

gests that Williams and Taylor found the opening scene to be "irrelevant to the book."¹³⁹ Although Brontë did not ultimately cast aside these two characters, she acknowledged in her reply the possible unwelcome repercussions—particularly negative criticism from the "periodical press"—that could result from publishing the chapter as it stood. Then, invoking her identity as the male author Currer Bell, she writes "Currer Bell, without pretending to be David, feels no awe of the unwieldy Anakim," but reassured them that he (Currer Bell) would reasonably accommodate their concerns: "comprehend me rightly, gentlemen—it would grieve him to involve others in blame—any censure that would really injure and annoy his publishers would wound himself—therefore believe that he will not act rashly—trust his discretion."¹⁴⁰ Acknowledging his criticism of the opening apostrophe, she (resuming the voice of "C. Brontë") wanted to move on: "Enough said of a work in embryo—Permit me to request in conclusion that the M.S. may now be returned as soon as convenient."¹⁴¹ Weighing these communications along with the codicological evidence, I believe that Brontë (in this case, operating as Bell) indeed reworked the first chapter in a way that would suit the need to retain Donne and Malone (who appear elsewhere in the novel) while also addressing some of the other concerns that Williams and Taylor had raised. Indeed, there is a letter written by Brontë to her publishers on September 19, 1849 that begins "I have made the alteration—but I have made it to please Cornhill—not the Public nor the critics."¹⁴² Margaret Smith speculated that the "alteration" pertained to the second paragraph in the first chapter; but the evidence offered by the manuscript suggests that the revision was much larger than that.

This revision could also have entailed changes with respect to the novel's introduction and characterization of Michael Hartley, given Brontë's late-stage alterations to volume 2 of the manuscript and also given Hartley's role in the novel's denouement in volume 3. Indeed, a sizable portion—ff. 16 to 20—of chapter one pertains to Hartley. Were the material recopied and revised from the initial, earlier draft, this extended passage would constitute the single prior allusion to Hartley mentioned at the end of volume 3. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the first chapter is shorter rather than longer in its revision. It is also possible though that Brontë withdrew other, more controversial material from chapter one and filled it out with this extended passage about Hartley; in that case, the inserted material about Hartley in volume 2 would constitute an expansion of what would have been a brief mention about him in that volume. Both scenarios are possible. In either case, a larger pattern and purpose is clear: Brontë made a strategic attempt to unify the novel's action across its three volumes.

This new evidence helps to inform our reading of *Shirley* as a whole. The novel's opening chapter has been widely discussed and debated among critics since the novel's initial release in 1849. Titled "Levitical," the chapter was clearly intended as a critique on both the privileges exacted by junior assistants to senior clergymen,

¹³⁹. Ibid.

¹⁴⁰. *Letters*, 2:186.

¹⁴¹. Ibid.

¹⁴². *Letters*, 2:256–57.