

removal to India—the catalogue allowed him to settle a few more scores and it is not too obviously out of place in what was already a very heterogeneous volume. To modern Dibdin scholars, it has proved invaluable. Dibdin completed the catalogue on 25 April, at which point he had just over 400 consecutive pages of the *MT* completed.

Dibdin was still not done. The following day he headed a new letter “The Corps de Reserve” and claimed to have “purposely reserved about forty pages for general observations” (407). These were mostly concerned with newspapers and the culture of reviewing and criticism—themes which had earlier loomed large in *The Devil*. Dibdin was, among his many other talents, a notable amateur artist who was able to exhibit at the Royal Academy in 1801, and he drew on the vocabulary of painting to justify this final section of the book: he would “rub off hardnesses, and throw in some finishing touches, to make this picture have a proper roundness and harmony in its general effects” (422). It was an awkward metaphor given that he could not change what had already been printed, and it is unlikely that any reader has ever found the book particularly harmonious: nevertheless, it is significant that Dibdin wanted his work judged this way. He dated the last letter—Letter 107—on 1 May, the day he initially closed the subscription, and the volume was finally complete. Toward the end of his labours, Dibdin claimed that the *MT* had been “written in a greater hurry than ever book was” (419). Even allowing for his proclivity to exaggeration, he surely cannot have considered this the case prior to March 1788. But nearly two-thirds of the volume had been written in March and April, and though hardly unprecedented, this was certainly impressive, especially as there is no obvious falling off in the quality of Dibdin’s writing in these months.

In this final period of intense work, Dibdin enjoyed a remarkable piece of luck which seemingly did a good deal to ensure the success of the *MT*. In a letter dated 23 April, and significantly entitled “The Coup de Theatre,” Dibdin explains that his “kindest and most generous friend” had arranged an audience for him with the Prince of Wales, the future George IV (282). This audience can be dated 5 April 1788 with some precision.²⁰ Dibdin played some twenty songs for the prince, some of them certainly drawn from *Readings and Music*, and the climax of the evening came when the future king said “I might use his name in any way that I thought would be of service to me” (283). Dibdin was thus able to dedicate—or, in his preferred term, “inscribe”—the book to the prince, “With pride of heart, humble deference, and grateful susceptibility.” The Winchester manuscript gives some idea of whom the book might have been dedicated to, had this meeting with the prince not been arranged. It contains four dedications each designed for a “single book”: to Dibdin’s wife; to William Davis (eventually the dedicatee of Dibdin’s *Collection of Songs, Selected from the Works of Mr. Dibdin* of 1790); to Thomas Preston; and to Gales. The most interesting of these is the inscription to “Mrs. Dibdin / in return for the chearfulness and kind attention

20. Dibdin says that it was the evening when “MARCHESI . . . made his first appearance at the *Opera*” (283). Luigi Marchesi was one of the most celebrated singers of his time and his London debut was seen as a major cultural event.