



# Chopin's Polish Ballade: Op. 38 as Narrative of National Martyrdom

*Jonathan D. Bellman*

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Chopin's Second Ballade, Op. 38 is frequently performed, and takes only seven or so minutes to play. Yet the work remains very poorly understood--disagreement prevails on issues from its tonic and two-key structure to its posited relationship with the poems of Adam Mickiewicz. *Chopin's Polish Ballade* is a reexamination and close analysis of this famous work, revealing the Ballade as a piece with a powerful political story to tell.

Through the general musical styles and specific references in the Ballade, which use both operatic strategies and approaches developed in programmatic piano pieces for amateurs, author Jonathan Bellman traces a clear narrative thread to contemporary French operas. His careful historical exegesis of previously ignored musical and cultural contexts brings to light a host of new insights about this remarkable piece, which, as Bellman shows, reflects the cultural preoccupations of the Polish émigrés in mid-1830s Paris, pining with bitter nostalgia for a homeland now under Russian domination. This vital connection to the extramusical culture of its day forms the basis for a plausible relationship with the nationalistic poetry of Mickiewicz. *Chopin's Polish Ballade* also solves the long-standing conundrum of the two extant versions of the Ballade, making an important point about the flexible notion of "work" that Chopin embraced.

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