

ing of manuscripts but rather “that terrible handwriting of human destiny, illness and death,” as perceived by George Eliot²⁷—a grappling with the grave consequences of sickness, social isolation, and loss that, indeed, mark the novel’s very core.

At the same time, these comparisons raise tantalizing questions both about the circumstances underlying the creation of the manuscript and the ways in which scholars have talked about its composition. Is there any evidence in the manuscript that accounts for the novel’s feeling of disunity or discord? Is this sense of random disjunction, observed by Lewes and others, reflected in the actual structure of the manuscript itself? Any attempt to address these questions requires a close study of the document and its physical construction.

1. THE CURRENT STATE OF THE MANUSCRIPT

Even a quick glance at the fair-copy manuscript of *Shirley* suggests that many hands have modified the manuscript since it left Charlotte Brontë’s custody. Currently, volumes 1 and 3 are three-quarter bound in boards covered in brown goatskin and fine-grained book cloth. These recent bindings date from August 1976, when volumes 1 and 3 of the manuscript were rebound by the BL,²⁸ according to a “Record of Treatment” tipped in onto the rectos of the first of three rear free endpapers.²⁹ Volume 2 of the manuscript is still in a binding that was likely commissioned by Brontë’s publisher, George Smith. The binding of volume 2 consists of worn, three-quarter tan calf and boards covered in marbled paper, in a manner typical of the last quarter of the nineteenth century; the volume contains light brown uncoated endpapers with a single flyleaf at the front appearing to have been introduced as part of the binding process.³⁰ When the BL later rebound volumes 1 and 3 in 1976, the binders discarded the endpapers, but they

27. Glen, *Imagination in History*, 186.

28. The spines of the 1976 rebind are decorated as follows: covered in brown goatskin, they feature six compartments and five raised bands (double ruling in blind around each raised band). Reading from the head of the spine down: the top compartment is empty, except for a new, white shelf mark label that reads “\$667 | A”; the second compartment contains a deep maroon spine label that reads as follows: “[double rule in gold] | SHIRLEY [in gold] | [single rule in gold] | M. S. S. [in gold] | [double rule in gold]”; the third compartment is empty; the fourth compartment contains the following lettering tooled in gold: “VOL. | I [III]”; the fifth compartment contains the following text tooled in gold: “GEORGE SMITH | MEMORIAL | VOL. IV [VI]”; the sixth compartment contains the following text tooled in gold: “BRITISH LIBRARY | ADDITIONAL | MS. | 43,477 [43,479]”.

29. The record of treatment documents that “RS” examined volume 1 of the manuscript, Add MS 43477, “after binding” on 24.8.76. Volume 3, Add MS 43479, is also documented as having been examined by “RS” on the same day.

30. The following is a description for the spine of volume 2. The original spine is of brown leather (appears to be calf) with six compartments and five raised bands (each raised band tooled in gold with double rule) with a deep maroon spine label located in the second compartment [“SHIRLEY”] tooled in gold: top compartment blank, aside from a sticker label with the old shelfmark “670” canceled in pencil; in second compartment from top: “[double rule in gold] | SHIRLEY. | [single rule] | M. S. S. | [double rule in gold]”; third compartment empty; fourth compartment: “VOL. | II.”; fifth compartment: “GEORGE SMITH | MEMORIAL. | VOL. V.”; sixth compartment: “BRIT. MUS. | ADDITIONAL | MS. | 43,478. | [old shelf mark label at bottom with the following letter in pencil] B”. These library markings were tooled onto the spine in the twentieth century.