make his case a cause célèbre but ultimately cancelled his show trial in 1942 for fear of tarnishing the memory of a Nazi martyr. Grynzspan's fate is as ambiguous as his sexuality, since his ultimate fate remains unknown. He never assumed the heroic mantle that Scholom Schwartzbard claimed.

Immigration into France between the wars was closely tied to contentious arguments concerning gender roles. France welcomed millions of immigrants to rebuild the shattered country and to replace the missing labor of those men killed during the war. Their presence also meant that French women could go back to their homes and bear the babies so dearly desired by conservative pronatalists rather
than taking jobs outside the home and leading independent lives. Without immigrants, the hundreds of thousands of French women who had replaced men in the factories might have had to stay there. When naturalization laws were liberalized in 1927, immigrant men could even become voting French citizens, while women born in France were denied this privilege. Immigrant (largely male) labor thus aided in displacing women from the economy; the absolute number of women in the industrial labor force was slightly less in 1926 than it had been twenty years before.\(^5\) Schwartzbard's act occurred at the high point of French openness toward foreigners.

Scholom (called Samuel in the French press) Schwartzbard, thirty-nine years old at the time of his trial, had left his Ukrainian homeland after being imprisoned by the tsarist government for political activities related to the 1905 revolution. His own pregnant mother had perished in a pogrom.\(^6\) By 1908 he was a militant anarchist residing in Vienna, where he was arrested for theft and served a four-month jail sentence. Moving to Paris along with his brother Meir in 1910, he ended up like many other Jews in the working-class neighborhood of Belleville in northeastern Paris, where he practiced the watchmaking trade that he had learned back in his homeland. He and his brother both enlisted in the French Foreign Legion at the outbreak of war, both were seriously wounded, and both were awarded


the Croix de Guerre. He would eventually, in 1925, become a naturalized French citizen. After the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, he returned with his wife to Russia and made his way to his father's house in Balta, in Ukraine. He tried to practice his watchmaker trade in Odessa but ended up joining the Red Army, where he fought both Ukrainian nationalists and Denikin's White Army. He witnessed personally the chaos that the revolution visited on Ukraine and in particular experienced the pogroms against Jews during the years 1919 and 1920. Fleeing anti-Semitic violence, Schwartzbard returned to Paris with his wife after the civil war while maintaining his anarchist affiliation and nursing hatred for the Ukrainian peasants and nationalists whom he blamed for the deaths of tens of thousands of his coreligionists.

After the Bolshevik victory, Simon Petliura fled to Poland and brought his family to Paris in October 1924. Petliura advertised his arrival by publishing a weekly Ukrainian exile newspaper, The Trident, a paper that

---

7 Friedman, 58.
8 Sachar, 4, 5.
9 Paul Magocsi, A History of Ukraine (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996) says that of 1,236 pogroms that occurred between 1917 and 1921, most were in 1919 and 1920. He estimates between 30,000 and 60,000 deaths. The figure of 60,000 was widely used in France at the time of the trial, although some estimates ranged as high as 300,000. Sachar, 18, estimates that up to 150,000 Jews died during the civil war in Ukraine. See also John Reshetar, The Ukrainian Revolution, 1917-1920: A Study in Nationalism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 315, who discusses the Schwartzbard case but without mentioning his anarchist affiliation. For newspaper coverage of his trial, see "Samuel Schwartzbard qui tua le Général Simon Petliura comparaîtra demain devant les Assises de la Seine," L'Oeuvre, 17 Oct. 1927. Friedman, 62, maintains that Schwartzbard returned to Russia out of enthusiasm for the revolution and that he left out of disgust for the treatment of the Jews, not due to Bolshevik suppression of anarchists.
enraged Schwartzbard for its anti-Semitic comments.\textsuperscript{10} In December 1925, Schwartzbard learned of Petliura's presence and purchased a pistol. He found a photograph of Petliura and pasted it on a card, which he kept with him. He refused to kill the Ukrainian leader as long as Petliura was in the company of his wife and child. By one account, the day before the assassination, Schwartzbard was dining at a restaurant on the Boulevard Belleville with the Russian anarchist émigrés Alexander Berkman, Mollie Steimer, and Senya Fleshin when he spotted Petliura. If this is true, it suggests that Schwartzbard maintained close relations with other anarchists at the time of his attack.\textsuperscript{11} On 25 May 1926, he found the former hetman dining at the Chartier restaurant at the corner of the Boulevard St. Michel and the Rue Racine on the left bank. When the Ukrainian emerged from the restaurant, Schwartzbard, still not sure he recognized his quarry, asked if he were Petliura, at which point the general immediately sensed danger and raised his cane. Schwartzbard drew his revolver, fired five shots, and, as the general fell to the pavement, continued to fire until he ran out of bullets, shouting, "murderer, this is for the massacres, this is for the pogroms."\textsuperscript{12}

Shortly before the attack and his immediate arrest, Schwartzbard sent a pneumatic message to his wife,

\textsuperscript{10}Imonti, 76, 77.
\textsuperscript{11}May Picqueray reports this meeting in her memoir, \textit{May la réfractaire} (Paris: M. Jullian, 1979), 126. However, her memory may have been faulty, as she got the date wrong by two years; she claimed it took place in 1924. It is also not clear in her account why, if they were together in Belleville, Schwartzbard was able to track down Petliura the next day in the Latin Quarter. Picqueray later became an assistant to Emma Goldman when the latter was writing her autobiography in the south of France, and she probably heard this story from Goldman's friends a couple of years after the incident.
\textsuperscript{12}Henry Torrès, \textit{Accusés Hors Série} (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 91.
alerting her to the forthcoming event. His crime was premeditated; he never expressed any remorse for the murder, and there was no doubt that he had done it, yet he nonetheless pleaded "not guilty" at his trial. There was some debate about whether Schwartzbard continued firing as Petliura lay helpless on the ground, but otherwise no one contested the facts of the case. This incontrovertible evidence might have deterred most defense attorneys, but not the fiery leftist lawyer Henry Torrès.

Torrès applied the same techniques that had won him the acquittal of the young female anarchist assassin Germaine Berton four years earlier. Acting for defendants who admitted their crime and showed no remorse, Torrès shifted the burden of guilt onto the victim, justifying the crime as an act of revenge against someone who had placed himself outside the pale. In a letter from prison to his wife Anna, Schwartzbard wrote that he wanted his father's tomb inscribed with the statement "our son Scholom has avenged the sacred blood of your brother Israel and the martyrdom of the whole people of Israel." Torrès elicited sympathy for Schwartzbard as the prodigal son, making it easy to imagine how he would have played to the jury if he had been allowed to represent the seventeen-year-old Grynzspan.

Schwartzbard was praised for standing up for his people, who, it was alleged, too often faced oppression with silent resignation. The passive eastern Jew had been masculinized by his wartime service to France. Torrès in effect asked the jury how they could condemn someone who heroically defended his people. The crux of the case was to show that Petliura did indeed deserve his fate. This meant shedding light on what took place in Ukraine seven

---

13 Torrès, *Accusés*, 94. Torrès also recorded his summation in *Le Procès*. 
and eight years before, so the case drew considerable international attention for highlighting the egregious anti-Semitism that afflicted eastern Europe after 1880 and especially during the collapse of the tsarist regime. Torrès portrayed Schwartzbard not as an anarchist terrorist, a partisan of direct action, but as a man imbued with French values of justice. Here is how he put it in his summation:

I have just spoken about the passivity of Jewry, which did not know how to organize a gendarmerie of its own, [and] which Petliura did not even begin to discuss until tens of thousands had been killed, assassinated by his soldiers, as they let themselves be exterminated in the village square . . . because a Jew who would lift a stick to defend himself was an unknown phenomenon. So submissive was the Jewish race to ancestral domination that they had become accustomed to this organized terror.

Well! I say that when one becomes a French citizen as did Schwartzbard, when one experiences freedom, full of life, among the Parisians, when a French soldier in a trench has held hot steel in his hands, a new soul, ardent and trembling with excitement, is awakened in him; it is then that one strikes out for the sake of justice.

After creating a heroic image of Schwartzbard to contrast with the ignominy of the pogroms, Torrès invoked the names of Grégoire, Mirabeau, Hugo, and Gambetta, all of whom he imagined as crying out for justice and acquittal. Remarkably, the defense attorney had transformed the foreign-born Jewish anarchist assassin into a true Frenchman, bearer of universal values of justice in the spirit of 1789. The jury retired after Torrès' summation to return with a verdict of "not guilty" twenty-five minutes later.

14 Torrès, Le Procès, 52-4, quoted in Imonti, 103.
Schwartzbard could not return to his trade after his acquittal, and he feared reprisals by the large Ukrainian community. He wished to emigrate to Palestine, but the British refused him entry, and instead he became a full-time writer and journalist. Even before his attack on Petliura he had sent articles regularly to the New York-based Yiddish-language anarchist newspaper *Die Fraye Arbeiter Shtimme (The Free Workers' Voice)*. Two weeks after the assassination, he wrote from his prison cell to explain his deed:

Dear Comrades of The Workers' Voice: I am writing you from my cell and cordially greet all of you. After having served the idea of the revolution and class struggle with devotion, like a faithful soldier, for numerous years, when my life and thoughts clung to a single goal – how to ameliorate the dolorous condition of the poor and oppressed masses of humanity – I have become convinced that before being able to emancipate all mankind, one must first liberate himself, liberate the Jewish people from all persecutions and calumnies which never cease to strike this people which has been abandoned by everyone and is oppressed everywhere.¹⁵

At the beginning of this letter, Schwartzbard explained to his leftist comrades why he decided to represent the Jewish people rather than his class. At the end of the impassioned letter came the proud claims of a resurgent masculinity: "Enough of slavery, enough outpouring of tears, an end to imploring, crying, bribing. With our heads raised high, and with our chests stuck out, we demand from now on to live in equality with all."¹⁶ In a violent world full of exploitation and oppression, one must fight back in order to be accepted on equal terms.

---

¹⁶ Quoted in Imonti, 88.
Schwartzbard's acquittal appears even more remarkable when contrasted with the execution of his fellow anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in Massachusetts just two months earlier. The Italian-American anarchists' case highlighted the American red scare and xenophobia that had led the U.S. to curtail immigration from southern and eastern Europe. France was politically stable enough in 1927 not to be overly alarmed by the presence of radicals and economically dependent on foreign labor to rebuild its shattered infrastructure. In writing to anarchist newspapers from his jail cell, Schwartzbard was scarcely trying to hide his leftist views. The Schwartzbard case signaled French toleration and openness in a post-Dreyfus era of diminished anti-Semitism.17

Schwartzbard took advantage of his fame and acquittal to rise from humble artisan to intellectual. Though the British refused to allow him into Palestine, he traveled widely elsewhere in the world.18 He died in 1938 while on

---


18 In 1933, Schwartzbard toured the United States, in part to publicize his Yiddish-language books, At War With Myself and Over the Years. In 1936, Schwartzbard spoke to a gathering of the League Against Anti-Semitism in the working-class Parisian suburb of Montreuil. His topic was the assassination the previous month of a Nazi official in Davos, Switzerland, by a young Yugoslav Jew named David Frankfurter. See Jean Laloum, Les Juifs dans la banlieue parisienne des années 20 aux années 50. Montreuil, Bagnolet et Vincennes à l'heure de la "solution finale" (Paris: CNRS, 1998), 95, note 7. The working-class suburbs east of Paris contained over 3,000 Jews on the eve of World War II.

Proceedings of the Western Society for French History
a journalistic assignment in Cape Town, South Africa. Later that year, another immigrant Jew, Hershel Grynszpan, echoed the deeds of Schwartzbard and David Frankfurter, the Croatian-born Jew who killed a Nazi activist in Davos, Switzerland, in 1936.

Though the two Paris-based assassinations occurred only twelve years apart, Herschel Grynszpan was a generation younger than Scholom Schwartzbard. He was born in 1921 to Polish Jews who had settled in Hamburg, Germany. At the age of fifteen Herschel was sent to Frankfurt to study Hebrew at a yeshiva. He was religious in a way the anarchist Schwartzbard was not, but like Schwartzbard he wanted to resettle in Palestine. Rather than waiting until he was eighteen, the minimum age to emigrate, he decided to leave Nazi Germany, first heading to Brussels and then to Popular Front Paris in the autumn of 1936. He stayed with a childless aunt and uncle and received an eighteen-month visa in January 1937. After his Polish passport expired in February 1938, his French permit was his only legal document. When this residency permit expired, he was ordered to leave the country, but instead he went into hiding in the servant's quarters of his uncle's apartment. By this time the Popular Front was over, replaced by a center-right government that was less hospitable to foreigners.

1938 would be a signal year for Jewish refugee crises, and Herschel Grynszpan's life would be one of many transformed by Nazi threats to deport tens of thousands of Jews. In June 1938, U.S. President Roosevelt called a conference to consider the fate of the Austrian Jews recently annexed into the Third Reich, whom Hitler was already threatening to deport. That fall, Poland announced that citizens absent five years or longer would lose their citizenship as of 29 October 1938. When the Nazis realized
that thousands of Polish Jews residing in Germany would soon be stateless, they summarily rounded them up and expelled them across the German-Polish border before the deadline went into effect. This was the fate of Grynszpan's family, of which he was apprised by a letter from his sister which he received on 3 November. Since the deported Jews were allowed to take only a suitcase of clothes and ten German marks, they were impoverished, and Grynszpan's sister Berta begged their Parisian relatives to send them money. Grynszpan himself was stateless and residing illegally in France. These desperate circumstances led him to the fatal confrontation at the German Embassy.\textsuperscript{19}

Grynszpan's attack was far less premeditated than those of Schwartzbard or Frankfurter. Whereas Schwartzbard tracked his quarry for several months, Grynszpan bought a pistol and bullets that same morning, asked a French policeman to direct him to the entrance of the German Embassy, and seemingly knew the names of none of the embassy staff. He arrived too early to meet with the ambassador, and when he explained that he had a "confidential document" to deliver, he was shown in to a low-level diplomat, Third Secretary Ernst vom Rath, twenty-nine-year-old scion of an influential Prussian family. Grynszpan was completely inexperienced with firearms but managed to hit vom Rath twice at close range; the diplomat died at four o'clock on the afternoon of 9 November. Grynszpan was immediately arrested, and in the interrogations that followed he did not appear to know the name of the man he had shot.\textsuperscript{20} He did make it clear that he

\textsuperscript{19} Imonti, 206-10.

\textsuperscript{20} Imonti, 217; and Alain Cuenot, \textit{The Herschel Grynszpan Case}, trans. Joan Redmont (Beverly Hills: David Rome, 1982), 52-5. Dr. Cuenot was an amateur historian who thoroughly researched the case and interviewed survivors in the 1960s. David Rome was an American
acted out of grief and desperation for what had happened to his family and the 12,000 other Jewish deportees.

The extreme violence of the German reaction rather than the significance of the victim caused the Grynszpan case to assume international proportions. There is no need here to dwell on the violence of Kristallnacht, which began in the early hours of 10 November and continued throughout the day across Germany. The level of violence shocked many Germans as well as people around the world and led to a campaign to defend Grynszpan. An American Committee was spearheaded by Dorothy Thompson, wife of the Nobel prize-winning novelist Sinclair Lewis. A week after the attack on the General Electric radio show Thompson described how "an anemic-looking boy with brooding black eyes walked quietly into the German embassy in the rue de Lille in Paris, asked to see the ambassador, was shown into the office of the third secretary, Herr vom Rath, and shot him." She then explained what drove Grynszpan to his deed:

I want to talk about that boy. I feel as though I knew him, for in the past five years I have met so many whose story is the same – the same except for this unique desperate act. Herschel Grynszpan was one of the hundreds of thousands of refugees whom the terror east of the Rhine has turned loose in the world. His permit to stay in Paris had expired. He could not leave France, for no country would take him in. He could not work because no country would give him a work permit. So he moved about, hoping he would not be picked up and deported, only to be deported again, and yet again.

21 Jewish who discovered Cuenot's manuscript and arranged to have it translated and privately printed.

21 Dorothy Thompson, Let the Record Speak (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), 256, reprinting radio show originally broadcast on 14 Nov. 1938.
In this talk and again two days later in a long article in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Thompson called specifically for non-Jews to contribute to a defense fund for Grynszpan so as not to provoke further reprisals against the Jewish community of Germany. Eventually $40,000 was earmarked for the defense, and the American Committee specifically sought a non-Jewish lawyer to represent Grynszpan. They chose an anti-fascist Corsican lawyer named Vincent de Moro-Giafferi, while the World Jewish Congress contacted Henry Torrès. They agreed to serve as co-counsels, though Grynszpan preferred the representation of Yiddish-speaking lawyers.

One might think that Grynszpan's chances of acquittal rose with the declaration of war on Germany the following year, but apparently the appeasement-minded foreign minister, Georges Bonnet, was still anxious not to arouse Hitler's enmity during the period of the phony war and managed to delay the trial indefinitely. While Herschel Grynszpan remained in prison, his flamboyant Corsican lawyer propounded an unconventional defense strategy that would transform a political crime into a crime of passion. He suggested that the murder was revenge for a homosexual affair between the Jewish boy and the young, unmarried German diplomat. Since his client was a minor, the claim of sexual exploitation might free Grynszpan while blackening the reputation of vom Rath, who had been accorded a state funeral in Germany attended by the Führer himself. Moro-Giafferi thought this story explained how the young Jew had gained admittance to the embassy so easily for it suggested that the security staff might already know him. Moro-Giafferi found it suspicious that the door porter Nagorka had been sent in haste back to Berlin so he
could not testify in French court. Grynszpan rejected this line of defense, seeing himself as a defender of the Jewish people and more specifically avenging his family for the wrong done them in the weeks before the assassination. A crime of passion would render him a victim rather than an honorable man of action. Yet the rumors of homosexuality persisted, made plausible by the slight stature and good looks of the boy and the unmarried status of vom Rath. The restaurant that Grynszpan frequented, Tout Va Bien, also had a reputation as a homosexual hangout. In any case, Grynszpan never did face a French jury, and the money raised by the American Committee eventually went to resettling British children away from the London blitz.

With the fall of France in May-June 1940, Grynszpan was evacuated along with other prisoners to the south of France. He had several opportunities to escape; at one point German planes attacked the convoy he was traveling with and most prisoners scattered with the tacit complicity of their guards. Yet Grynszpan feared he might be seized by the Germans and so turned himself in to the French authorities. He did so again further south in Toulouse, possibly because he feared that his German accent might make people think he was either a German spy or fugitive. Article nineteen of the armistice agreement required the French to surrender all enemies of the Third Reich, and the new French regime duly did so on 18 July 1940. On 8

---

22 Cuenot, 99, suggests that that Moro-Giafferi concocted the homosexual liaison story. Cuenot is convinced that Moro-Giafferi simply made up the story and that in fact Grynszpan had never met vom Rath or anyone else at the embassy and that further he was a virgin with no sexual experience. Imonti, 256, raises the homosexual rumor but is less dismissive of it and does not link it to Moro-Giafferi.

23 Cuenot, 123. Unfortunately, p. 124 is missing from the typescript text from the Widener Library at Harvard, so some of the story of the evacuation is missing.
September, *The New York Times* reported that Grynszpan had been handed over to the Gestapo and had not been heard from since.24

Herschel Grynszpan found himself in Berlin within two days of being turned over to the Germans. In his initial interrogations he claimed that anti-Semitic comments by vom Rath incited his violent response. From Berlin he was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp where he was relatively well cared for. His trial, finally scheduled for the spring of 1942, was meant to coincide with the Riom trial of Daladier, Blum, and other Third Republic luminaries so as to emphasize the baneful influence of Jews on France, directing the republic and causing the war. After the Riom trial was cancelled on 4 April 1942, Grynszpan's trial was less critical to the Nazi leadership's overall strategy. Further, Georges Bonnet refused to go to Germany to testify about this supposed Jewish influence. Above all, Grynszpan had changed his own story and now admitted the homosexual relationship that had been rumored back in France. He provided details of how vom Rath had picked him up at the Place de la République, taken him to an assignation hotel in Montmartre, and paid him for sex. Vom Rath had then gone to his uncle's house, but Grynszpan refused to see him, and he claimed that his visit to the embassy was to terminate the affair. After an exchange of insults, he shot vom Rath. He told other prisoners that vom Rath had dragged him into disgusting practices since he was age fifteen.25 Goebbels knew that Hitler would be enraged by the mention of homosexuality

\[\text{24} \text{Imonti, 277-9.}\]
\[\text{25} \text{Cuenot, 135, 136 for the story of the liaison; 142 for the connection to the Riom Trial.}\]

*Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*
if the trial were to proceed, and by 17 or 18 April Hitler personally decided to suspend the trial.\textsuperscript{26}

If Grynszpan revived the homosexual story to save himself from a show trial and execution, the plan worked brilliantly. Hitler probably would not have minded branding a young Jew as a sexual deviant, but he had no desire to blacken the reputation of the young Prussian aristocrat whose funeral service he had attended in 1938. After 1942, the story of Herschel Grynszpan became even murkier. Apparently he returned to Sachsenhausen, was seen at Gestapo headquarters late in 1944, and possibly was in Brandenburg Penitentiary as late as January 1945. His parents and brother managed to survive the war by heading east to Russia; they reached Israel in 1949. After the war his brother returned to look for him in Paris, where he was rumored to be living under an assumed name, but found no trace. Alain Cuenot, who researched the story in the 1960s, agrees with the Grynszpan family that he must have died during the war, for otherwise he would have tried to contact them.\textsuperscript{27}

In 2001, the legend of the homosexual affair between Grynszpan and vom Rath received a powerful new advocate in the person of Hans-Jürgen Döscher, a respected German historian. In the new edition of his book \textit{Reichskristallnacht}, first published in 1988, Döscher argues that vom Rath was well known in Parisian homosexual circles and cites the journal of André Gide, who wrote that vom Rath "had an exceptionally intimate relationship with the little Jew, his murderer." Gide expressed surprise that "the press failed to bring this scandal into the open."\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{26} Cuenot, 134, 149, 150.
\textsuperscript{27} Cuenot, 160, 161.
\textsuperscript{28} Kate Connolly, "Did gay affair provide a catalyst for Kristallnacht?," \textit{Guardian Unlimited}, 31 Oct. 2001, \url{www.guardian.co.uk}.
\end{footnotes}
Döscher reports that vom Rath, who was known by such nicknames as "Mme. Ambassadeur" and "Notre Dame de Paris," met Grynszpan at the well-known gay bar Le Boeuf sur le Toit in the autumn of 1938. Vom Rath then promised to use his influence to regularize his lover's immigrant status. When he reneged on this promise, Grynszpan went to the embassy and shot him. Grynszpan admitted that the murder was a crime of passion when he learned that his trial in 1942 was designed to blame the Jews for the outbreak of World War II.\(^{29}\) The fact that the Nazis took this claim seriously enough to drop the case lends the story credibility even as it undermines the reputation Grynszpan had acquired as a partisan of "violent justice" (to use the title of the Imontis' book on Jewish avengers).

In *The Sun Also Rises*, written in Paris and published the same year as the assassination of Simon Petliura, Ernest Hemingway created a Jewish character, Robert Cohn, to act as an inferior, feminized foil to the manly, Aryan characters he so admired.\(^{30}\) One wonders what Hemingway thought of Schwartzbard's deed. We have seen that even the Jewish attorney Henry Torrès accepted the legend of a feminized Jewry and took pains to contrast Jewish passivity with Schwartzbard's aggressively French behavior. Schwartzbard himself saw his deed as opening a new chapter in Jewish history, and he implicitly moved from an anarchist to a Zionist/nationalist identity. His belief that he

---


was redeeming his people through violence, thereby gaining both respect and a homeland, is reminiscent of the arguments for black manhood through anti-imperialist resistance that Frantz Fanon was to make after World War II in *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*. Masculinity was not the main argument that Torrès used to justify Schwartzbard's act, but it made him a more sympathetic and, above all, less foreign figure to the French jury and possibly even to the assimilated, Sephardic Jew Torrès.

In an era and a culture that was both misogynist and racist, in which Jews from Léon Blum on down were castigated as effete "coffeehouse Jews," was it possible to defend a political assassination as an act of honorable manliness akin to a duel?31 If Schwartzbard was acquitted due in part to his manliness, Grynszpan may have avoided a potentially deadly show trial because of his alleged homosexuality. In both cases, manipulating gender images proved to be an effective legal strategy.

---