as well a satire on their inflated self-importance and grandiose polemical views.[143] The opening failed to succeed with a number of contemporary readers—this despite Brontë's apparent late intervention at the prior behest of her publishers. George Henry Lewes wrote in his unsigned review of *Shirley* that it was a "mistake" to include the three "offensive, uninstructive and unamusing" curates featured in the initial chapter of the novel.[144] Over time, the figures have become "infamous" in Brontë criticism, and they continue to be discussed in great detail (viz., Dolin; Perkin; Thormählen).[145] An influential essay written in the mid-twentieth century by Jacob Korg branded the chapter as an "irrelevant" element marring the novel's unity.[146] In keeping with this Lewesian strain of criticism, Tim Dolin has interpreted *Shirley*'s "arbitrariness" as "reinforc[ing] the sense that it resists a logic of historical influence or even causality."[147] He argues that the novel "is plagued with anagnoreses [sic], confessions pleading new beginnings, and reversals of fortune," and notes that "*Shirley* is one of the first English novels to display as structural disturbance the disquieting implications of the modern crowd . . . [a] structural disturbance that was, and still is, perceived to be its formal imperfection."[148] Yet recent critics have welcomed these same qualities as a signal innovation in Brontë's writing. Justine Pizzo argues that the comic nature of *Shirley*'s opening chapter establishes the novel's "episodic structure and seemingly discrete, disunified vignettes that mark its difference from the rest of Brontë's oeuvre."[149]

If *Shirley* seems to be episodic in its design, close bibliographical analysis indicates that this was a calculated effect. Brontë carefully considered the risk of retaining her first chapter, as she clearly seems to have modified an earlier, slightly longer version of the chapter (i.e., longer by one leaf) in order to allay at least some of her publishers' concerns, while retaining the characters of Donne, Malone, and Sweeting for her main purpose. The free-wheeling exploits and haughty attitudes of these young, unmarried men starkly contrast with the condition in which the novel's two unmarried heroines find themselves—a marked disparity between the kind of privilege that certain men had (and often abused) and the limitations imposed on women, who were highly restricted in what they could say and do. Although it remains unclear exactly what changes were made to the first chapter, the ultimate fates and fortunes of these curates—who appear elsewhere throughout the novel—are disclosed within the novel's last chapter,

143. See J. Russell Perkin, *Theology and the Victorian Novel* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 61.

144. Lewes referred to the curates as he continued: "That they are not inventions, however, we feel persuaded. For nothing but a strong sense of their reality could have seduced the authoress into such a mistake as admitting them at all." Lewes, *Currer Bell's 'Shirley,'* 84.

145. Tim Dolin, *Mistress of the House: Women of Property in the Victorian Novel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997); Perkin, *Theology and the Victorian Novel*; and Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

146. Jacob Korg, "The Problem of Unity in Shirley," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 12, no. 2 (1957): 125–36 (126). doi:10.2307/3044150, accessed August 19, 2020.

147. Tim Dolin, "Fictional Territory and a Woman's Place: Regional and Sexual Difference in Shirley," *ELH* 62, no. 1 (1995): 197–215 (205). http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030266, accessed October 31, 2020.

148. Ibid.

149. Justine Pizzo, "Gendering the Comic Body: Physical Humour in *Shirley*," in *Charlotte Bronte, Embodiment and the Material World*, ed. Justine Pizzo and Eleanor Houghton (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 50.