

INTRODUCTION: ON THE REBELLIOUS MARYS

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Éva Antal (Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Hungary) and Antonella Braidà (IDEA, Université de Lorraine, Nancy-Metz, France) were the convenors of a seminar session at the 16th ESSE Conference at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (from 29th of August to 2nd September 2022), titled “Rebellious Marys: Women on Self-Development in Late 18th-and Early 19th-Century Fiction and Prose Writings.” The seminar comprised two sessions, organized thematically and chronologically.

The seminar was inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft’s, Mary Robinson’s, Mary Hays’s, and Mary Shelley’s work and by their revolutionary novels, *Mary* (1788), *Maria* (1798), *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799) and *Mathilda* (1820), among others. In all these works, the female protagonist struggles to find her own way in life, aiming to fulfil her self-development and to escape the constraints imposed on women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the two sessions of the seminar, the eight scholars intended to give voice to those courageous women—writers, journalists and fictional characters—who dared to question, criticise and/or transgress the boundaries of their social roles, emphasising the importance of (self-)education, self-knowledge and self-reliance. The papers discussed both fiction and non-fiction written by “the rebellious Marys” not only in the Pre-Romantic and Romantic periods, but also in the early Victorian times. In addition to novels and life writing, some of the papers focussed on other genres, such as treatises, journalistic pieces, or fables, while keeping the main concern of contextualised female self-development in mind. The two sessions were extremely stimulating thanks to their sharp focus on women writers’ presence in the public sphere, as well as on their exploration of (self-)education and the importance of reading.

In lieu of conference proceedings, the journal section here consists of six articles edited by Éva Antal and Antonella Braidà.

María José Álvarez Faedo (University of Oviedo, Spain) discusses the rhetorical strategies in an early eighteenth-century women’s journal, Eliza Haywood’s *The Female Spectator*, presenting the novelties of her instructive narratives. Dragoş Ivana (University of Bucharest, Romania) studies Mary Hays’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* in terms of the contemporary notions on rationality and sensibility in women’s conduct. Dóra Janczer Csikós (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary) analyses the understanding of motherhood and its images in Mary Hays’s scandalous

novel, *The Victim of Prejudice*. Maria Parrino (Independent Scholar, Italy) examines the mother-daughter relationships in Mary Robinson's Gothic novel, *Vancenza*, while Éva Antal presents two rebellious Marys' life paths and development in two late eighteenth-century *Bildungsromane* authored by Mary Wollstonecraft. Antonella Braidà explores the fictional representation of female protagonists' self-education and their transculturalism in Mary Margaret Busk's short stories.

The guest editors, Éva Antal and Antonella Braidà have been working together in their shared field of research since 2019 as members of the research centre IDEA, Interdisciplinarity in English Studies at the Université de Lorraine. In 2022, with the French publishing house PUFC (Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté), they brought out the edited volume *Female Voices: Forms of Women's Reading, Self-Education and Writing in Britain (1770-1830)*, which also covered the literary period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with particular interest in the versatile self-expression of women writers.