

manuscript provides fascinating clues to the process by which the book came to be made, and it is regularly cited in the history reconstructed here.⁶

The story of the tour commences on page 15 of the published *MT*; the history of the book about the tour effectively commences on page 91, when Dibdin describes his return to Worcester on 31 July 1787 after an earlier visit in the spring. There follows one of the most ambiguous and conflicted passages in the volume:

I never experienced more *milk and water* treatment in my life. I advertised my entertainment however and was tolerably attended. . . . I sincerely believe, had it not been for the interference of a friend, I must have used the word INTOLERABLY. To this gentleman, who is no other than T. S. Esq. [.] I shall beg leave to say, that if he meant his friendship and attention to my interest should finish where it apparently has—God forbid I should load him with more trouble than he is willing to suffer! So far from it—I here, in the face of the world, acquit him of any intentions in relation to me, but those of serving, obliging, and pleasing me; and should it so happen that neither upon paper, nor any other way, we again exchange a single word, my wishes towards him are, may he enjoy a long life of health, happiness, and prosperity! And I hope he retains so much of his former good wishes for me, as to return an equal portion of esteem, with equal sincerity. (91)

Readers are expected to recall that the first eleven letters of the *MT* had been addressed “To T. S. Esq.” Dibdin later chose to reveal the identity of this individual, for in his *Professional Life* he states: “The name of THEOPHILUS SWIFT, Esq. will be seen at the head of some of the poetry. . . . To this gentleman I addressed a few letters in my original *Tour*.”⁷ Swift (1746–1815), whose parents were both cousins of Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, was an eccentric Irish barrister. The fullest contemporary description describes him as “an excellent classic [*sic*] scholar, and versed likewise in modern literature and belles lettres. . . . [He was] a sincere, kind-hearted man; but . . . at the same time, the most visionary of created beings. He saw every thing whimsically—many things erroneously—and nothing like another person.”⁸ Swift had just commenced a literary career by publishing a lengthy poem, *The Temple of Folly*. It is not clear when or where he and Dibdin first became connected, but it was sometime prior to this consequential meeting in Worcester, as a cryptic clue inserted into the *MT* indicates. In a letter to Swift of 16 October 1787, Dibdin writes: “You may remember, in a letter written to me some time ago, you wondered at my advertising my entertainment at BIRMINGHAM” (25). Dibdin performed at Birmingham in between his two visits to Worcester. The reference to the earlier letter suggests that Swift was probably not at Worcester when Dibdin first visited, or he would hardly have needed to

6. I am much indebted to Richard Foster, the Fellows’ Librarian, Winchester College, for allowing me access to the manuscript, for his generous hospitality when I visited Winchester, and for the information that the manuscript was donated to the College in the 1830s or 1840s by the Rev. Peter Hall (1803–49), a prolific collector of books and manuscripts and a former Winchester student. The records show that the manuscript was bound when first acquired by the College, though it was subsequently rebound in the twentieth century. The history of the manuscript before Hall acquired it, presumably no earlier than the 1820s, is unknown, but it seems likely that Dibdin’s printer, Joseph Gales, made the original decision to bind together the letters that constitute it.

7. Dibdin, *Professional Life*, 3:7.

8. Sir Jonah Barrington, *Personal Sketches of His Own Times*, 2 vols. (London, 1827), 1:405–6.