tion with the deaths of Charlotte Brontë's three remaining siblings—Branwell, Emily, and Anne—which took place while the novel was still awaiting completion. They have described with poignance the deep grief that Brontë endured, and they have speculated about the particular challenges that she likely faced in response to her profound loss—accounts that have impressed subsequent generations of readers and writers. At the same time, the perceived impact of this loss has overshadowed other details of importance pertaining to the manuscript: why the excisions were made, when they were made, and how they relate to the overall material structure of the manuscript in its many stages of composition.

The present study offers a fresh interpretation of the manuscript and, by extension, Charlotte Brontë's own practices as a woman writer. Here I have attempted to provide an intensive analysis of the manuscript's physical features—its paper, leaf and page numbering, inks, excisions, and insertions—by drawing on a variety of bibliographical and codicological methods that, taken together, yield new insight into Brontë's compositional practices. The evidence resulting from this analysis calls into question standard critical accounts of how the manuscript was composed and edited. My findings include the discovery of late additions, significant expansions, and previously undetected revisions that are documented within the very structure of the manuscript. Hidden within plain sight, these changes bear silent but powerful witness to Brontë's strategic approach to crafting her narrative. At the same time, when interpreted alongside Brontë's correspondence, these alterations to the manuscript tell a more nuanced story of the woman writer at work. Among the strata of the manuscript's leaves, we can trace gaps in writing when Brontë was primarily serving as a caregiver for her dying siblings. The manuscript was inadvertently shaped by these caregiving duties, which required Brontë's emotional and physical attention and which often took priority over the labor of writing itself. The manuscript thus makes material the kinds of hard, practical challenges that women writers such as Charlotte Brontë faced in caring for their families while pursuing careers as authors.

Modern manuscripts, like all historical artifacts, are subject to alteration and modification over time—their handling by compositors and press readers, the sequences of their leaves (whether unbound or as the result of a later binding process), and even their contents, in the event that new leaves are introduced or existing leaves are repaired. In the case of *Shirley*, the manuscript has been significantly altered through interventions made by those who have been in contact with it over more than a century and a half.

The manuscript volumes thus present various strata of data—different forms of handwriting, numbering, and leaf placement—that are the result of various agencies at work, sometimes with different intentions that are not clearly delineated as such. The surviving manuscript of *Shirley* is not just the product of one individual, but of many—not a solo aria, but rather like a chorus that is, at times, discordant. Just as one must attune one's ear to identify different voices and instruments in the study of music, we must train our eyes to read various hands and the work of their tools.

Brontë composed *Shirley* as a three-volume novel, and its narrative is contingent on its intended format in three parts, its word count, its pacing—and, as we