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Gilles Perrault. *The Red Orchestra.* New York: Schocken Books, 1989. 494 pp. $12.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8052-0952-5.

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"Soldiers of the 23rd Panzer Division, the Soviet Union salutes you. Your gay days in Paris are over now. Your comrades will already have warned you of what is happening here. Soon you will find out for yourselves." These words, blaring from loudspeakers just behind the Soviet lines, welcomed German troops to the Eastern Front. More damaging to German efforts, however, was the fact that the Soviet High Command seemed intimately acquainted with German offensive plans. During the German Operation *Blue* in 1942, Soviet armies always seemed to be in the right place, and when they retreated, it was always in the direction of Operation *Blue*'s objective, Stalingrad. The reasons for these successes may lie with the so-called Red Orchestra, the subject of the two books under review. ("Orchestra" is a common term for spy rings whose "pianists" [radio operators] play their "music" of coded messages.) The Red Orchestra, based in Paris and covering nearly all of German-occupied Europe, including Germany itself, was "conducted" by Leopold Trepper, a Polish Jew and the hero of both accounts, the first by Gilles Perrault and the second by V. E. Tarrant.

Perrault's rendering is masterful, suspenseful, and reads like a thriller. Trepper and his associates were for years able to smuggle valuable information out of Germany. Diplomatic secrets and detailed reports on German troop movements were uncovered by Trepper's spies. But *L'Orchestre Rouge* is not just the story of communist agents doing Moscow's bidding. Trepper depended on a remarkably diverse cast of characters for his information–Tsarist barons, businessmen, clergymen, housewives, nurses, secretaries, all resisting the Germans to one degree or another. As a result, Perrault's book relates the struggle not only of the Soviet Union against the Germans, but of the French Resistance, British intelligence, and many ordinary French, Belgian, Dutch, and German men and women as well. *L'Orchestre Rouge* is also the story of Gestapo efforts to crack Trepper's network and prevent the broadcast of its "music" to the Soviet Union from transmitters in Paris, Brussels, Marseilles, Switzerland, and elsewhere in Western Europe. Villains, heroes, cowards, martyrs, and dark mysteries abound.

The central issue of both Perrault's and Tarrant's work involves a great *Funkspiel* or "radio game" played by the Germans on the Soviets. After capturing a few Red Orchestra "pianists" and their transmitters, the Gestapo tried to hide the fact from Soviet intelligence. The Germans hoped to use the operators and their codes to transmit false messages to the Soviet Union and thus drive a wedge between the Allies by convincing the Soviets that the British and Americans were working toward a separate peace. But as Perrault points out, such games are extremely delicate. Enough real, verifiable information had to be sent along with the fake messages so that the Soviets would never catch on. Not surprisingly, the Gestapo had difficulties convincing military, diplomatic, and Chancellery officials to part with vital information. Once the Gestapo captured Trepper himself, the latter agreed to participate in the ruse, or at least so it appeared, adding the validity of his own codes and call signs to the German messages being sent to the Soviet Union. The mystery is sustained and deepened by the reader's gradual realization that this game may have in truth been played in reverse, *by* the Soviets *on* the Germans. For example, Trepper managed in captivity to draft a cryptic message warning Moscow of the German game, hoping that Moscow would turn the tables. By knowing about the *Funkspiel*, the Soviets could glean useful information, while their replies to Germans fake messages would ensure a steady supply of secrets from the Germans themselves! And while appearing to fall for the German "game," the Soviets could provide the Germans with damaging disinformation in the form of requests for clarification from its agents. Perrault's work is filled with such double crosses, and even double-double crosses.

V.E. Tarrant's *The Red Orchestra* covers much of the same ground, though in a far more clear and concise manner. Gone is Perrault's suspense; greater clarity is the re-

sult. Tarrant does not (as far as I can tell) use pseudonyms for his characters, something Perrault was forced to do in order to gain the interviews which form his book's foundation, and Tarrant is better at providing brief contextual passages before discussing the Red Orchestra's impact on the various campaigns of the war, such as Case *Blue* (Stalingrad) or Operation *Citadel* (Kursk). Tarrant also provides a much more complete picture of the Berlin and Swiss branches of Trepper's network, though in the latter case he relies mainly on secondary sources, in this case Anthony Read and David Fisher's *Operation Lucy*, published in 1980.

Both works suffer from the problem of evidence. Neither writer had access to Soviet archives, so neither can say much about how the Red Orchestra's messages were received in Moscow, in spite of claims by both to understand the aims and mistakes of Soviet intelligence. For example, Perrault has little hard proof for the claims he makes about the Red Orchestra's role in providing advance warning of the German attack in June 1941 or of the Germans' intentions regarding the Caucasus in 1942. He emphasizes the supposed effects on German morale of Soviet announcements, but instances of Germans surrendering on the Eastern Front are certainly few. In general his fantastic claims regarding the Red Orchestra's efficiency merely beg the question: "If Trepper's network was so powerful and successful, why did the Soviets do so badly for so long?" Tarrant is much more dutiful in his citation of sources, but those sources are almost all secondary, and more than a quarter of his 564 citations come from either Perrault's work or from Trepper's memoirs, published in French in 1975 as *Le Grand Jeu*. It is difficult to distinguish what exactly is new in Tarrant's work. Trepper certainly emerges as less of a hero. At the very least, Tarrant has done a service by synthesizing the work of several others into a manageable, English-language edition.

The story of the Red Orchestra, speculation and all, remains fascinating. Perrault provides some evidence, albeit speculative, that certain German officials including Martin Bormann and Heinrich Himmler tried to contact the Soviets via the "radio game" to save their own skins. It is also interesting to see the Gestapo caught up in its own racism. The Gestapo believed all Jews to be master-conspirators but at the same time refused to believe that Jews like Trepper could ultimately outwit them. Thus they consistently underestimated Trepper and his Jewish colleagues. They failed to imagine, for example, that once "broken" by torture or intimidation, a Jewish spy would ever have the nerve to escape or somehow to play a double game, as Trepper ultimately did (we suspect) in conjunction with the *Funkspiel*.

In the final double-cross, Trepper returned to Moscow in 1945, only to be imprisoned in Lubianka prison by his superiors, for what crime he was never told. He might have been imprisoned because of his collaboration, however temporary and disingenuous, with the Germans. More likely, however, he was imprisoned because he was living proof of the blindness of the Russian leadership to the dangers of a German invasion in 1941. His network, after all, had warned Stalin of the impending attack and Stalin, who had turned a deaf ear to their signal, surely did not wish to be reminded of his failings. As a Jew who had had contact with the West, he was also suspected of "cosmopolitan" tendencies. It was not until 1955 that he was released and given a rehabilitation certificate. With no further desire to stay in the Soviet Union and yet still a communist at heart, Trepper returned with his wife to Poland, where he became a leader of the Jewish community in Warsaw. Perrault concludes *L'Orchestre Rouge* with the image of Trepper speaking at Auschwitz on the twentieth anniversary of its liberation. "It is fitting," Perrault states, "that a place which had witnessed the slaughter of so many defenseless women and children, of so many Jewish men unable to fight back, should reecho with the voice of the Jew who must surely have dealt the Third Reich its deadliest blows" (p. 494).

Note:

This book is reprinted from the original title, *L'Orchestre Rouge* (1967).

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