

plans is their grandiosity. On 4 March, Dibdin had brought his narration up to mid-December, and his book up to 183 pages. So far, then, he had worked at a rate of approximately twenty pages per month of tour. By now allowing 123 pages for the rest of the tour, he was apparently thinking it might continue to June, or, alternatively, planning a great deal more digression.

Dibdin's later working practice with his "Table Entertainments" was to write out the text he intended to perform, but then to make numerous additions, deletions and rearrangements as he continued to refine and adapt his work.¹⁸ Assuming that *Readings and Music* existed in some comparable form, Dibdin's job in Liverpool was indeed to "copy," but also to tidy and regulate. Although the epistolary format made little sense when it came to presenting a supposedly continuous dramatic text, he continued to employ it. *Readings and Music* is thus divided into no less than 24 letters, each one commencing on a new page: the headings, each occupying a third of the page, the spaces at the ends of the letters, and some added footnotes, extend the text to a remarkable 100 pages, not counting the unnumbered pages of score expanding it still further. Even the casual reader can be in no doubt that Dibdin is seeking to fill as many pages as possible. What he presents is not equivalent to any single performance of the show, but a sort of aggregate of all the versions through which it had evolved. Thus the published version in the *MT* includes 50 songs, though Dibdin's normal performance practice was to sing 24. As he notes in the passage quoted above, Dibdin prepared a text of this "ideal," extended version of the show between 6 and 22 March.

After a brief rest, on 25 March Dibdin began work on the 123-page missing section he would require to complete his volume, and that in the end needed to be 125 pages long. What Dibdin and Gales had forgotten is that the nature of the printing process meant the total number of pages prior to the new material (i.e., *Readings and Music*) needed to be divisible by four—to avoid a single leaf having to be inserted—which would have been the case had they started printing *Readings and Music* on page 305 or 309.¹⁹ Dibdin did not find it as easy to fill the gap as he apparently expected. His account of the tour proper was completed on 17 April, but this only brought him to page 249, leaving another 59 pages of additional content urgently needing to be filled. Here Dibdin announces that he will "wind up" with a "running account of places, inns, &c. and a few more gleanings," as well as more "remarks on the subject of music" and a catalogue "of my [theatrical] pieces, and the profits which arose from them" (249). It was the catalogue that served Dibdin best, for, rather absurdly divided into letters like everything else, it filled 24 pages. His original plans for the *MT* had mentioned "many theatrical transactions," but it is hard to believe that he then imagined it encompassing this sort of career overview. Given that a persistent theme of the book is Dibdin's not being properly appreciated in England—hence the intended

18. There are three manuscript volumes of Dibdin's performance texts for the "Table Entertainments" in the British Library (Add. Mss. 30,960–30,962). From these, notably, *Retro-spect Opera* has recently been able to create a performance edition and recording of *The Wags* (1790), Dibdin's biggest success in the genre (RO008).

19. Strictly speaking, I believe Dibdin was wrong to say they were "entangled with an odd quarter of a sheet": they were "entangled" with an odd eighth of a sheet, i.e., 2 pages.