eled on Anne. As late as May 8, 1849, Brontë writes: "I can make no promise as to when another [book] will be ready—neither my time nor my efforts are my own. That absorption in my employment to which I gave myself up without fear of doing wrong when I wrote 'Jane Eyre' would now be alike impossible and blamable; but I do what I can—and have made some little progress: we must all be patient."[107] Brontë made her moral obligations very clear to her publisher: Anne's well-being came first, *then* writing. She would not endanger her sister's life for the sake of completing *Shirley*.

After a prolonged and painful illness, Anne finally died on May 28 in Scarborough, where she and Charlotte had both hoped that she would eventually recover. And so Charlotte Brontë parted with the last of her six siblings, who all perished from the same dreaded disease, the "galloping consumption"—named so for the swiftness of its spread and the speed with which it killed its victims. Brontë wrote to W. S. Williams of Smith, Elder: "had a prophet warned me how I should stand in June 1849—how stripped and bereaved—had he foretold the autumn—the winter, the spring of sickness and suffering to be gone through—I should have thought—this can never be endured. It is over. Branwell—Emily—Anne are gone like dreams—gone as Maria and Elizabeth went twenty years ago."[108] Brontë sought work—and the labor of writing, in particular—as a remedy for the intense pain resulting from their loss. On June 25, she wrote to Williams: "Labour must be the cure, not sympathy—Labour is the only radical cure for rooted Sorrow—The society of a calm, serenely cheerful companion . . . soothes pain like a soft opiate—but I find it does not probe or heal the wound—sharper more severe means are necessary to make a remedy. Total change might do much—where that cannot be obtained—work is the best substitute."[109] The deliberateness of Brontë's approach contradicts those who have characterized her work at this time as "confused," uncertain, and clouded by grief.[110] As described earlier, such assessments have inadvertently depicted Brontë as a hapless woman—her broken spirit reflected in the fractured leaves of her manuscript. It can be shown, however, that she approached her work during this period with a particularly strategic focus.

By July, Brontë had gathered her powers, resuming her work in a steady stream of London Superfine stock, which runs throughout the rest of volume 3. Indeed, codicological evidence seems to confirm that, after completing this volume, Brontë then used this same London Superfine paper stock as needed to go back and carefully revise each volume as she steadily worked to polish her novel for publication. And so while the manuscript is indeed marked by death—that "painful, even raw, reality" described by Rosengarten and Smith—her priorities were clear. The interruptions to the manuscript's completion resulted from her active efforts to save the lives of her sisters. The corresponding gaps in the

107. *Letters*, 2:206.
108. *Letters*, 2:220.
109. *Letters*, 2:224.
110. Rosengarten and Smith characterize this period as one of "uncertainty" (Clarendon edition, xxvi), while Deborah Lutz describes it as "confused" (*The Brontë Cabinet*, 184). I discuss some of the reasons and trends unpinning these interpretations in "Reading the Writing Desk," 518–19.