

# **WATCHING THE VOLCANO.**

## **A FRANCES BURNEY D'ARBLAY PRIMER**

**FRANCESCA SAGGINI**  
**(UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH)**

Frances Burney d'Arblay, who was born in 1752 and died in 1840, spent 72 years of her long and eventful life writing letters and diaries, published only after her death. Burney experienced lockdown and mental health issues during her life at the Court of the 'mad' king George III. She married a French officer during the great European wars when England and France were worst enemies. She lived in England as the wife of a Catholic Frenchman, and in France as a Protestant Englishwoman. She was the breadwinner in her family thanks to her published work, but she also tried unsuccessfully to make a living by writing for the stage. Burney underwent a devastating, anaesthetic-less mastectomy, of which she left a shocking narrative, the earliest first-person account of this type of surgery. Her onomastic odyssey – from the baby-like “Fannikin” of her youth and the informal “Fanny” Burney she is still known by, to the present-day excision of her married surname d'Arblay-- this odyssey is a biographical journey worth recounting in its own right.

Frances Burney d'Arblay was a remarkable woman who was also a pioneering writer, destined to confront familial and social apparatuses throughout her life as well as in her afterlife.