

likely also influenced the culture of London's "song-and-supper rooms" which started opening in 1815—the direct ancestors of the later music hall.⁴

The *Readings and Music* tour proved transformative in another way, too: it persuaded Dibdin that he could and should produce books. Although from the early 1770s onwards his literary ambitions were steadily developing, there is no evidence prior to 1787 of a serious interest in book production. He had published librettos, a polemical pamphlet, *The Royal Circus Epitomized* (1784), and his own periodical, *The Devil*, which ran for 22 issues in 1786 and 1787. But after his 1787–88 tour produced the *Musical Tour of Mr. Dibdin*, a 450-page quarto far bigger in size and scope than anything he had written before, he began thinking on a different scale, publishing three three-volume novels between 1793 and 1807, a five-volume *Complete History of the English Stage* between 1797 and 1800, two large volumes of *Observations on a Tour Through Almost the Whole of England, and a Considerable Part of Scotland* in 1801 and 1802, and four volumes of *The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin* in 1803. The *Musical Tour* directly anticipates, in different ways, most of the major publications that followed. Dibdin discovered a taste for autobiographical writing mixed with anecdotes, opinions and polemics; although he has, at most, appeared as a footnote in accounts of Romantic autobiography, no British writer published more about themselves in the decades between 1780 and 1810.

Despite the great importance of the *Musical Tour* (hereafter *MT*) in Dibdin's polymathic career, it is as flawed as it is fascinating. It did not develop smoothly and Dibdin had written much of it before deciding on the final shape and content of the volume. Moreover, he was often juggling the historical aspects of his account with a desire to comment on his present circumstances. When Dibdin left London, he had no idea of recording his experiences: "at my first setting out I had not the smallest idea of writing any account of my TOUR at all" (43–44). Not until August did he lay plans for a book, and not until October did he begin systematically writing it. Given that the tour itself continued until March 1788, this meant that for a long time Dibdin was having to catch up with himself, and he recognized almost immediately the parallels with Laurence Sterne's 1760s novel, *Tristram Shandy* (10). As the project developed, it came to unite the different worlds of self-publishing, provincial printing, financing by subscription and—belatedly—royal patronage. Scholars have paid some attention to the tour itself, and to *Readings and Music*,⁵ but there has been no separate analysis of the complex vehicle through which Dibdin preserved a record of these things. The published *MT* is the more interesting in that, uniquely among Dibdin's major prose publications, a complete fair copy manuscript of the book has been preserved, held in the Fellows' Library at Winchester College (MS 61). Although there are few significant departures from this bound manuscript volume in the printed text, the

4. For the "song-and-supper rooms" and their place in London's entertainment culture, see Laurence Senelick, introduction to *Tavern Singing in Early Victorian London: The Diaries of Charles Rice for 1840 and 1850* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1997), xii.

5. See, in particular, Elisabeth M. Lockwood, "Charles Dibdin's Musical Tour," *Music and Letters* 13, no. 2 (1932): 207–14; and Jeremy Barlow, "Dibdin on Tour: Performer or Sight-seer?," *Early Music Performer* 39 (October 2016): 3–8.