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Frances Burney--Without Anesthesia

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Frances Burney—Without Anesthesia

Mary Dengler

More powerful than *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, *Wanderer*
Was their creator's life. Adherence to the old regime
Of England, pre-reform, marked out
Her daily path. Respect for parents banished
Her first work to flames. Respect for scholars pushed
Her pen again, till *Evelina* found its way anonymously
To publishers and fame. Then came successors
With their author's name—good work
For one who struggled long to read, who scribbled
Endlessly, who watched at ten her mother die. Obedient
To her father's pride, she served at Court
As writer-stifling Keeper of the Robes
Five-years, and unofficial counselor to Charlotte,
Fretful Queen of George the Third,
Who lost the colonies and almost spent
The writer, till her father saw her fading
Health and set her free. For this, she credits
"Providence," the source of all good things,
Including romance, as we read. Resisting
Economic ease, she loved at 42 impoverished
French Aristocrat d'Arblay for his loyalty,
Though nonpolitical herself. Far from autonomy,
She bore a son, who lived as long as she. But more
Compelling was her war with cancer of the breast.
This was no easy war: No anesthesia dulled
The weaponry. How did she face the surgeon's
Clumsy art? She wrote of her Redeemer,
He whose death removed her sin; of her creator,
God, whose Providence removed her fear.
She was an Anglican in church, a Calvinist
at heart.