

Hans Magnus Enzensberger

Ein glücklicher Jude oder ein Glücksrabe

Anmerkungen zu den Erinnerungen von
Dan Vittorio Segre

Mit einer Vorbemerkung von Michael Brenner

Im Jahr 1993 erschien als 100. Band in Hans Magnus Enzensbergers *Anderer Bibliothek* der Titel *Ein Glücksrabe. Die Geschichte eines italienischen Juden*. Es handelt sich um die bemerkenswerten Jugenderinnerungen des späteren israelischen Diplomaten und Universitätsprofessors Dan Vittorio Segre. Segres Vater war Bürgermeister eines kleinen piemontesischen Dorfes, aktives Mitglied der Faschistischen Partei – und Jude. Im Gegensatz zu den meisten anderen rechtsextremen Parteien Europas waren die italienischen Faschisten anfangs keine erklärten Antisemiten, bis sie unter dem Druck der Nationalsozialisten 1938 ebenfalls Rassegesetze erließen und ihre jüdischen Mitglieder ausschlossen. Segres Erinnerungen handeln von einer tief in Anhänger und Gegner Mussolinis gespaltenen Familie sowie von seiner eigenen Hinwendung zum Zionismus, die ihn schon als Sechzehnjährigen von Italien nach Palästina führte. Am 4. September 1939, kurz nach Kriegsbeginn, bestieg er in Triest ein Schiff, das ihn in seine neue Heimat brachte und aus Vittorio Segre bald den Israeli Dan Avni machte.

Auf einer vom Lehrstuhl für Jüdische Geschichte und Kultur im Juni 2005 in München veranstalteten Tagung zur Geschichte der Juden in Italien trafen Verleger und Autor zum ersten Mal zusammen. Segre nahm, gemeinsam mit der Historikerin Diana Pinto und dem damaligen Präsidenten der italienisch-jüdischen Gemeinden, Amos Luzzatto, an einer Diskussionsrunde zum Thema „The Case of the Italian Jews: Jewish Normalcy or Jewish Exception?“ teil. Hans Magnus Enzensberger sprach die einleitenden Worte, die wir hier im englischen Original abdrucken. Sie handeln nicht nur von den Umständen, wie der italienische Autor seinen deutschen Verleger fand, sondern auch von den feinen Unterschieden zwischen *fortune* und *happiness*, zwischen Glück und *Massel*.



Why I should have the privilege of introducing Dan Vittorio Segre to this audience I am at a loss to say. I cannot lay claim to any sort of competence in the scholarly fields to which this meeting is devoted. About the history of the Jews in Italy from Antiquity to present days I am as ignorant as the man in the street; and neither have I ever had a chance to meet the guest of honour of the conference in person. So the only remaining explanation for my being here is sheer luck.

In October, 1990, I found in the mail a letter from an unfamiliar source. If I remember rightly, the sender was a teacher living in the Saarland. He told me about a book called *Storia di un ebreo italiano* about which I had never heard before.

Perhaps I should explain that, for the past twenty years, I have worked as a sort of amateur publisher. As you may know, this is a precarious occupation, and you might well ask why I should bother to engage in it. The return on capital in this line of business is notoriously small, so money can hardly be a sufficient reason to dabble in it, even less so if you do not have the necessary funds to start with. What I relished was the rather extraordinary position I found myself in: I was given ‚carte blanche‘ to print all the books, and only the books which I wanted to read myself. This meant, of course, that I could not count on the machinery which is common in the industry: a staff of professional editors, scouts and secretaries. As it turned out, an invisible network of voluntary helpers came to my rescue. Readers who had seen the books I published came up with advice and with suggestions of their own, some of them far-fetched or harebrained, others surprising and welcome. I need not tell you that I followed each of them up in the hope of finding a hidden treasure.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger (Abb. 1 links) und Dan Vittorio Segre (Abb. 2 rechts) während der Konferenz „Juden in Italien von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart: Zwischen Ghetto und Integration“, Juni 2005

This is exactly what happened when Bompiani sent me a copy of Dan's book, followed by an English version called *Memoirs of a Fortunate Jew* published by Peter Halban in London. Those of you who know it will agree with me that this work is unique, by which I mean to say that it is strictly speaking incomparable. Even the English title gives a hint of this quality, for I would guess that in the second half of the twentieth century this is the only autobiography of a fortunate Jew to see the press. When I had it translated into German, I was faced with a semantic problem. In my language, the vocabulary dealing with *fortuna* is not very rich. Whereas in French or English there is a clear distinction between *happiness* and *luck*, between *bonheur* and *fortune*, in German we have only *Glück* to serve both ends.

But there are, I suspect, good reasons why Segre chose to call himself "fortunate" and not "happy". His story is not only an existential adventure and a picaresque tale, it is also a moral fable. There is no page in it where the dark background of the holocaust is absent. Therefore, it would have been an unforgivable 'gaffe' to call him 'einen glücklichen Juden'. In the end, I found a way out of my dilemma. In the German tradition, the raven is a symbol of bad luck, and thus a person suffering from it is called 'ein Unglücksrabe'. I turned this idiom on its head, inventing a neologism, and titled Segre's memoir *Ein Glücksrabe*.

It is an act of great courage that in the face of the murderous background of the holocaust our author never loses his epic calm. Segre has at one point commented on the new name which he adopted when he came to Palestine: Dan Avni. Whereas Dan is derived from 'ladun', the Hebrew word for 'judging', Avni suggests stone-like strength. Not a bad choice for an eighteen year old innocent who could hardly foresee that justice and fortitude, tempered by an unfailing sense of humour, would indeed prove to be the virtues governing his future life.

They alone, of course, cannot guarantee a writer's quality, but they help when he engages in the trickiest of all literary projects, which I believe is to write an autobiography. This is a genre fraught with many pitfalls, as witnessed by its foremost modern example, the *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which in the end is nothing but a bundle of self-serving lies. The trouble starts with the first person singular. Segre's memoirs never fall into what I would call the ego trap. He is in fact more interested in the fate of others than in his own. His book is first of all a family saga. In this respect, I would compare it to

Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Gattopardo*. Just as this Sicilian nobleman gives us an account of a vanished world, Segre introduces us into a milieu which is gone forever, with all its antecedents, its illusions, its destruction, and into the rise of the new and raw reality of Israel. What serves him in this enterprise is his remarkable memory. His account is full of Proustian moments, and the delicacy of these epiphanies makes his prose breathe and shine.

I am told that one of the few Yiddish words surviving in the German language, the word 'Massel', is derived not only from Hebrew 'mazzal', which means fate; it can be traced back to the times of the Babylonian captivity; the original meaning of 'mazzaltu' in Accadian is a star guiding us on earth. Dan Vittorio Segre has always followed his star. All we can do is to admire and congratulate him for his achievement. Massel tov!

BILDNACHWEIS
Abb. 1 und Abb. 2: Privat-
aufnahme.