

her work.⁹⁷ Brontë's friend and biographer, the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, seems to corroborate this history when she writes:

She had nearly finished the second volume of her tale when Branwell died,—after him Emily,—after her Anne;—the pen, laid down when there were three sisters living and loving, was taken up when one alone remained. Well might she call the first chapter that she wrote after this, "The Valley of the Shadow of Death."⁹⁸

"The Valley of the Shadow of Death" chapter mentioned by Gaskell is the first of volume 3; thus, according to Gaskell, Brontë resumed writing volume 3 only after the death of her remaining sister. In her edition of Charlotte Brontë's letters, Margaret Smith disagrees with Gaskell, suggesting that, as late as February 1849, Brontë "writes as if she had completed no more than the first volume rather than the greater part of two, as Mrs. Gaskell alleged." Smith continues: "the second volume, if she had begun it, was perhaps still in the form of a preliminary pencil-draft—CB's normal method of composition, according to the *Life*."⁹⁹

On the contrary, the evidence found in the manuscript's differing paper stocks largely corroborates Gaskell's claim, suggesting that Brontë had copied out the majority of volume 2 by late September 1848. Toward the end of volume 2, the run of Cream Laid paper abruptly ends at f. A551.B551.C557.E273—a leaf that falls in that volume's final chapter, "An Evening Out." The remaining 16 leaves of volume 2 contain a mixture of paper stocks (Royal Superfine and Cream Laid) that do not correlate with any changes to their numbering—a fact that seems to confirm that Brontë attempted to work on the manuscript intermittently. A letter written in September of 1850 also seems to confirm this. In it, Brontë recounted to James Taylor of Smith, Elder how the "great part" of *Shirley* was "written under the shadow of impending calamity" and the "last volume . . . composed in the eager, restless endeavor to combat mental sufferings that were scarcely tolerable."¹⁰⁰

Sickness had stalked the Brontë household ever since September of 1848 and had still not abated in January of 1849.¹⁰¹ After the death of her brother, Branwell, on September 24, Charlotte Brontë had increasingly found herself performing a different form of labor from that of writing: the caregiving duties of nursing her own family members. Whether soliciting medical advice for Emily (who adamantly refused it until her death in December), or attending to Anne and their

97. See Brontë letter to Smith dated October 30, 1852.

98. Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 315.

99. *Letters*, 2:182.

100. *Letters*, 2:461.

101. "All the days of winter have gone by darkly and heavily like a funeral train; since September sickness has not quitted the house." *Letters*, 2:168. The situation was rather more complex, unfolding over many prior months. Branwell's dependence on alcohol and opium had contributed to the deterioration of his health and had even disguised the symptoms of tuberculosis. As Juliet Barker notes: "Branwell's health had worsened so imperceptibly over the last eighteen months that no one had noticed how ill he had become. So often drunk or hung over, it could only be expected that his constitution would be affected. . . . Any sympathy Charlotte felt for her brother had long evaporated; now he simply irritated her." See *The Brontës* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), 564–65. Branwell's father had primarily looked after him during his illness, although sometimes the sisters assisted in caring for him, particularly at night (see *Letters*, 2:93).