Photographing Byron's Hand

A photograph of the concluding stanza of Lord Byron's *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte* (1814) is included among history's earliest examples of the medium of photography. In early 1840 the British proto-photographer William Henry Fox Talbot produced what he referred to as a "photogenic drawing negative" contact printed from a page of handwritten manuscript from Byron's *Ode to Napoleon*. Photographing the poet's final five lines and flamboyant signature marking the conclusion of an ode that expresses Byron's remorse and anger over Napoleon Bonaparte's exile to Elba, Talbot created four negatives of the handwritten stanza and flourish through his negative-positive photographic process of contact printing, which he had invented only five years earlier. Talbot ultimately labeled one of these photographic variants as "Specimen of Byron's Hand" (Schaaf, *Records of the Dawn of Photography*, 169) (fig. 1.1, page 20).

How Talbot arrived at the decision to photograph handwritten Romantic poetry at the dawn of the age of photography and why, in doing so, he chose to turn to Byron's work—and specifically these five lines of poetry and signature from *Ode to Napoleon*—remain as enduring questions that have yet to be given adequate historical, critical, or theoretical treatment by scholars of Romanticism, photography, or media studies, more generally.

How is Talbot's gesture to be read? On the one hand, Talbot's choice to photograph Byron's poetry is not at all perplexing, given the
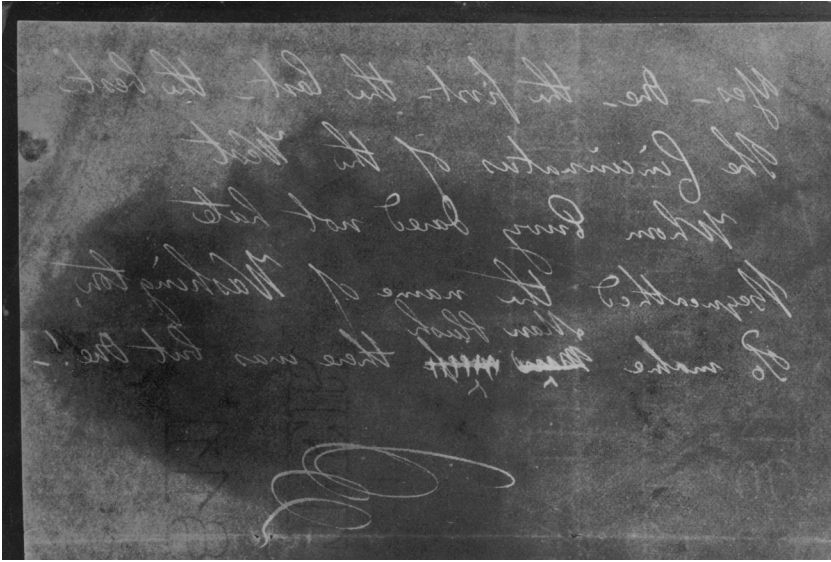
Figure 1.1. William Henry Fox Talbot (British, 1800–77), *Copy of a stanza from the "Ode to Napoleon" in Lord Byron's hand*, prior to 4 April 1840. Photogenic drawing negative; 12.3 x 18.3 cm on 13.2 x 19.0 cm paper. Partial watermark "J Whatman Turkey." Credit: The Collection of Dr. Walter Knysz, Jr. Courtesy of Hans P. Kraus, Jr., New York.

culture's absolute fascination with the poet and Talbot's own admiration for Byron as well as his easy access to the manuscript held by his neighbor Thomas Moore, Byron's friend and biographer. On the other hand, however, we would do well to remember that when Talbot wanted to demonstrate the possibilities for his new reproductive technology—a photographic science that he envisioned, in part, as a way for poets to act as the publishers of their own verse—he turned to the manuscript of a cancelled stanza of *Ode to Napoleon* (with its signature flourish), an unpublished fragment of a text written to order by John Murray, Byron's publisher, for an occasional poem and almost immediately suppressed by the poet.

    In what follows, I investigate the rather complicated publication history of this poem and its topic as well as the theoretical implications concerning the photographing of Byron's authorial flourish. In one scenario, Talbot possibly chooses these particular lines because they represent an

example of uninspired and unimaginative Romantic verse—that is, a form of poetry ostensibly uncharacteristic of Byronic Romanticism and thus at odds with the impulsive unruliness of the flourish representing the poet's signature and authorial identity. However, such logic must assume an account of Romanticism (as inspired, imaginative, etc.) that has been complicated by scholars over the past quarter century, including in reference to Byron's work. In an alternative scenario, Talbot photographs these particular lines and signature precisely because he is enchanted by their artifice and contrivance—the photograph exposing and monumentalizing the ways in which, in a moment of paradox, Byron's lines and signature endorse yet simultaneously overturn what Jerome Christensen has described in his pathbreaking *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (1993) as "the culturally dominant and economically profitable phenomenon called 'Byron'" (xx).

We will thus be interested in the ways in which "Byronism" should be seriously considered within the context of early photography. The particular historical as well as conceptual importance of Byron is of special interest in this history, given that there has been little attention to Byron among those who have recently taken up the topic of Romanticism and photography.[1] In doing so, this discussion situates *Ode to Napoleon* in the broader context of the poetry from Byron's years of fame (1812–16) and especially in relation to the famous Napoleonic stanzas of the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt* (1816). If, as Christensen has provocatively argued, the profundities of Napoleonic failure serve as the crucible out of which "Byronism" emerges as "the *logos* of a modern—that is, post-Napoleonic—commodity culture," then the transformation of the fantastical image of Napoleonic militaristic triumph into Byronism's "mediated, ironized" yet "gentler symbolic violence" of the (re)producible image of the commodity form also creates an essential element of the condition for the possibility of the invention of the photographic image (130, 172). In other words, without Napoleonic failure, Byronism would not have been fully possible, and—perhaps more specific to our concerns—without both the crisis of Napoleonic militarism and the subsequent success of Byronism's economic ascendancy within a global market economy, one can only wonder if Talbot's negative-positive photography would have been fully imaginable.

This chapter rehearses and interrogates this history in order to raise a range of broader theoretical and philosophical questions concerning the nature and function of Byronic models of identity as well as the ways in which such models contributed to the type of identity provided

by negative-positive photography. In so doing the following inquiries are raised and answered here: (vis-à-vis Walter Benjamin) was (is) there a singular Byronic identity that can be emptied by the reproductive technology of Talbot's early negative-positive photography? What does the answer to this question mean for our understanding of the notion of auratic authenticity and the claim that the technological reproduction of photography subverts it? What model of identity does Talbot's photography offer? And what are the implications for our reading of Byronic Romanticism? By better understanding the complex relationship between Byron's art and Talbot's science through searching for answers to these and related questions, we may more clearly recognize and appreciate the rich, complex, and subtle ways in which the medium of Romantic poetry crucially participated in the birth of this era's new medium of negative-positive photography.

Byron's Hero Worship and the Publication History of *Ode to Napoleon*

Byron's sense of self, and especially his authorial identity, were inextricably tied to and fashioned by his long-standing fascination with Napoleon. Napoleon served as one of Byron's primary heroes since childhood, and during the period of 1813 to 1814, Byron wrote often about the struggling Emperor in journal entries just preceding Napoleon's fall and subsequent exile to Elba. "Napoleon!—this week will decide his fate," Byron wrote on 18 February 1814, "All seems against him; but I believe and hope he will win—at least beat back the Invaders" (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 243). Then, on 8 April, he recorded the following: "Out of town six days. On my return, found my poor little pagod [idol], Napoleon, pushed off his pedestal;—the thieves are in Paris," and on the following day he wrote:

> I mark this day! Napoleon Buonaparte has abdicated the throne of the world. . . . What! wait till they were in his capital, and then talk of his readiness to give up what is already gone!! . . . The "Isle of Elba" to retire to! . . . I am utterly bewildered and confounded. (Ibid., 256)

Finally, on 10 April, Byron composed his infamous *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*, thus channeling his frustration, fury, and sadness over the

loss of his idol into the thematic textures of this vitriolic poem (ibid., 257). The heart of the poet's anger and sorrow resides in the fact that he is unable to understand how Napoleon could choose exile over suicide, and he never forgives the fallen Emperor for not taking his own life in order to serve as a martyr for the cause of liberty. *Ode to Napoleon* originally concludes by measuring in imaginative verse what the poet perceives as Napoleon's cowardice against the unassailable honor and bravery of the Titan Prometheus, Byron's unwavering mythic hero:

> Or like the thief of fire from heaven,
> Wilt thou withstand the shock?
> And share with him, the unforgiven,
> His vulture and his rock!
> Foredoomed by God—by man accurst,
> And that last act, though not thy worst,
> The very Fiend's arch mock;
> He in his fall preserv'd his pride,
> And if a mortal, had as proudly died! (136–144)[2]

As this stanza reveals, Byron clearly envisions the poem as concluding on the note of suicide and, more important, by contrasting a fallen idol against a resolute—albeit, fictional—hero. The ode thus originally ends by drawing attention to the paradoxical nature of Byron's hero worship: as a "mortal," Napoleon is, of course, inherently measureless against the Byronic idealization of titanic idolatry.[3]

Byron quickly completed a ninety-line (ten-stanza) first draft of the poem on 10 April 1814 but subsequently expanded the ode by five stanzas for the poem's first publication on 16 April (McGann, Editorial Notes, 456). In 1814 alone, Byron's ode went through ten published editions, and the poet's name only appeared on the tenth edition. *Ode to Napoleon* ran through a total of fourteen editions. In the first and second editions, the poem existed in the form of fifteen, nine-line stanzas, but in the third through fourteenth editions, the ode was inserted with a new fifth stanza, thus increasing the ode to a total of sixteen stanzas for these editions (ibid., 456).[4] In order to avoid the stamp tax, Murray insisted that the poet expand the ode by additional stanzas so that the publication stretched beyond a single sheet. Byron was reluctant to do so but eventually produced these stanzas to expand the pamphlet and appease Murray. In a letter to his publisher on 25 April 1814, Byron wrote:

> Do you want the last page *immediately*? I have doubts about
> the lines being worth printing; at any rate, [I] must see them
> again and alter some passages, before they go forth in any
> shape into the *ocean* of circulation;—a very conceited phrase,
> by the by: well then—*channel* of publication will do. "I am
> not i' the vein," or I could knock off a stanza or three for the
> Ode, that might answer the purpose better. At all events, I
> *must* see the lines again *first*, as there be two I have altered
> in my mind's manuscript already. (Moore 545–546)

While the version of the poem with sixteen stanzas (and thus with the
added fifth stanza) was published in twelve separate editions of the ode,
Byron never felt that the additional final stanzas—seventeen through
nineteen—met his poetic standards. Indeed, the concluding lines of the
poem are stale and unimaginative—perhaps even borderline obtuse:

> Where may the wearied eye repose
> When gazing on the great;
> Where neither guilty glory glows,
> Nor despicable state?
> Yes—one—the first—the last—the best—
> The Cincinnatus of the West,
> Whom envy dared not hate,
> Bequeath'd the name of Washington,
> To make man blush there was but One! (ll. 163–171)[5]

While signifying Byron's desire for an intensity of poetic closure, the
overuse of caesura, for example, in the stanza's second half is tediously
artificial. As Jerome McGann remarks, the added lines result in "a new
conclusion to the Ode" (Editorial Notes 456). The stanzas "injure the
poem's accomplished pace. B[yron]'s decision to exclude them was a good
one," he notes (ibid., 456). These contrived lines written for Murray
are dry and protracted and obviously uncharacteristic of Byron's poetic
achievements throughout the ode's original conclusion and certainly
elsewhere throughout his corpus. Furthermore, as John Clubbe notes,
although George Washington "appealed to Byron's rational admiration,
he did not capture the poet's imagination—at least not to the degree
that did Prometheus or Napoleon." This is because Washington symbol-
ized for Byron and his contemporaries the greatest example of judicious,

virtuous leadership.[6] "Lord Byron could have pardoned Napoleon more easily," Stendhal once quipped, "if he had had a little of the colorlessness of Washington" (*His Very Self and Voice* 198).[7] As the living embodiment of reason trumping the dramatics of heroism, Washington thus serves as a fitting figure for the final lines of stanza nineteen.

Written under duress and for purely financial reasons, it is not surprising that Byron was absolutely insistent that these revised lines be removed altogether from the poem before publication. "I don't like the additional stanzas [seventeen to nineteen] *at all*, and they had better be left out," Byron wrote to Murray the next day, "The fact is, I can't do any thing I am asked to do, however gladly I *would* [do it]; and at the end of the week my interest in a composition goes off. This will account to you for my doing no better for your 'Stamp Duty' Postscript" (Moore 547–548). Although, as noted earlier, the pamphlet was lengthened through addition of the fifth stanza included for publication, Murray followed Byron's instructions concerning the final three stanzas, and *Ode to Napoleon* was never published with additional stanzas seventeen through nineteen in Byron's lifetime.

These additional stanzas are thus unique in that they mark the outer limit of the envelope of power and control that—as Christensen has persuasively documented—Murray worked to engender in the creation of "the literary system of Byronism," which was "triggered by the lord's deviation into print and guaranteed by his continued degeneration—a process fully coincident with his relentless commodification" (Christensen xvi, 53). Once Murray purchased Byron's copyright in 1811, he simultaneously acquired an "investment in the career that the name *Byron* described," precisely because copyright "assigns a career to the name and the words that appear under the name independent of the biological life of either writer or publisher" (ibid., 144).[8] However, as the additional stanzas of *Ode to Napoleon* reveal, the power exercised by Murray's publishing empire has its limitations as well. Although the stanzas are solicited and acquired by Murray from Byron, these lines also become a controversial site of struggle between poet and publisher for the control and expression of Byronic identity. As a result, the lines exhibit what Christensen would refer to as the characteristic "convulsions" that periodically erupt throughout Byron's corpus:

> Such convulsions register the potential (and therefore either
> the cathartic or prophetic) or actual (and therefore either

revolutionary or psychotic) breakdown of habitual social and political arrangements. Part of the pathognomy of contradiction—a violent distortion of the code by which the face of reality is recognized—convulsions occur at the threshold of change, as vehicle or resistance. (Ibid., 24)

The creation of the additional required stanzas and their subsequent erasure through suppression by the poet record a momentary interruption of the customary dynamics of power and command that structure the literary phenomenon known as "Byronism." On the one hand, the fact that these lines are created in the first place registers the extent of influence wielded by Murray's mighty publishing house. On the other hand, the purported badness of these *convulsive* stanzas to some extent reasserts poetic subjectivity and agency because, as Christensen explains, "for Lord Byron to write in opposition meant to write against himself, or at least 'Byronism,' that systematically elaborated, commercially triumphant version of himself devised and promoted by his publisher, celebrated and denounced by his reviewers and readers" (ibid., 88). Additional stanzas seventeen through nineteen of *Ode to Napoleon* are thus the synecdoche of Byronic convulsiveness: they perform the double function of both underwriting and simultaneously undermining the phenomenon of Byronism.

Talbot's "Tribute of [Photographic] Science to [Romantic] Poetry"

Talbot first read Byron's additional stanzas for Murray (including the nineteenth stanza that he would photograph in manuscript form exactly a decade later) alongside Byron's explicit demands for removal of these stanzas in the first volume of Thomas Moore's 1830 (two-volume) *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: With Notices of His Life* (hereafter, *Life of Byron*), where the stanzas were first posthumously published (545–548).[9] During the same month (January 1830) in which he acquired and read the first volume of Moore's biography, Talbot was himself becoming all too keenly aware of the machinations of Murray's commercially driven publishing enterprise. Talbot was not only a scientist and an inventor but was also an aspiring poet, and in late 1829 he had begun corresponding with Murray in the hope of securing a contract for the publication of a book of his own poetry—a volume that would ultimately be published by James Ridgway in Piccadilly as *Legendary Tales, in Verse and Prose*

(1830), Talbot's first book publication. On 30 January 1830, Talbot wrote to Murray the following letter:

> Sir[,]
>
> The reason I have not got sent my manuscript (if it is necessary to give any reason for what you have perhaps forgotten all about) is that you informed me a brochure would not sell, and what I had written was not enough to form an octavo of any decent thickness, however it might be assisted by amplitude of <u>margin</u>. It is my intention therefore to wait a little & see whether I cannot add something else, but as I have a great aversion to <u>prolixity</u> I wish you would let me know at your leisure what is the minimum number of pages that will make a book <u>producible</u>.
>
> M[r.] Moore's life of Byron is a most amusing and agreeable work and I trust its success has been equal to what you had anticipated—The second volume will be expected by the public with anxiety[.]
>
> I remain Sir Yours truly[,]
>
> Henry F. Talbot (*Correspondence* document number 1954)

In the same letter in which he reveals that he has read Moore's *Life of Byron*—and therefore the account of Byron's own battles with his controlling publisher—Talbot exposes his difficulties when dealing with Murray and especially their intercessions on the matters of manuscript length and the economics of the textual (re)production of verse. Much like Byron before him, Talbot struggles with Murray in the negotiation of executing poetry into print.

Moore, the Irish poet, was not only Byron's biographer and intimate confidant but was also, coincidentally, the neighbor and close friend of Talbot in rural Wiltshire. Moore's Sloperton Cottage was a single mile east of Talbot's home at Lacock Abbey, and Moore was a member of the Lacock Parish Vestry. Historians of photography agree that Talbot almost undoubtedly acquired the final page of Byron's handwritten manuscript from Moore (Schaaf, *Sun Pictures*, 32; Batchen, "Electricity Made Visible," 42). Talbot produced the negative from Byron's original draft

manuscript of *Ode to Napoleon* (which is currently in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin).[10] As noted earlier, the reasons for Talbot's choice to photograph these specific lines from the unpublished nineteenth stanza have not been adequately explored. As historian of photography Larry Schaaf points out, Talbot's choice was, at least in part, necessarily motivated by "technical reasons," as his process of producing the negative required contact printing from "a page [of manuscript] that was written on only one side" (*Sun Pictures* 32). However, as investigation of Cheryl Fallon Giuliano's facsimile edition of the HRHRC manuscript reveals, Byron wrote a number of stanzas of the original draft on only one side of the page. In fact, the reverse side of the page on which the poet wrote stanza sixteen—the ode's original conclusion—is left "blank" (Giuliano 29, 34–35).

Talbot considered his work on Byron's ode as part of a larger project announced somewhat obscurely in his *Notebook P* (comp. 1839–40) as "The Tribute of Science to Poetry, two views of house, and one copy of manuscript" (as cited by Schaaf, *Sun Pictures*, 32). This "tribute" was, as Schaaf notes, "a proposal for a privately printed memorial publication to Lord Byron" (ibid., 32).[11] Only a year before Talbot photographed Byron's handwritten stanza, he announced in a letter to Sir John Herschel that he aspired with his invention of contact printing to create a science that would allow writers to become their own publishers: "The enclosed scrap [of small print] is to illustrate what I call 'Every man his own printer & publisher'—to enable poor authors to make facsimiles of their own handwriting—" (*Correspondence* document number 3843).[12]

This "Tribute of Science to Poetry"—inspired by Byron's work—is rooted not only in concerns related to textual reproduction but also to Talbot's reading of Byron's *Ode to Napoleon* as well as his knowledge of the circumstances of that poem's publication history, as detailed in Moore's *Life of Byron*. It is very easy to understand that, for one thing, if Talbot's main intention in photographing Byron's hand was to demonstrate the ways in which poets could act as their own publishers by embracing his negative-positive process, one must speculate about why he didn't choose to photograph stanza sixteen—a set of lines that were actually transformed by Murray from the original manuscript draft to print and published fourteen times in Byron's lifetime alone. Surely, doing so would have exposed much more explosively the implications of Talbot's theory: that Byron could have taken over the means of reproduction of the stanza himself, thus making Murray's printing of the poem obsolete. That this concluding stanza to the original ode is written on

only one side of the page makes Talbot's decision to photograph can-
celled stanza nineteen all the more puzzling.

More surprising, however, are the ways in which Talbot's aspirations
for this photographic process and practice appear to go far beyond rea-
sons of authors "mak[ing] facsimiles of their own handwriting." Consider
the possibility that he chooses to photograph the final cancelled stanza
of Byron's ode for a much more basic reason: what if Talbot is enchanted
by these lines precisely because of their artifice and contrivance? Fol-
lowing Christensen, these lines indeed express a quintessential Byronism
in that they are, from the start, "concocted by the powers that be" as
"commodities that could be vended to a reading public" and marked in
the name of *Byron*, "a cultural denominator capable of abstracting indi-
viduals from their concrete concerns and traditional relationships and
inducting them into a network of exchange and competition . . ." (xvii,
xvi, 146). In this context, these particular lines are entirely characteristic
of the literary phenomenon and system known as Byronism. In fact, as
noted earlier in this chapter, the lines are the synecdoche of Byronism—
because Byron is constrained by Murray's demands for additional stanzas
in order to avoid the stamp tax, these lines are written under the duress
of strictly economic imperatives, and the lines are thus replete with the
convulsive artifice defining Byron's greatest poetry.

If Byron had been able to act as his own publisher, he would likely
never have written these lines in the first place. Talbot's photographic
negative—his "Tribute of Science to Poetry"—thus serves as an ideal
visual memorial to Byron's art because it distills and crystallizes the
degree to which Byronism operated in the first decades of the nineteenth
century. In *Childe Harold III* the poet succinctly describes his own rec-
ognition of this elaborate construction of his (non)identity as "Byron":

> 'Tis to create, and in creating live
> A being more intense, that we endow
> With form our fancy, gaining as we give
> The life we image, even as I do now.
> What am I? Nothing. . . . (3.6.46–50)

Created by Murray's networks of mechanical (re)production, mass mar-
keting, and unappeasable consumption, the poet's *image* has become
reduced to a fantastical illusion conjured by the complex dynamics of
a global market economy. Not surprisingly, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage:
Canto the Third* marks the moment in which Childe Harold, the fictional

pilgrim, collapses into and is finally subsumed fully by the text's narrating voice—the phantom poet "Byron." "Phantomized, *Lord Byron* becomes the *name of absence*," Christensen explains in his reading of *Hours of Idleness* (1807), "[f]or Byron to come into his own . . . required coming to terms with ghosts: making, dissipating, or becoming a phantom" (26, 27). Ironically, Byron's phantomization is—at its core—a way in which Byron partially retains the capacity to exert poetic subjectivity and agency and thus fly in the face of a market economy based on mass (re)production and consumption.

It is therefore appropriate that Talbot would concentrate on producing photographic *negatives* of Byron's stanza nineteen: his reproductive photographic process literally turns inside out a set of lines that are always already the shadow, phantom, and simulacrum of poetic identity.[13] Talbot's process thus works to capture the shifting, elusive, and especially ephemeral phantom image of "Byron" in an attempt to fix it forever in a memorial tribute. In 1833, Talbot first envisioned what would become his photographic practice in precisely these terms as he imagined the possibility of finding a way for natural scenes somehow to be captured forever by the camera obscura.[14] As he "reflect[ed] on the inimitable beauty of the pictures of nature's painting which the glass lens of the Camera [obscura] throws upon the paper in its focus—fairy pictures, creations of a moment, and destined as rapidly to fade away," Talbot arrives at the following "idea" in his "Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art": "how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably, and remain fixed upon the paper" (*The Pencil of Nature*). As Schaaf notes, when Talbot began in 1834 "to turn his dream into reality," he did so first by capturing the phantom shadows of objects rather than the substance of natural scenes:

> Seeing that the light in the camera obscura was too weak for experimental purposes, he turned to simple shadows of objects placed on light sensitive papers. . . . In his notebook of the period, he called these images *sciagraphs*—the depictions of shadows. His images were negative impressions—light represented by dark . . . (*Photographic Art* 13, 14)

Talbot thus initially envisioned his photogenic drawing process as *Sciagraphy*, "the art of depicting objects through their shadows" (ibid., 17).

To produce these "negative impressions," Talbot first applied a coat of silver chloride, a light-reactive chemical compound, to ordinary writing paper (ibid., 14).[15] Next, an object was placed on the silver-chloride-treated paper, and the unit was then set together under glass (most often in a wooden frame) and placed in sunlight for roughly ten minutes to half an hour. As a result of the exposure process, areas of the paper showing to the sunlight darkened, while those covered by the chosen object were left unexposed and thus remained white (ibid., 18). And "[w]here the object was semitransparent," notes Schaaf, "varying amounts of light filtered through and some silver was deposited in that area of the paper, forming a range of middle tones" (ibid., 18). As early as 1834, Talbot had also discovered how to transform his negatives into prints (ibid., 15). "[I]f the paper is transparent, the first drawing may serve as an object, to produce a second drawing, in which the lights and shadows would be reversed," Talbot writes in an 1835 notebook (as cited by Schaaf, *Photographic Art*, 15). Perhaps most crucial though to Talbot's negative-positive process was his breakthrough in fixing the images that were created through his various photographic methods. He employed a range of chemical compounds (e.g., potassium iodide, potassium bromide) as well as practices (e.g., flooding his exposures with heavy salt solutions) to deactivate the residual light-sensitive silver salts trapped in the matrices of his paper fibers and thereby render them into new compounds generally insensitive to light—thus *fixing* his fleeting, fantastical images (Schaaf, *Photographic Art*, 19–20).[16]

Some of the first specimens to which Talbot turned when he sought to fix his phantom images were tenuous botanical forms (ibid., 18). Indeed, some of Talbot's earliest photographs of plant specimens are actually represented as *phantomized* by the photographer himself. Consider, for example, the shadowgram probably produced on 6 February 1836 (ibid., 42) (fig. 1.2, page 32). The spectral sprouting of the delicate stem and branches of the pea bean plant (*Leguminosae papilionaceae*) creep from the center of the negative outward to its edges where they blossom into the extraordinarily fragile leaves and flowers of the specimen's shadowy image (ibid., 42, 43).[17] "Nature's composition is a moment frozen, a single frame extracted from a time-lapse recording of plant life," notes Schaaf, "[i]n normal circumstances, this particular specimen of a plant would have hardly outlived its own shadow" (ibid., 42).

Schaaf's label for this item, "The Ghost of a Plant," captures and expresses the nonidentity of this ethereal negative's phantomized image

FIGURE 1.2. William Henry Fox Talbot, [*Leguminoae Papilionaceae (Pea Bean)*], about 6 February 1836. Photogenic drawing negative; 19.1 x 11.4 cm (7^1/$_2$ x 4^1/$_2$ in.). Credit: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

(ibid., 42). Through the manipulations of Talbot's reproductive photographic science of the *negative*, specimen and shadow have become one and the same: much like the shadowy "Byron" conjured by the system of Byronism, they are "[n]othing" but "image."

Within roughly one year of producing the photographic "Specimen of Byron's Hand," Talbot was at work on producing a photographic negative of an actual human hand, and the photographic verisimilitude of the anatomical structure of the hand came to take the place of the hand *writing* for Talbot (fig. 1.3).[18] Another ghostly image, "Hand" (1840/41?), as Schaaf labels this specimen, captures an anonymous human subject's right hand placed palm-down, away from the viewer, and in a slightly awkward position in which the middle and ring fingers are locked together while the other three digits float free in what appears as a gulf of shadowy darkness (*Photographic Art* 104, 105).

The photograph is produced in such a manner that the hand appears as sharply cut off just below the wrist, giving the impression to the viewer that the hand has been somehow severed from the human body to which it once belonged, with the eerie effect that this right hand now appears
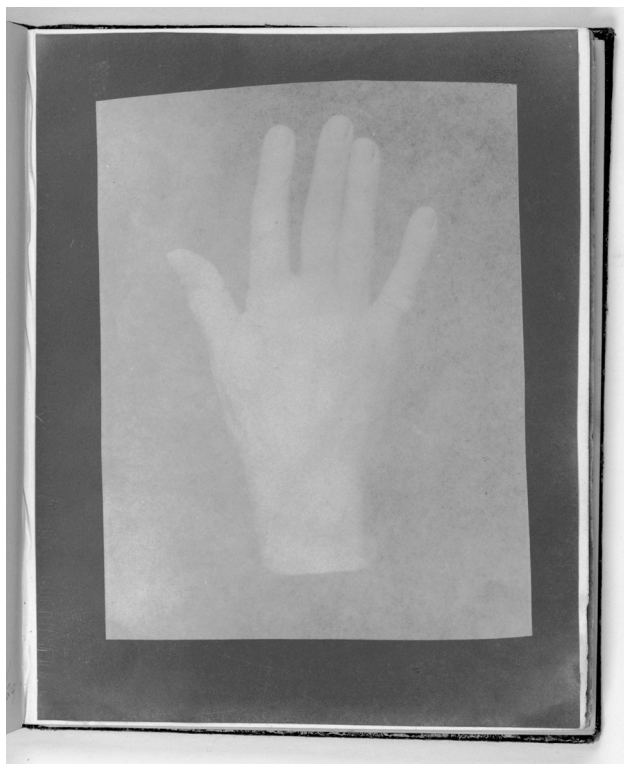
FIGURE 1.3. William Henry Fox Talbot, *A human hand*, ca. 1841. Salt print from a calotype negative; 8.8 x 6.8 cm image on 10.9 x 8.6 cm paper, with a stationer's blind stamp. Credit: National Media Museum (Bradford)/Science & Society Picture Library.

to exist autonomously—as if it is liberated from the human subject and suddenly existing with a life of its own. In his *English Etymologies* (1847), Talbot argues that "[t]he notion of *power* is strongly connected with *the right hand*," and the shadowy hand depicted by this photographic print indeed registers a certain sovereignty and authority all its own (64–65).[19] As in the case of "Specimen of Byron's Hand," the literal hand of this photograph is phantomized. Precisely because they have become these phantoms, both photographic examples mark—as Byron would depict the phenomenon in *The Giaour, A Fragment of a Turkish Tale* (1813)—a "hand / Fresh sever'd from its parent limb" (827–828), with the spectral

effect that neither the ghostly traces engendered by Talbot's negative of Byron's hand *writing* nor this anonymous "Hand" meaningfully belong to any singular person. In this context, Talbot's shadowy human hand is an update, an extension, and a literalizing of the dynamics of Byronism monumentalized in his earlier "Specimen of Byron's Hand." In this sense and for these reasons, Talbot's negative-positive photographic science is indeed best understood as a "tribute" to the strength of Byron's original achievements in Romantic *poiesis*.

Byron's Flourish:
The Photographic (Re)Production of Romantic Byronism

While Talbot captures in photographic form the complex dynamics of the phenomenon of Byronism, he was likely also drawn to the final page of handwritten manuscript because it included Byron's flamboyant signature. This flourish is comprised of three large, partially interlocking loops that fall just beneath the stanza's final line. The signal autographical mark serves as a classic example of what Murray has described as Byron's characteristic penmanship:

> I believe it would be difficult to find a handwriting in which the character of a man and of his writings is more accurately reflected than is the case with Lord Byron. . . . With Byron . . . every mood seems to be reflected in his handwriting—the impulsive waywardness of the man can be seen on every page, whether of poetry or of his letters. (Murray as cited in "Byron's Penmanship" 215)

Furthermore, "Byron's signature," writes a nineteenth-century journalist for the *New York Times' Saturday Review of Books and Art*, "followed his humor. Sometimes it was legible, but as often utterly illegible. He might write 'Bn' or 'Noel Byron,' or 'N. B.,' and as often as not, 'a blurred scribble or a flourish' represents his signature" ("Byron's Penmanship" 215). Although the dramatic flourish reverberates with the uniqueness of Byronic character, we need not necessarily believe that Talbot gravitated toward Byron's signature because in it he located a visual manifestation of national or international celebrity—although such a potential desire certainly might be employed to account for his selection. Indeed, especially in light of recent work by Tom Mole and

other scholars investigating Byron's cult of celebrity and the "Byromania" erupting after the poet "awoke one morning and found [him]self famous" (Moore 347) following the initial publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (in March 1812), one might be tempted to read the photographic negative of Byron's signature as a symbolic gesture affirming something like the ostensibly boundless depths of poetic subjectivity or interiority (Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture*; McDayter). However, such an approach would fail to take into account the formal photographic mechanism comprising Talbot's negative-positive process and, most important, the theoretical implications invoked by his prioritization of mechanical reproduction in this process. Talbot explains in Plate XXIV, "A Fruit Piece" at the end of *The Pencil of Nature* (1844–46):

> The number of copies which can be taken from a single original photographic picture, appears to be almost unlimited. . . . [A] very great number of copies can be obtained in succession, so long as great care is taken of the original picture.

Whatever his scientific or aesthetic intentions for the possibility of such nearly unlimited reproduction, in the case of his "Specimen of Byron's Hand," Talbot's photographic treatment of the signature reproduces the simulation of subjectivity inherent within Byronism by ultimately transforming a signature that ostensibly represents authorial identity into a simulacrum of subjectivity through processes of mechanical reproduction. Talbot's reproductive science of photography therefore produces a second-order phantomization of Byronic identity.

The processes of phantomization at the core of both the literary phenomenon/system of Byronism and Talbot's photographic science evacuate from the handwritten manuscript what Benjamin would explain as the artwork's "aura." "[T]hat which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art," writes Benjamin,

> This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. (221)

As with Talbot's negative-positive reproductive technology made possible, in part, by its emergence, Byronism therefore exists as a form of *techne* (re)presenting (through its continuous performance) one of the first examples of something like what Benjamin would cite as the subversion of the art-object's auratic "authenticity" through processes of mechanical reproduction. "From a photographic negative," Benjamin notes, "one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense" (ibid., 224). In this context, Talbot's negative-positive treatment of Byron's hand can neither be fully understood as a celebration or perpetuation of the poet's cult of celebrity nor as underwriting anything like a traditional conception or representation of Romantic subjectivity. Instead, both processes—*Byronism and photography*—empty and ultimately subvert what have been traditionally characterized as the hallmarks of Romantic identity (e.g., boundless autonomy, self-consciousness, authenticity, and personality; self-sufficient interiority). This reading of the theoretical implications of both Byronism and early photography's engagements with Romantic identity is thus indebted to the recent work of Andrea Henderson, Jacques Khalip, Nancy Yousef, and other scholars who have asked us to reconsider radically a number of long-standing definitions of Romantic subjectivity (Henderson, *Romantic Identities*; Khalip; Yousef). "Critics have long argued that one of the defining features and enduring legacies of Romantic writing is its characterization of the self in terms of psychological depth," Henderson explains, reminding us of the work of M. H. Abrams, Harold Bloom, Jerome McGann, Clifford Siskin, Marjorie Levinson, and others (*Romantic Identities* 1–2).[20] While such work has tended to naturalize what Henderson refers to as this "depth model" of Romantic subjectivity, this formation was, she notes, "during the Romantic period itself, only one available model among many" (ibid., 2).

At the tail end of the era of second-generation Romanticism— roughly a decade after the deaths of John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Lord Byron—negative-positive photography emerges and begins to define itself as a new medium partly by its engagements with not only Romantic verse but also, and more specifically, with what was becoming even during the period an increasingly outdated conception and representation of Romantic identity and subjectivity. One form and phenomenon of mass mediation ("Byronism") thus helps to create part of the conditions for the possibility of the emergence of another (photography). In carefully defining the terms *media* and *medium* in her investigation of the etymology of the rise of "new media" as a phrase and concept, media

theorist Wendy Hui Kyong Chun draws attention to the complicated (and often overlooked) philological history of these terms, which are obviously crucial to contemporary media studies:

> In terms of media, histories that reach from the Renaissance to the present day elide the fact that: one, although the word medium does stretch across this time period, its meaning differs significantly throughout; two, the plural-singular term "media" marks a significant discontinuity. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), media stems from the Latin *medium* meaning middle, center, midst, intermediate course, intermediary . . . In the fifteenth century, medium emerged as an intervening substance in English, stemming from the post-classical Latin phrase *per medium* (through the medium of) in use in British sources since the thirteenth century. The term "media" (as opposed to mediums or medium) is linked to mass media: . . . in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, media emerged as the term to describe inexpensive newspapers and magazines and, in an affront to English and Latin, became a singular noun. ("Introduction: Did Somebody Say New Media?" 2–3)

In drawing on Chun's definitions and qualifications of these terms, I do not seek to suggest however that the medium of Romantic poetry converged with or was the absolute prerequisite for the arrival of negative-positive photography. Nor is it to suggest that this new medium was the ultimate telos of Byronic form, content, history, or philosophy. Rather than historicize or theorize the dawn of this new media form through a now obsolete Kittlerian lens in which the conclusion of the history of media is narrated and understood in an overdetermined manner, we must investigate this emergence instead through the media-archaeological approach recently espoused by Lisa Gitelman, for example, who lucidly describes the ways in which "new media emerge into and engage their cultural and economic contexts as well as the ways that new media are shaped by and help to shape the semiotic, perceptual, and epistemic conditions that attend and prevail" (*Always Already New* 11).[21] Indeed, the instance of negative-positive photography's emergence as a new medium is tied intimately and complexly to a set of such "conditions" perhaps best contextualized and characterized, in this case, through issues pertaining to "idolatry" and "exile": Byron's angry and remorseful *Ode to*

Napoleon composed in response to the exile of his long-standing hero; Talbot's "tribute" to Byronic Romanticism through recuperation of a stanza once exiled to the margins of history but ultimately forever memorialized by the new medium of photography.

Controlling the Image:
Byron, Napoleon, Talbot, and Romantic Visual Culture

Talbot's engagements with Byronism are also best understood against the background of recent critical and historical work investigating Byron's various investments in and reactions to the visual culture of his period and especially to visual representations of himself in portraiture, and a richer and more nuanced analysis of this matter arrives if we take into consideration Byron's relationship to other, more established forms of visual culture of his era and especially by exploring what numerous scholars have identified as Byron's conflicted stance on portraiture and, specifically, *ad vivum* paintings of himself.[22] Like William Wordsworth, Byron harbored a deep-felt anxiety about controlling the ways in which he was represented to his nineteenth-century audiences (and, more generally, culture at large). As a number of scholars have discussed, Byron was obsessed not only with controlling the ways in which he was represented via portraiture by early-nineteenth-century artists (e.g., George Sanders, Richard Westall, Thomas Phillips) but also, and perhaps more important, by the ways in which visual images of him were reproduced and disseminated within the public sphere. Fiona MacCarthy's influential text *Byron: Life and Legend* (2002) clearly documents the ways in which Byron wished to control visual representations of himself by a range of important artists of the period (x–xi, 216–217). And, as Christine Kenyon Jones notes,

> [i]n the two most successful public portraits of his early manhood which Byron did commission himself (the Sanders full-length, and the Phillips *Albanian*) Byron played a major part in creating images of himself that accord with and enhance the representation of "Byron" displayed in the verse, prophesying with uncanny accuracy the kinds of images subsequent generations would require of the poet. (19)

By commissioning artists like Phillips and Westall, Byron hoped that he would be represented not realistically but instead heroically. Germaine Greer points out that Westall was, of course, "not a portraitist but a