

Who was the *New Woman*?

Elsa Herrmann, "This is the New Woman" (1929), in: *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg. 1994 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 206-08.

First published as *So ist die neue Frau* (Hellerau: Avalon Verlag, 1929), 32-43.

My main source of information on Elsa Herrmann:

- Jürgen Nitsche, "Dr. Elsa Herrmann, eine streitbare jüdische Frauenrechtlerin, und ihr Buch 'So ist die neue Frau': Nicht nur ein Exkurs zu ihrem Weiblichkeitsentwurf in den späten 1920er Jahren", in: *Jüdinnen und Psyche, Medizin und Judentum*, ed. by Caris-Petra Heidel. (Mabuse-Verlag, 2016), pp. 77–108.

Originally printed by the art publisher Avalun in Hellerau in 1929, "So ist die neue Frau," is the first published work of Elsa Herrmann (later Dr. Elsa Pick). It depicts the modern German woman in the Weimar Republic. Then an unmarried 36 year-old Jewish woman, Herrman provided a new and unique perspective on the "New Woman," a concept only recently developed. Published soon after the 11th Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1929, Herrmann wrote about the new financially and sexually free modern woman. This modern woman is focused on the future and independence, rather than marriage and a husband. Depicting her personal experience in a generation in which redefining gender difference was particularly important, her book provided new insight. Time and time again the piece is referenced in academic papers and essays on Weimar women and the development of feminism in Weimar Germany. And while the GHDI headnote explains that Elsa Herrmann fled to Czechoslovakia in 1933 where her trail ended,¹ this is not the case. Elsa Herrmann went on to participate further in human rights activism, marry several times, become a British citizen, and achieve much more in her career.

Elsa Herrmann (1893-1957) was born in Plauen to a Jewish merchant family. After she studied at a teacher training college under a well-known school reformer, Dr. Hugo Gaudig, she

¹ GHDI.org, *Elsa Herrmann: This is the New Woman*, (1929).

spent some time teaching at the *Höhere Israelitische Bürgerschule* (Jewish Secondary School).² On May 1, 1916 Elsa started her studies in Philosophy at the *Königliche Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität* in Berlin before changing her focus to the study of law (*Studium der Rechte*) in May 1917. Given permission from the University in April 1918, Elsa Herrmann moved to Marburg for a semester before enrolling at Leipzig Universität, where she attended lectures on law.³ She graduated from the University of Leipzig in 1919 with a law degree. In 1920 she became the first Jewish doctoral student at the Leipzig law faculty, acquiring her PhD in Law in 1920.⁴

Sometime in 1920 she corresponded with Albert Einstein while working for the *Deutscher Zentralausschuss für die Auslandshilfe* (German Central Committee for Foreign Aid) discussing collections for the German Children's Fund. On behalf of the Deutschen Zentralausschuss für die Auslandshilfe she requested a personal statement in which Albert Einstein acknowledged the relief efforts; he wrote such a statement on July 11, 1920.⁵ Little else is known about her whereabouts from this time to 1933.

After the rise of the National Socialists to power in 1933, Elsa Herrmann moved first to a border town in Bohemia. Scholar Jürgen Nitsche claims that Elsa was married here on December 16, 1933 to Bedrich Goder, a Czech man 15 years her junior. This marriage was short lived. In February 1934 the couple moved to Prague. But by May 18, 1934 she was married to Karel Pick (1880-1950). From then on she was known as Dr. Elsa Pick and she began to hold lectures in November of 1934 on topics such as "women in the economic crisis."⁶ As the violence escalated throughout Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, Elsa eventually emigrated to Britain.

It is unknown when exactly she moved to Britain, but her sister claimed they lived together in Birmingham during the summer of 1940.⁷ There is evidence she lived in Birmingham

² Kowalzik, Barbara: *Lehrerbuch. The teachers of the Leipzig Jewish School 1912-1942, presented in biograms*, (City of Leipzig (ed.): Leipziger Kalender (special volume 2006/1). Leipzig 2006, pp. 49-62.

³ Humboldt-Universität, *UArch*, (Berlin, AZ 30.04.1918.)

⁴ Lang, Hubert, *Zwischen allen Stühlen. Juristen jüdischer Herkunft in Leipzig 1848-1953*, (Kaufering 2014), Anl. A, S. 379/380.

⁵ Albert Einstein to the German Committee for Foreign Relief, 11.7.1920. *The Collected Papers* (2002), Siehe Anm. 29, S. 332/33.

⁶ Benedik, Stefan: *Mutterlohn, Ozdravén & les pas modernes. Versuch einer Fallstudie zu Gender und Nation im Prag der Zwischenkriegszeit am Beispiel des „Deutschen Vereins Frauenfortschritt“ und des Klubs deutscher Künstlerinnen“*. Diplom-Arbeit, (Graz 2007) (unveröffentlicht).

⁷ Archiv der Israelitischen Religionsgemeinde zu Leipzig, *Gertrud Herrmann, Auswanderungsbogen*, Juni 1940.

for at least several years after, going on to publish in London Magazines throughout 1940 and 1941.⁸ In 1943 she published a letter from Birmingham through the Austrian Center in London for the “Zeitenspiegel,” which would be printed in the “Rescue Measures for Jews” section of the magazine. In that article she would also mention the death of her mother, who had died after being transported from the ghetto in Vogtland that had been her home for two years to Treblinka where she was ultimately murdered in September of 1942. Elsa would not learn of her mother’s death until January 1943.

It is not clear exactly when Elsa Pick obtained British citizenship, but she was issued a passport by the Foreign Office in March, 1950. After Karel Pick died in March, 1950, Elsa moved to Munich in July, 1951.⁹ On September 22, 1952 Elsa Pick moved to her final residence in Munich. In 1954 Elsa wrote on social work by the Berlin Senator for Labor and Social Aliens where she discussed how international organizations could solve social problems, which was published in the magazine *Soziale Arbeit*.¹⁰

Eventually, while visiting her brother, Elsa Pick suffered from collapse and was sent to the hospital. It was there she died on March 23, 1957.

Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order

Herrmann, Elsa. *So ist die neue Frau*. Avalon Verlag. Hellerau, 1929.

This is Elsa Pick’s first circulated publication. It is a book discussing the modern woman of Weimar. Describing the “New Woman” as financially independent from a man, free in her choice of hair and dress, and liberated from the norms of the past. Pick begins by distinguishing this “women of today” from the “woman of tradition,” who is bound by her family duties and limited in her capacity. She goes on to describe the “New Man” for the modern woman and the “New Family” they create. Within the historical circumstances of the time, it is interesting that this progressive book by an honest Jewish woman of little literary acclaim would be published at this time in Hellerau, Germany.

Rühle-Gerstel, Alice. *Das Frauenproblem der Gegenwart. Eine psychologische Bilanz*. Leipzig: S. Hirzel. 1932.

Interestingly, this book is also cited in “Anticipating the Future in the Present: ‘New Women’ and Other Beings of the Future in Weimar Germany,” (see Graf, Rüdiger). This book is also cited in my main source, “Jüdinnen und Psyche, Medizin und Judentum,” in

⁸ Pick, Elsa: *Frühling in Bournville*. (The European Press, 1940), H. 4, S. 7.

⁹ Stadtarchiv München: *Einwohnermeldekarte Pick, Elsa*. Adolf Herrmann

¹⁰ Pick, Elsa, "Wie können internationale Organisationen Soziale Problem lösen?" in: *Soziale Arbeit*. (Berlin 1955) H. 8, S. 377-382.

reference to Rühle-Gerstel's more exaggerated take on the Modern Woman, which she published 3 years after Herrmann's work. I could not access Rühle-Gerstel's book directly online so I am unsure of the pages in which Herrmann is cited, but a physical copy is held at Indiana University. The title of Rühle-Gerstel's book implies she will use Herrmann's book as evidence for her psychological record of problems of the modern woman.

Pick, Elsa. Response to reader letter. *Frau in Arbeit* 2. 1941, Nr. 17.

Elsa Pick answered the letter of a reader of the periodical specifically aimed toward refugee women. A mother hit her 5 year-old son for lying and asked if it was justified. While still childless herself, she advised the mother that the violence was unjustified while providing examples of successful parental techniques from around the world, with emphasis in showing a child the difference between an honorable person and a coward, while referencing prominent child psychologists. This is an interesting insight into the extent of Pick's academic interests and her ethics.

Pick, Elsa. "Rettungsmaßnahmen für Juden." *Zeitspiegel*. London, 1943, Nr. 1 (2. Januar), S. 8. In this article, "Rescue Measures for Jews," Elsa Pick provides instructions on creating an organization to help the youths and boys who have been deported. The goal was to provide those deported an opportunity to write messages to neutral countries and the Red Cross. Pick also calls on the older people to write letters demanding action.

Pick, Elsa. "Wie können internationale Organisationen Soziale Problem lösen?" *Soziale Arbeit*. Berlin 1955, H. 8, S. 377-382.

In this paper, Pick discusses the social work of the Berlin Senator for Labor and Social Aliens. She presents the work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organization (IRO) between the years of 1945 and 1952 as evidence of the help international organizations can contribute to solving social issues.

Bertschik J. "Vicki Baum: Gelebter und Inszenierter Typ der ›Neuen Frau‹" in der Weimarer Republik. J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart. 2000. Accessed February 20, 2019.

https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-476-02693-4_4

This chapter describes the social situation in which its subject, Vicki Baum, lived. It cites "So ist die neue Frau" in a footnote describing the ideal image of the working wife and mother at the time. Rather than a direct quote, the author summarizes Herrmann's characterization by highlighting the more 'radical' aspects of the new woman: financial independence, equality in love, sex and marriage, and freedom of dress. Bertschik then states that this "New Woman" is the epitome of Weimar modernity. This citation's publication date is significant in that it shows the significance of "So ist die neue Frau." That the book is still used as a primary source about Weimar women shows the lasting impact of Herrmann's experience.

German Central Committee for Foreign Relief, 9.7.1920. *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein. Vol. 7, The Berlin Years, Writings 1918-1921*. Princeton, 2002., S. 335.

Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://einsteinpapers.press.princeton.edu/vol7-doc/>

In these collected papers is a letter from Elsa Herrmann to Albert Einstein in which they discuss a telephone conversation between Elsa and Ilse Einstein, Albert's step-daughter. Their conversation was about the collections of money for the German Children's Fund, organized by the Quakers since 1919. On behalf of the „Deutscher Zentralausschuss für die Auslandshilfe“ she requested a personal statement in which Albert Einstein acknowledged the relief efforts; he wrote such a statement on July 11, 1920, which is also included in this same collection.

Graf, Rüdiger. Anticipating the Future in the Present: 'New Women' and Other Beings of the Future in Weimar Germany. *Central European History* 42, no. 4. 2009. 647–73.

This article was published in a history journal and discusses the concept of the “New Woman” as a paradigm case for Weimar political and intellectual debates in general. The abstract implies that the author will use Herrmann's “New Woman” and her formation as supporting evidence of the political and intellectual parallels.

Jürgen Nitsche, "Dr. Elsa Herrmann, eine streitbare jüdische Frauenrechtlerin, und ihr Buch 'So ist die neue Frau': Nicht nur ein Exkurs zu ihrem Weiblichkeitsentwurf in den späten 1920er Jahren", in: *Jüdinnen und Psyche, Medizin und Judentum*, ed. by Caris-Petra Heidel. (Mabuse-Verlag, 2016), pp. 77–108.. Accessed February 19, 2019.

This chapter is the main source of my exploration. It is through this text I found many of my other citations, and all of my footnotes. The book in its entirety is a study of the conditions and circumstances in the personal life of Jewish women that have led to the special interest and professional occupation with psychiatric or psychological problems. The chapter on Dr. Elsa Pick provided a detailed record of Elsa Pick's documented achievements and records. This book is the first that provides detail on Elsa Herrmann's life after 1933 and her entire career under her married name. It also gave significant attention to why and how Elsa started her published career at a later age and why she published at an art publishing house. Heidel really explores the psychological circumstances of Pick's life that led to her publishing “So ist die neue Frau,” and more than that, explores the psychological implications of the book itself.