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Ambiguity in the Themes of Chopin's First, Second, and Fourth Ballades

William Rothstein

There is a style of music which may be called natural, because it is not the offspring of science or reflection, but of an inspiration which sets at defiance all the strictness of rules and convention. I mean popular music, and especially that of the peasantry. How many exquisite compositions are born, live and die, among the peasantry, without ever having been dignified by a correct notation, without ever having deigned to be confined within the absolute limits of a distinct and definite theme. The unknown artist who improvises his rustic ballad while watching his flocks, or guiding his ploughshare, and there are such even in countries which would seem the least poetical, will experience great difficulty in retaining and fixing his fugitive fancies. He communicates his ballad to other musicians, children like himself of nature, and these circulate it from hamlet to hamlet, from cot to cot, each modifying it according to the bent of his own individual genius. It is hence that these pastoral songs and romances, so artlessly striking or so deeply touching, are for the most part lost, and rarely exist above a single century in the memory of their rustic composers. Musicians completely formed under the rules of art rarely trouble themselves to collect them. Many even disdain them from very lack of an intelligence sufficiently pure, and a taste sufficiently elevated to admit of their appreciating them. Others are dismayed by the difficulties which they encounter the moment they endeavor to discover that true and original version, which, perhaps, no longer retains its existence even in the mind of its author, and which certainly was never at any time recognised as a definite and invariable type by any one of his numerous interpreters....

We observed that his playing was a perpetual modification of each theme. It was impossible to write a single one of these themes without taking a notation for every one of fifty various versions. In this probably lay his merit and his art.

George Sand, *Consuelo*
(trans. Fayette Robinson), 250-52

I

Chopin's Ballades are rightly considered difficult pieces to play. The impassioned perorations of the First and Fourth Ballades, and the *Presto* sections of the Second Ballade, have inspired awe and dismay in many an aspiring pianist. But it is my experience, as both pianist and listener, that in all three of these magnificent works, the sections that appear the simplest are perhaps the most difficult to perform convincingly. I am referring to the initial statement of the principal theme in the First and Second Ballades, and to the initial statement of both themes (F minor and B \flat major) in the Fourth Ballade. These unadorned thematic statements often fail in performance, even when the rest of the piece is played satisfactorily. In each case, I believe, the difficulty lies partly in hidden conflicts, or ambiguities, within the theme itself. In the First Ballade, the conflict pits tonal structure—harmony and counterpoint—against an aspect of the theme's rhythm that I will term its *versification*. In the Second Ballade, the melody of the principal theme can be plausibly grouped (or "phrased") in at least three different ways; Chopin exploits all three groupings within the piece. In the two themes of the Fourth Ballade the principal conflict is metrical: the themes often fail—or seem to fail—to correspond to the notated meter.

As many have observed, Chopin's Ballades all share certain features. They are all in compound meter ($\frac{6}{8}$, $\frac{6}{4}$, or $\frac{12}{8}$). They are all highly dramatic works, covering an enormous range of emotional expression. They are all bithematic, employing principal and subordinate themes of differing characters; except in the Second Ballade, the degree of thematic contrast is moderate. Finally, all of the Ballades make some reference to the conventions of nineteenth-century sonata form; the Second Ballade is again a partial exception, being less sonata-like than the others.¹

¹The term "sonata deformation," coined by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, could be used—with appropriate qualification in each case—

However, the formal aspect of the Ballades, though fascinating, is not central to this study. For our purposes, the common rhythmic and metric features of the Ballades are of signal importance, for they point to a generic ancestor: the poetic and poetic-musical ballad of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is to the sung folk ballad that George Sand refers in her novel *Consuelo* (ca. 1850), probably reflecting the ideas of Chopin himself. The poetic ballads of Chopin's compatriot Adam Mickiewicz, which have traditionally been associated with Chopin's Ballades, should also be considered in this connection.

Rufus Hallmark, in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, gives a concise history and description of various types of ballad (or ballade). In the period around 1800, the ballad was cultivated mostly by poets writing in German. Stanzaic construction varied, but each stanza was typically a quatrain, comprising four lines of verse. (I am using the term "stanza" to refer to a unit of verse; "strophe" will denote the corresponding musical unit.) A typical scheme, known as "ballad meter," alternated lines of eight syllables with lines of six syllables. Given the iambic rhythm that was characteristic of German ballads, lines of four feet (iambic tetrameter) thus alternated with lines of three (iambic trimeter). Rhyme schemes also varied, but they tended to be consistent within a single poem.

Mickiewicz's ballads, published in 1830, are somewhat different. Iambic rhythms are not natural to the Polish language, in which the penultimate syllable in a word always receives the principal stress (some proper nouns excepted). This linguistic feature makes the amphibrach—a stressed syllable surrounded by two unstressed syllables—far more natural to the Polish poet than the iamb. Mickiewicz's ballads "Switez" and "Switezianka," traditionally associated with Chopin's Second and Third Ballades respectively, share the

to describe the formal rhetoric of the First, Third, and Fourth Ballades. See Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5-7.

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same poetic meter, one in which amphibrachs and trochees alternate. The metrical scheme of each couplet (half of a quatrain) is as follows: amphibrach-trochee-amphibrach-trochee; trochee-amphibrach-trochee. While the disposition of feet (i.e., the number of feet per line) is the same as in ballad meter, the meter is less rigid than that of the typical German or English ballad. The alternation of amphibrachs and trochees already ensures a certain variety, owing to the changing number of unstressed syllables that fall between stresses. In addition, many lines contain extra syllables; these count as unstressed, and thus do not alter the number of feet per line.²

Prosodic analysis of Chopin's themes can be a valuable tool, as we shall see shortly. The principal themes of the Second and Fourth Ballades play with the conventions of ballad meter. The theme of the First Ballade, although not in ballad meter, is especially rigid in its prosody, while its tonal organization is more subtle.³

II

Since the First Ballade presents the simplest case, my discussion of it will be correspondingly brief. Example 1 presents a voice-leading graph of mm. 1-36, comprising the recitative-like introduction and the theme itself.⁴ Solid bar lines are used to separate the introduction (mm. 1-8) from the

²I am indebted to Ann McNamee for most of my information on the rhythms of the Polish language.

³Shortly after this article was written, I encountered James Parakilas' book *Ballads Without Words: Chopin and the Tradition of the Instrumental Ballade* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1992). Parakilas shares my concern with the prosody of Chopin's ballad themes. His discussion of the ballad as a narrative genre is very useful and sheds light on the large-scale shape of Chopin's Ballades.

⁴Example 1 and the accompanying discussion appear in a slightly different form in my "Analysis and the Act of Performance," in *The Practice of Performance: Studies in Musical Interpretation*, ed. John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 217-40.

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theme, and to separate the theme's antecedent (mm. 9-16) from its consequent (mm. 17-36). Dotted bar lines divide the antecedent and consequent into two segments each. The resulting segments, which I will term "halves" regardless of length, are equal—four measures each—in the antecedent, but they are highly unequal—four and sixteen measures, respectively—in the consequent. The expansion of the consequent, relative to the antecedent, thus occurs entirely within the consequent's second half.

I have purposely avoided using the terms "phrase" and "period" in the preceding paragraph, because the divisions and subdivisions shown in Example 1 do not conform to the definitions of "phrase" and "period" offered in my book *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*.⁵ Those definitions are based primarily on linear and harmonic factors, and only secondarily on criteria such as symmetry. If we regard mm. 1-36 from the standpoint of middleground harmonic progression, we note that an incomplete progression (basically $\flat\text{II}^6\text{-V-I}$) is followed by two complete progressions (I-III-V-I and I-IV-V-I , respectively). Only at the end of the passage, in m. 36, does a boundary of one of these progressions coincide with a bar line in Example 1: the conclusion of the last progression is also the end of the theme's consequent half, and thus of the theme as a whole. Other harmonic boundaries—the tonics in mm. 9 and 17—fall just *after* a solid bar line in Example 1, and thus *after* the beginnings of the antecedent and consequent, respectively. The out-of-phase relationship is fairly slight—half a measure in each case—and it is certainly not unusual: countless phrases in tonal music begin with dominant upbeat like those in mm. 8 and 16.⁶

⁵New York: Schirmer Books, 1989. For the same reason, I am referring to the theme's two main parts as "antecedent" and "consequent" rather than as "fore-phrase" and "after-phrase." The term "phrase" is itself at issue, so I am avoiding it in discussing this theme.

⁶The term "out of phase," referring to the non-coincidence of grouping and meter, originates with Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff; see A

However, the dominant in each case represents the penultimate harmony in a long-range progression; it is no mere upbeat. Resolution to the tonic occurs only *after* one has clearly entered a new segment of the theme. One hears this most strongly at the boundary between antecedent and consequent, because the antecedent ends with a dissonant chord (II⁷ in m. 16).

Harmonic progression is not responsible for the segmentation shown in Example 1 (although the three middleground progressions correspond approximately to the threefold division of introduction, antecedent, and consequent). It is, rather, the theme's *versification* that creates these divisions. For instrumental melodies, like many of Chopin's, that recall poetry and song—melodies, in a more or less vocal style, that exhibit a significant degree of symmetry—*musical versification* may be defined as a compound of a melody's rhythmic grouping, its metrical structure (meter and hypermeter), and any verse-like relationships that obtain between melodic segments (especially repetition, symmetry, beginning-rhyme, and end-rhyme). Example 2 illustrates the versification of Chopin's theme by presenting the theme *as* verse—specifically, as two quatrains.⁷ The last line of the second quatrain is hypothetical, a compression into two measures of the consequent's second (expanded) half.⁸ A two-measure hypermeter is implied in the example; larger levels of hypermeter—four-measure and even eight-measure—may also be heard. The rhyming scheme (end-rhyme) for the first quatrain is ABAA; for the

Generative Theory of Tonal Music (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983), 25-30. Several of the concepts used in this article derive from *GTTM*.

⁷The term "quatrain" is used in this article to denote a four-line stanza of poetry, or, metaphorically, a strophe that is constructed like such a stanza. In *Phrase Rhythm I* I used the same term (borrowed from the musicologist Dénes Bartha) to denote a specific musical form (AABA).

⁸The last line of Example 2 lacks the descending fifth-progression ($\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}-[\hat{2}]-\hat{1}$) of Chopin's mm. 34-36. This suggests a partial motivation for the expansion of that line in the Ballade itself.

Example 2. First Ballade, stanzaic organization of the principal theme

Stanza 1

Stanza 1 consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 6/4 time signature. The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. This is followed by a half note G4, a half note F4, and a half note E4. The second staff continues with a quarter rest, a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. This is followed by a half note G4, a half note F4, and a half note E4. The third staff continues with a quarter rest, a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. This is followed by a half note G4, a half note F4, and a half note E4. The fourth staff continues with a quarter rest, a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. This is followed by a half note G4, a half note F4, and a half note E4.

Stanza 2

Stanza 2 consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 6/4 time signature. The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. This is followed by a half note G4, a half note F4, and a half note E4. The second staff continues with a quarter rest, a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. This is followed by a half note G4, a half note F4, and a half note E4. The third staff continues with a quarter rest, a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. This is followed by a half note G4, a half note F4, and a half note E4. The fourth staff continues with a quarter rest, a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. This is followed by a half note G4, a half note F4, and a half note E4.

second quatrain, ABCB. (“A” represents a falling step at the end of a line, “B” a rising step, and “C” a repeated note.)

As has already been noted, only at the end of the second quatrain (m. 36 of the score) does a line of “verse” end with what Example 1 identifies as a cadence—i.e., with the conclusion of one of the three progressions. Many listeners—perhaps most—would also identify a half cadence at the end of the first couplet (m. 12; the same music is heard in m. 20). But, as Example 1 indicates, this dominant acts not as a point of interruption (which would make it a typical half cadence) but as the penultimate harmony in a tonic prolongation—in Schenkerian terms, a foreground divider.⁹ In other words, it is possible—and, I believe, more rewarding—to regard the “half cadence” as more apparent than real—or, more precisely, as a “cadence” that is canceled in retrospect. Harmonic and linear tension continue *through* the break between lines; versification and tonal syntax are in continuous conflict until the end of the theme. The analogous technique in poetry is, of course, *enjambment*.

Chopin’s musical enjambments demand sensitive performance. Careful dynamic shading is required: for example, the crucial II⁷ chords (mm. 10, 16, and 18), and the motivic upper neighbor that is associated with them (E_b₄), should be subtly stressed to avoid a slackening of tension at

⁹Schenker, in his mature theory, recognized only one kind of cadence, the authentic cadence V-I. He regarded a cadence as the completion of the bass arpeggiation I-V-I at some level of structure; if the initial I is lacking (as in the first progression in Example 1), he termed the progression an auxiliary cadence. Thus, Schenker regarded any motion to V as an incomplete progression, not a “cadence.” Recent Schenkerian theorists have tended to adopt conventional terminology for cadences, but without acceding entirely to conventional concepts: for example, a “deceptive cadence” V-VI is regarded not as an actual cadence but as an attempted cadence (compare the British term “interrupted cadence,” which implies an unsuccessful attempt). In recent Schenkerian usage, a “half cadence” involves a dominant that does *not* resolve to an immediately following tonic, at least not in the middleground. Such non-resolution most often occurs when a fundamental structure—original or transferred—is interrupted, generally at the $\hat{2}$, and then repeated in its complete form. Also possible, though, is an articulation (phrase ending) at an applied divider, more commonly known as a “back-relating dominant.”

the ends of their respective lines.¹⁰ Avoiding too strong a break in m. 12, and observing Chopin's accent on C₄ (the dominant seventh), will prevent too great a release of tension at the end of the first couplet. A discreet *rubato* is called for in the first seven lines (the expanded eighth line seems to demand a more extravagant performance). Chopin emphasizes his versification strongly, not only by repeating virtually the same durational pattern for each line, but also by accenting the first note in each of the first five lines (these are the only right-hand notes marked with accent signs until m. 32). If a pianist were to pay attention *only* to Chopin's versification, however—neglecting his syntax—the effect would be similar to the rigid, sing-song declamation of a poem in which lines are enjambed. As Victor Zuckerkandl wrote in a slightly different context,

We all know this kind of playing—from small children, beginners, or the hopelessly unmusical person. It is certainly the surest way to drive all life out of the music and make nonsense of it.¹¹

The German musicologist Hugo Leichtentritt seems to have found the tension between Chopin's versification and his syntax unbearable, so he eliminated it by re-barring the theme. Leichtentritt, here as elsewhere in his analyses of the *Ballades*, claimed that Chopin's bar lines were incorrectly written; he speaks here of "the misleading, false bar lines of

¹⁰Both Schenker and the French theorist Mathis Lussy believed that upper neighbors should often be accented in performance. For Lussy, see Michael D. Green, "Mathis Lussy's *Traité de l'expression musicale* as a Window into Performance Practice," *Music Theory Spectrum* 16/2 (Fall 1994):196-216. For Schenker, see my "Heinrich Schenker as an Interpreter of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas," *19th-Century Music* 8/1 (Summer 1984):3-28. Lussy's 1874 *Traité* was translated into German, and it is possible that Schenker knew it, although I know of no reference to Lussy in Schenker's writings.

¹¹Victor Zuckerkandl, *The Sense of Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 110.

the original,” which his version “sets right.”¹² Leichtentritt’s “corrected” version may be seen in Example 3. The tension of Chopin’s enjambments is almost completely gone; most “lines” now end with a perfect authentic cadence (the third “line” notably excepted). The theme also begins in the wrong place. It is instructive, though painful, to play the theme (including the accompaniment) according to Leichtentritt’s barring. It is no longer Chopin’s theme.

III

Until fairly recently, my knowledge of the Second Ballade was almost entirely aural; I had neither played the piece nor studied it in detail. My analysis began when I discovered, to my surprise, that Chopin’s first slur for the right hand ends in the middle of m. 5, with the melody’s A₄. Without having given the matter any conscious thought, I had always heard the first phrase as ending half a measure earlier, with a half cadence on G₄, despite the descending motion of the alto voice at that point. (Notice again an ambiguity involving a “half cadence.”) Since making my belated discovery, I have come to believe that I was not entirely wrong to hear the melody as I did; to some degree, I still hear it that way.¹³ What has changed is that I now recognize not one but three different versions of the theme. The pitches and durations are the same in all three versions, but the notes are grouped differently; thus the versification also varies from one version to the next. I believe that Chopin created these

¹²The complete sentence reads, “Um die Einsicht in dies merkwürdige Gebilde zu erleichtern, ist es hier in einem auf das wesentliche vereinfachten Extrakt wiedergegeben, der auch die irreführenden, falschen Taktstriche des Originals richtigstellt.” Leichtentritt, *Analyse der Chopin’schen Klavierwerke*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1921-22), 1:4-5.

¹³I pointed out in *Phrase Rhythm* (220) that Chopin’s slurs often contradict his phrase structure.

Example 3. First Ballade, Leichtentritt's re-barring of the principal theme

The image displays two musical staves, labeled I and II, representing different versions of a principal theme. Both staves are in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time signature.

Staff I (top) is in 6/4 time. It contains a melody with a dotted half note followed by a quarter note, then a half note, and finally a dotted half note. Brackets labeled 'a', 'b', and 'c' are placed above the staff, indicating structural divisions. Bracket 'a' covers the first two measures, 'b' covers the next two, and 'c' covers the final two.

Staff II (bottom) is in 9/4 time. It contains the same melody as Staff I, but with a different rhythmic grouping. Brackets labeled 'a' and 'b' are placed above the staff, indicating structural divisions. Bracket 'a' covers the first three measures, and 'b' covers the next three. A bracket labeled 'Dehnung' (stretching) is placed above the final measure of the staff.

variants deliberately, because each one is referred to later in the Ballade. Imagine my delight, then, when I read the passage in Sand's *Consuelo* that forms the second of my two epigraphs. In it, the narrator describes the playing of a peasant bagpiper somewhere in central France. The emphasis placed on the variants of a simple folk melody, and on the artistic value of including such variants in a performance, bespeaks the variety and flexibility with which Chopin treats his theme.

Any mention of Chopin's slurs brings up the vexed issue of the sources—in particular, differences between the autograph manuscript and other sources stemming from Chopin's lifetime (a second manuscript, corrected by Chopin, and four separate editions). I have personally examined neither the autograph nor the first French edition (the two most important sources), but have relied instead upon the text and the somewhat sketchy critical reports in the Henle edition (by Ewald Zimmermann) and the generally more reliable Wiener Urtext Edition (by Jan Ekier).¹⁴ While the slurs in this Ballade—and especially in the principal theme—vary between sources, I will discuss only those slurs on which at least these two editions—both of which claim to follow the autograph primarily—agree.¹⁵

Of all the themes in Chopin's Ballades, that of the Second Ballade comes nearest to the folk style which, for many ballad composers both before and after 1800, represented the

¹⁴See also Camille Saint-Saëns' report on the autograph of Op. 38 in his *Outspoken Essays on Music*, trans. Fred Rothwell (London, 1922), 97-105.

¹⁵On Chopin's autographs and first editions, see Jeffrey Kallberg's invaluable Ph.D. dissertation, *The Chopin Sources: Variants and Versions in Later Manuscripts* (University of Chicago, 1982). Kallberg deals mostly with the music of Chopin's last years, for which the chain of source material is clearest.

ideal.¹⁶ None of the theme's three versions represents what Sand referred to as "that true and original version, which, perhaps, no longer retains its existence even in the mind of its author."¹⁷ While Sand implies that recovering the original version of a ballad tune may be impossible, in the Second Ballade I believe that it *is* possible, even though the "original" is nowhere heard in the piece itself. I have reconstructed the first strophe—poetically, the first stanza—of this "original" in Example 4. Commas above the staff indicate divisions between "lines" of the stanza. The stanza—a quatrain—is composed in ballad meter, alternating iambic tetrameter with iambic trimeter; the occasional sixteenth-note represents either an extra, unstressed syllable (as in Mickiewicz's ballads) or a single syllable sung to two notes (a dotted eighth followed by a sixteenth).

It may seem that I have constructed an elaborate alibi to justify a mishearing of Chopin's theme; notice, for example, that the first couplet of Example 4 ends with my treasured half cadence. If the analysis is an alibi, it is at least a revealing one, for it highlights the theme's subtle asymmetries. Compared to Example 4, Chopin's first strophe (mm. 2-9) contains an "extra" note at the end of each couplet. The first such note, A₄ in m. 5, has already been cited. Corresponding to this note is C₅ in m. 9, an anticipation of the second strophe's

¹⁶Jim Samson (*Chopin: The Four Ballades* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 15-16) points out the theme's pastoral associations, its resemblance to the siciliano, and possible parallels with the many ballads and romances in contemporary opera (he quotes the Ballade from Act I of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*). Leichtentritt (vol. 1, 13) speaks of "the idyllic, pastoral sound of the lovely, folk-song-like tune" ("der idyllische, pastorale Klang der lieblichen, wie ein Volkslied anmutenden Weise").

¹⁷The characterization of a ballad's original version as "truer" than later versions presumably reflects Sand's own artistic prejudices, not those of peasant musicians.

Example 4. Second Ballade, Op. 38, “original version” of the principal theme

Ballad

Example 5. Second Ballade, prosodic analysis of mm. 1-5

beginning.¹⁸ Although C₅ is not slurred to the preceding music (as A₄ is), the attack points of the two notes—on the second half of the fourth measure of the four-measure phrase—correspond exactly. The two “extra” notes balance each other, the asymmetries together creating a larger symmetry. This symmetry helps to explain my original hearing of the first couplet: if C₅ (m. 9) belongs to the second rather than to the first quatrain, then—reasoning by analogy—A₄ (m. 5) must belong to the second rather than to the first couplet. Chopin offers precisely this interpretation in m. 21, where E₅ begins a transposed quotation of the second couplet; Chopin’s *pianissimo* marks the beginning of the quotation. Whether this is a new interpretation (as the slurs at mm. 5 and 13 might suggest) or the confirmation of a successful analytical surmise (as expressed by Example 4) is difficult to ascertain; suffice it to say that Chopin’s first couplet is purposefully ambiguous in its grouping.

Another asymmetry, one that is not balanced in such a clear way, occurs at the beginning of the theme. The little introduction is clearly iambic in its rhythm; an earlier version, half a measure longer, was similarly iambic.¹⁹ These iambs encourage the listener to hear the theme itself iambically, as in Example 4. But a contrary, trochaic signal is given at the downbeat of m. 2 by the entrance of the theme’s characteristic four-part texture. The change to a fuller texture constitutes a kind of accent; it also suggests that the theme “really” begins here—with a quarter-note, and thus with trochees.²⁰ The pattern of pitches in the alto voice strengthens the trochaic

¹⁸The second strophe, which ends at m. 17, is a repetition of the first. After that it becomes increasingly difficult to divide the melody into strophes (quatrains).

¹⁹Saint-Saëns, 97.

²⁰The trochaic interpretation of m. 2 is reinforced at m. 115, where the resumption of *tempo primo* on the downbeat marks the beginning of the theme. On accents of various kinds, see Joel Lester, *The Rhythms of Tonal Music* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 13-44.


impression in mm. 2-3. So does Chopin's pedaling, since the theme's first and only required pedal ends with an eighth-note (suggesting that the eighth-note ends a group). Even the dotted rhythm in m. 4 contributes to the trochaic impression, since the first half of the measure can easily be heard as a dactyl (an expanded trochee). Thus the prosodic signals at the beginning of the theme are mixed. Hearing the theme trochaically makes sense, however, only until the last eighth-note of m. 3, where iambs again take over unmistakably; notice the brief change here to a three-voice texture, and the parallel tenths accompanying the melody's first iamb (D₅-C₅).

The shifting prosodic situation in mm. 1-5 is summarized in Example 5. A compound foot—a dactyl fused with an iamb—is heard in m. 3, effecting the transition between trochees (m. 2) and iambs (m. 4). The iambs of m. 4 allow a listener to predict that the couplet will end *before* the last eighth-note of m. 5. The conventions of ballad meter suggest, further, that the remainder of m. 5—everything, that is, before the last eighth-note—will be occupied by a single long note, like the fourth measure of Example 4. The extension of the first cadence from G₄ (half cadence) to A₄ (imperfect authentic cadence) does not exceed the prospective length of the couplet, but it turns the final iamb into an amphibrach, thus balancing the compound foot in m. 3. Each of the couplet's two lines now consists of two short feet (two syllables each) followed by one longer foot (three or four syllables).


Example 6 shows the three versions of the second couplet (henceforth Couplet 2). In the terminology of Lerdahl and Jackendoff, these are three alternate and, in principle, mutually exclusive grouping analyses; I have labeled them Groupings 1-3. Next to each grouping is a list of measure numbers, indicating passages later in the Ballade where each grouping appears. Only some of these passages are actual statements of Couplet 2; others, while thematically derived (sometimes from Couplet 1), represent one of the three groupings but not its associated melodic material. Example 6 also shows nuances,

Example 6. Second Ballade, the three groupings of Couplet 2


Grouping 1 (see 6-9, 34-37, 110-14, 135-39)



Grouping 2 (see 21-25, 85-87, 97-109, 122-34)



Grouping 3 (see 88-91, 95-97, 198-200)



The image displays three musical staves, each representing a different grouping of notes from a single line of music. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a 6/8 time signature. The notes are grouped into three distinct units, each enclosed in a large, thin-lined bracket. The first unit of each grouping is marked with a left-pointing chevron (<), and the second unit is marked with a right-pointing chevron (>). The third unit is marked with a downward-pointing chevron (v). The first grouping (Grouping 1) shows a sequence of notes with a large slur over the first two units. The second grouping (Grouping 2) shows a sequence of notes with a large slur over the first two units. The third grouping (Grouping 3) shows a sequence of notes with a large slur over the first two units.

written in parentheses, which could be used by a pianist to help communicate each grouping. Notice that the high point of each nuance is always A_4 on a downbeat. Notice, too, that all three groupings conform to the proportions of a Schoenbergian sentence: 1+1+2 measures.

Since nuances can help to clarify grouping, we are fortunate to have one report—probably reliable, although frustratingly incomplete—of how Chopin himself performed this theme. Pauline Viardot, the great mezzo-soprano who studied piano with Chopin, told Saint-Saëns that

Chopin had often played her the opening Andantino, but never the rest [of the Ballade]. He played this Andantino without any nuances at all, except for the two indicated, which he strongly brought out.²¹

It is unclear which two nuances, of the several in the score, Chopin “strongly brought out,” but they may have been the two at the end of the theme proper (mm. 37-40; one of these is cited by Saint-Saëns in another connection). Another, more intriguing possibility is that they marked the two places where the theme veers toward A minor (mm. 17-18 and 32-33).

If Chopin really played the first two strophes without any nuances (since none are indicated there), he probably did not make it obvious which of our three groupings should be heard in Couplet 2. The effect would be that a listener might hear any of them. Grouping 1, the iambic rhythm, is the way one typically hears an alternation of eighth-notes and quarters in $\frac{6}{8}$ meter, if there are no indications to the contrary;²² this is

²¹Quoted in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, trans. Naomi Shohet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 65-66. The translation given in Saint-Saëns (102) ends “and these he strongly accented.”

²²Compare the discussion of grouping in the famous A-major theme from Mozart’s Piano Sonata, K. 331, in Leonard Meyer’s *Explaining Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 30-43.

also the grouping that results—at least initially—if the pianist makes a clear separation in m. 5 (following Chopin's slurs). Groupings 2 and 3 suggest themselves, in part, because a quarter-note A_4 recurs on every beat of Couplet 2 until the final V-I cadence; it therefore becomes plausible to hear groups beginning with A_4 . Even if one hears Grouping 1 in m. 6 (because of the separation in m. 5), it is easy to hear a change to Grouping 3 in mm. 7-8 (because the dotted rhythms suggest dactyls). Much later in the Ballade, in mm. 110-14 and 135-39, Chopin makes such a change of grouping explicit.

It is curious—and surely significant—that the most emphasized chord in this rhythmically ambiguous passage is that notorious harmonic chameleon, the $\frac{6}{4}$ chord on scale-degree 5. This chord accompanies A_4 no fewer than five times in mm. 6-8. To my ear, the harmonic meaning of these $\frac{6}{4}$ chords changes according to the rhythmic grouping heard.²³ In Grouping 1, I hear the first chord (IV) as a functional pre-dominant leading to an expanded cadential dominant (basically $\frac{8}{4} - \frac{7}{3}$) in mm. 6-8. For Grouping 2, two harmonic interpretations seem possible: either a tonic prolongation in mm. 5-7 followed by the cadential dominant in m. 8 (the first four $\frac{6}{4}$ s are thus consonant), or a prolongation of IV (or IV^7) in mm. 6-7 followed again by the cadential dominant (the second, third, and fourth $\frac{6}{4}$ s are thus passing, with voice exchanges between alto and bass). The former interpretation is suggested in mm. 21-25 by virtue of the strong C-major harmony in m. 21 (the quotation of Couplet 2 prolongs this harmony); the latter analysis is plausible in mm. 85-87, because the phrase breaks off on the

²³The taxonomy of $\frac{6}{4}$ chords used here is taken from Edward Aldwell and Carl Schachter, *Harmony and Voice Leading*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 284-303.

subdominant.²⁴ Grouping 3 is harmonically similar to Grouping 1: I hear it as a straightforward expansion of the cadential dominant. This last analysis is strongly confirmed at the end of the Ballade, where Grouping 3 follows the climactic French sixth chord (m. 196). Notice Chopin's pedal connecting the French sixth to the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$; the step F-E, which is virtually the leitmotif of this Ballade, is outlined in the bass.²⁵

Faced with three different versions of the theme in a piece of strongly narrative character, a listener might naturally ask whether some "master plot" governs the appearances of the three versions throughout the Ballade. The answer, I think, is yes. Several facts are striking in this connection. The first is that, after the opening *Andantino*, Grouping 1 appears only rarely, and never as an actual quotation of Couplet 2. Grouping 2 is most common in the central "development" section (mm. 95-139), although all three groupings appear there. Grouping 3 has the final word in the Ballade (mm. 198-200), and it is surely significant that this is the *only* version of Couplet 2 to appear after the "development."²⁶ Thus the final statement of Grouping 3 seems to be associated with the Ballade's ultimate resolution to A minor, a resolution

²⁴Saint-Saëns' discussion of the autograph raises additional possibilities. Chopin originally wrote A, rather than C, in the alto on the downbeat of m. 6. The disjunct alto that results suggests a cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ followed by a prolonged neighboring chord (basically IV⁶), with the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ returning in m. 8. In m. 87, Chopin originally extended the thematic quotation by two notes, so that the general pause—a full measure of rest—occurred after IV⁶. This seems to strengthen the idea of a prolonged IV in this passage (IV of F major is eventually reinterpreted as \flat II of A minor).

²⁵The motivic structure of the Second Ballade, like the two-key scheme, is largely beyond the scope of this study. Aldwell and Schachter (450) point out the importance of the E-F dyad; so does Harald Krebs (cited in Samson, *The Four Ballades*, 56).

²⁶This final appearance of Grouping 3 is foreshadowed in mm. 88-91 (also in A minor).

that becomes inevitable only during the final *Presto con fuoco* (specifically, at the dominant arrival in m. 156).

In this powerfully affecting close, Couplet 2—in Grouping 3—follows the repeated notes of the introduction; it thus takes over the expository function of Couplet 1. (Imagine a singer delivering the final couplet, telling the *denouement* of the drama as in Schubert’s “Erlkönig.”) Couplet 2 also assumes the trochaic rhythm with which Couplet 1 originally began (see Example 5). And, of course, the tonal orientation of the Ballade has been transformed: A minor, once a lowly mediant in F major (albeit a curiously emphasized mediant), has become the governing tonality, relegating F to the status of submediant; in the motive, F now resolves to E rather than the other way around.²⁷ In rhetoric, rhythm, motive, and tonality, a revolution has occurred. Whether or not the story being told is that of Mickiewicz’s “Switez,” it is hard to miss the point.

A note on performance: I have not done anything like an exhaustive survey of recordings of the Second Ballade, but, among those few recordings I have heard, the pianist who most vividly makes an issue of the theme’s variant groupings is Alfred Cortot, in his recording of July 1933. Cortot’s sensitivity to grouping goes beyond his own performance: it decisively—and sometimes unfortunately—colors his “students’ edition” of the Ballades.²⁸ In his recording, Cortot breaks Chopin’s slur in the first complete measure, inserting a *Luftpause* before the last eighth-note; he retards the tempo to this *Luftpause* and resumes tempo with the following

²⁷The motivic reversal goes beyond the reversed functions of F and E. In the opening *Andantino*, the tetrachord F₄-E₄-D₄-C₄ (mm. 4-5, alto) “resolves” to its inversion, C₄-D₄-E₄-F₄, at the cadence of the first strophe (mm. 8-9). In the closing measures, the same descending tetrachord (mm. 199-200) is continued downward, after a general pause, to B₃-(G₃)-A₃ (mm. 201-203), thus “resolving” the tetrachord to the other tonic.

²⁸Paris: Éditions Salabert, 1929 (trans. David Ponsoy). The punctuation signs used for the theme of the Second Ballade appear in no other work in this edition.

eighth. He thus forces an iambic hearing of the theme's beginning (compare Example 5). In his edition (Example 7), Cortot punctuates the theme with commas, semicolons, colons, and periods, rather like Johannes Mattheson's punctuation of a minuet in *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister* (1739). Cortot makes his intentions clear by stating that "commas, semicolons, stops, etc., should be given the true value of caesuras, which would be theirs in a literary text." With all due respect to a great pianist, this approach to the theme is unacceptable, because it imposes a specious clarity where Chopin intended the most delicate ambiguity. After his false start in mm. 1-2, Cortot (in his recording) masterfully explores variant groupings without a hint of pedantry. The same cannot, unfortunately, be said of Kristian Zimerman (Deutsche Grammophon 4230902), who also seems to be aware of variant groupings within the theme, but whose performance lacks the fluidity needed to express them convincingly.

IV

The Fourth Ballade, unlike the other three, takes the form of variations on its principal theme. After an introduction, the theme is stated in mm. 8-22. Three variations follow: mm. 23-57, 58-151, and 152-202. The dominant is prolonged by an eight-measure pedal (mm. 203-210); the violent coda follows.²⁹

The theme ends with a dominant harmony, as does each variation; with one exception, the seventh is always included.³⁰

²⁹The section from m. 211 to the end is universally referred to as a coda, and so it is in terms of the variation form. However, the Ballade's fundamental structure concludes in m. 227; from the standpoint of background voice leading, therefore, the coda begins there. On similar conflicts between "inner" and "outer form," see *Phrase Rhythm*, chap. 4.

³⁰Variation 3 ends with a plain dominant triad; note that, for the first time, the dominant is preceded by a cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ (m. 195). However, an 8-7

Example 7. Second Ballade, Cortot's edition, mm. 1-23 (melody only)

The image displays a musical score for the melody of the Second Ballade, measures 1-23, in Cortot's edition. The score is written on four staves in 6/8 time. The melody is characterized by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped with slurs and ornaments. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 6/8 time signature. The second staff contains a slur over the first few measures, with a circled '9' above it. The third staff continues the melody, also featuring a slur and a circled '9'. The fourth staff concludes the melody with a slur and a circled '9', followed by the text "[etc.]".

Once again, the dominants in question are not typical half cadences. The large-scale harmonic progression of each variation—basically I-(III)-IV-V⁷—closes into the tonic at the beginning of the next variation, so that a chain of overlapping progressions results. It is likely that Chopin, who venerated the music of J. S. Bach, took the inspiration for this procedure from Bach's ground bass forms (cf. the "Crucifixus" from the Mass in B Minor). Strengthening the historical connection is Chopin's conspicuous use of the descending tetrachord F-E^b-D^b-C (8-7-6-5), especially in the coda. The principal theme is based on a modal variant of the same tetrachord, F₅-E^b₅-D^b₅-C₅. Part of the "work" of the theme, in fact, is to eliminate the resulting augmented second; this is done, in effect, by changing the "incorrect" seventh degree, E^b₅ (left over from the end of the introduction), to F^b₅, and leading the latter note to the "correct" form of 7̂, E^b₅. The process is hinted at in mm. 9-11 and 19-21; F^b₅ appears explicitly in mm. 13-14.

The variations themselves are of a very unusual kind. Beethoven, seeking to give his variation forms greater scope, invented a kind of movement in which episodes are inserted between variations (see the *Adagio* of the Ninth Symphony and the *Arietta* from the Sonata Op. 111). In the Fourth Ballade, Chopin takes Beethoven's idea a step further by interpolating episodes, not between variations, but within them. These interpolations are made possible by the unusual construction of the theme itself. After statements in F minor and A^b major, the theme settles in B^b minor—the subdominant—and leads to a perfect authentic cadence in that key (m. 22).³¹ The progression from IV to V⁷ occurs within

motion over the eight-measure dominant pedal introduces the seventh at m. 205.

³¹A fifth-progression from F₅ to B^b₄ is completed at m. 22, although B^b₄ goes on to become the seventh of V⁷ (resolving into the left hand in m. 23, thus ultimately completing a sixth-progression). I read the Ballade's primary tone as C₅ (5̂), so, at a deeper level, 5̂ moves to 4̂ at m. 22; the resolution to 3̂ is overlapped by a renewal of 5̂ as Variation 1 begins.

m. 22, the last measure of the theme; consequently, the dominant sounds almost like an afterthought to the subdominant. It is the subdominant, then, that Chopin expands in ever more fantastic ways throughout the Ballade.³²

The expansions give Chopin the opportunity to overlay his variations with a rhetoric that is clearly derived from sonata form. After the principal theme has been stated twice (mm. 8-22 and 23-57), a more agitated counterstatement leads into a “transition” (mm. 72-80) to B \flat major, where a lyrical “second theme” soon emerges (mm. 84-99).³³ A passage of “development” follows, leading to a modified return first of the introduction (mm. 129-34) and then of the principal theme (mm. 135-51). Notice that most of the “sonata form,” from “counterstatement of first theme” to “recapitulation of first theme,” occurs within Variation 2, which contains the longest interpolation. Variation 3 includes, as its principal episode, the “recapitulation of the second theme” (in D \flat major). The form of the Ballade could thus be called ambiguous—not in the sense of vagueness or indeterminacy, but in the more literal sense of possessing two meanings. Variations form the backbone of the structure, but it is sonata form, as a series of conventionalized “plot” incidents, that lends the Ballade its particular narrative quality.³⁴ As the

³²This view of the theme, and of the role of the subdominant in the Fourth Ballade, was suggested to me by the late Ernst Oster. Carl Schachter seems to share this view, as evidenced by his brief comments on the Ballade in his review of Jim Samson’s *The Music of Chopin (Music Analysis 8/1-2 [1989]:187-97)*. See also Samson’s analysis—which differs in some respects from the one offered here—in *The Four Ballades*, 62-68.

³³The “second theme” is sometimes said to begin at m. 80, but this is incorrect. Measures 80-84 constitute an introductory motto in which the descending tetrachord $\hat{8}-\hat{7}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ is prominently featured in the bass. For a similar use of an introductory motto, see mm. 148-52 of the *Polonaise-Fantasy*.

³⁴On sonata form as paradigmatic plot, see Anthony Newcomb, “Once More Between Absolute and Program Music: Schumann’s Second Symphony,” *19th-Century Music 7/3* (April 1984):233-50.

pianist Harris Goldsmith has recently written, this is “a theme and variations interrupted strategically by a desire not to be a theme and variations.”³⁵

In the principal theme itself, the emphasis on the subdominant threatens the stability of the tonic, as B^b minor turns F into its dominant (mm. 18-22). The unsettled tonal orientation of the theme is matched by an exceptionally unstable metrical structure. Variation 1, for example, is virtually a straightforward repetition of the theme until m. 38, where its interpolated episode begins, and yet the barring of the variation is shifted by half a measure from that of the theme. Given the near-identity of the two passages, it is difficult to hear their meters so differently; one can force oneself to do so, but the hearing remains forced.

Another indicator of metrical instability is the return of the “second theme” at m. 169 (Example 8). For the first two measures of this passage, I have always instinctively heard, and played, the melody as if its metrical accents fell on the notated second beat (the fourth eighth-note), while the bass expresses the notated meter. Long before I had heard of music analysis, I savored this dissociation between the hands; for me, it has always expressed the visionary quality of this “recapitulation.”³⁶ In m. 171 (the third measure of the passage), the alto’s suspension begins a realignment of the melody with the notated meter; the hands are in full agreement by m. 172.

For this *Ballade*, uniquely, Leichtentritt convinces when he argues that Chopin’s bar lines are misleading—although, unlike Leichtentritt, I believe that they are ultimately correct (more on this later). The analysis in Example 9 is modeled

³⁵*Clavier* 34/1 (January 1995):19-21.

³⁶Part of the reason for this hearing, I think, is a desire to avoid an accent on the octave D^b in m. 170. Such an accent easily creates the effect of parallel octaves (F-D^b).

Example 8. Fourth Ballade, Op. 52, mm. 169-172

p
leggiero
in tempo
Ped. *

Ped. * *Ped.* * *

after a slightly different portrayal by Leichtentritt.³⁷ As with the First Ballade, I have divided the theme into “verses”; only, since there are two distinctly different types of “verse,” I have placed Type A—the opening motive—to the left, and Type B—the cadential motive—to the right. The theme’s rhyme scheme is AB, ABB, AB: I will refer to each of these three sections as a strophe, although two of the strophes comprise merely a couplet each. The numerals 1-4 denote what I, like Leichtentritt, take to be a four-measure pattern underlying each strophe. The second “measure” in each strophe is elongated by a beat (to $\frac{9}{8}$), and the second strophe is extended by the transposed repetition of its third and fourth “measures.”³⁸ Here again I will avoid the term “phrase” in describing the theme’s segments, because the tonal structure of the theme conflicts with its versification (though to a lesser degree than in the First Ballade).

The theme’s rhythmic peculiarities are clear. The first strophe comprises nine dotted-quarter-note beats, if the initial downbeat—the low F in the bass—is counted. The second strophe is extended to eleven beats, closing into the twelfth; that is, the twelfth beat—in the score, the second half of m. 18—represents an overlap (with metrical reinterpretation) between the second and third strophes. The third strophe is again nine beats long; the “second ending” in Example 9 shows mm. 36-37 (in Variation 1). The lengths of the three strophes are thus 9+11+9, or 29 beats, in the theme, and 9+11+10, or 30 beats, in the variation. Naturally, when most of the theme is immediately repeated in the variation, the

³⁷Leichtentritt, vol. 1, 33. Leichtentritt’s example is reproduced in John Rink, “Chopin’s Ballades and the Dialectic: Analysis in Historical Perspective,” *Music Analysis* 13/1 (1994):102. Rink also reproduces Leichtentritt’s re-barred version of the principal theme from the Second Ballade.

³⁸In Leichtentritt’s analysis, each strophe consists of three $\frac{6}{8}$ measures followed by a single measure of $\frac{9}{8}$. The extension of the second strophe is given as two measures, $\frac{6}{8}$ followed by $\frac{3}{8}$.

Example 9. Fourth Ballade, stanzaic and metrical analysis of the principal theme

The image displays a musical score for the principal theme of the Fourth Ballade, presented in four staves. The music is in G minor (three flats) and 6/8 time. The score includes various musical notations such as treble clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamic markings. Brackets and numbers (1, 2, 3, 4) are used to indicate stanzaic divisions across the staves. The first staff shows a sequence of four stanzas. The second staff continues the sequence with four stanzas. The third staff shows three stanzas, with the fourth labeled '4=' indicating a specific metrical or structural feature. The fourth staff shows a sequence of stanzas, with a first and second ending bracket labeled '1.' and '2.' and a '4' below it, indicating a four-measure ending.

barring shifts by half a measure.³⁹ In Variation 1, the extension of the final B^b-minor harmony (mm. 36-37) balances the extra half-measure preceding the theme (the first half of m. 8). Chopin thus ensures that the following episode—which for eight measures represents an island of metrical stability—begins on a notated downbeat.⁴⁰

Some explanation of my metrical analysis is in order. Using the metrical preference rules (MPRs) of Lerdahl and Jackendoff, the meter in Example 9 results from the application of four rules: (1) MPR 1 (parallelism)—parallel passages are barred identically each time they occur; (2) MPR 6 (metrically stable bass)—in the registral alternations of the bass (e.g., mm. 8-10), the low notes are given preference as strong beats; (3) MPR 8 (suspension)—suspensions are placed on stronger beats than their resolutions; (4) MPR 5e (length of pitch)—the inception of a relatively long pitch (including repeated pitches or pitch-classes) is a preferred point for a strong beat.⁴¹ Relating to MPR 5e, the motive of four sixteenth-notes, leading to repeated eighth-notes on the same pitch, is consistently treated as an upbeat, while the first of the repeated notes is treated as a downbeat. MPR 5e also affects the bass (and thus MPR 6) in

³⁹See Floyd Grave's discussion of similar displacements in eighteenth-century music in "Metrical Displacement and the Compound Measure in Eighteenth-Century Theory and Practice," *Theoria* 1 (1985):25-60.

⁴⁰The root motion of a major third downward—here B^b minor to G^b major—returns to begin the episode within Variation 3 (see mm. 167-69, where the root motion is F-D^b). It is perhaps not coincidental that G^b-major and D^b-major harmonies are juxtaposed within the theme itself at m. 17, just where the extension of the second strophe begins.

⁴¹A complete listing of MPRs is given in Lerdahl and Jackendoff (347-48). For MPR 8, chordal sevenths do not count as suspensions, even if they are prepared.

that the following changes are placed on downbeats: F to E \flat (m. 11); E \flat to A \flat (m. 12); E \flat to F (m. 18).⁴²

In Example 9, the cadential motive is of special interest (see “measures” 3-4 in each strophe). The appearances of this motive are isolated in Example 10; bar lines have been omitted.⁴³ In Example 10a, the repeated E \flat ₅ in the melody (MPR 5e) and the suspended A \flat ₄ in the accompaniment (MPR 8) lead to an overriding of the low-bass rule (the registral aspect of MPR 6). Something similar happens in Example 10d, except that the cadential $\frac{6}{4}$ is replaced by a suspended G \flat ₄ and an appoggiatura B \flat ₄ (prepared indirectly an octave lower) as representatives of MPR 8; the chord formed is II⁷ over a dominant pedal. Since the same chord is expressed in the previous half-measure, the feeling of suspension is somewhat weakened; the appoggiatura seems more salient here. Notice that, in both cases, the overriding of the low-bass rule leads to the appearance of a conventional bass formula: the descending leap of an octave, from strong beat to weak beat, on the cadential dominant.⁴⁴

In Examples 10b and 10c, suspensions appear not in the accompaniment but in the melody: a 9-8 suspension falls on what Example 9 identifies as the second, weaker beat of the “measure.” MPR 8 is not violated, however, because the resolution falls on a still weaker metrical position (the following eighth-note).

⁴²Leichtentritt does not give reasons for his metrical analysis (see note 37); he seems to follow MPRs 1 and 6—the latter in the restricted sense of bass register—but not MPR 5e. He does, however, place the climax of Chopin’s nuances (shown in Example 10) on strong beats, apparently following MPR 4 (stress). (Since the MPRs express metrical intuitions that are widely shared, it seems legitimate to speak of Leichtentritt “following” rules that would not be articulated for another sixty years.)

⁴³Example 10c, which initially sounds like a half cadence in B \flat minor, proves not to be a cadence at all. This dominant of B \flat leads to the authentic cadence in Example 10d, which is taken from Variation 1 because the cadence is clearer there.

⁴⁴See Aldwell and Schachter, 143.

Example 10. Fourth Ballade, the cadential motive (bar lines omitted)

a. mm. 10.5-12.5

Musical score for measures 10.5-12.5. The score is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features a treble and bass clef. The melody in the treble clef consists of a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, with a final cadence. The bass clef provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

b. mm. 15-16

Musical score for measures 15-16. The score is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features a treble and bass clef. The melody in the treble clef consists of a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, with a final cadence. The bass clef provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

c. mm. 17-18

Musical score for measures 17-18. The score is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features a treble and bass clef. The melody in the treble clef consists of a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, with a final cadence. The bass clef provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

d. mm. 35-36

Musical score for measures 35-36. The score is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It features a treble and bass clef. The melody in the treble clef consists of a sequence of eighth and quarter notes, with a final cadence. The bass clef provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

The nuances written between the staves of Example 10 are Chopin's, and they seem to contradict the analysis in Example 9: in every case, the analysis shows the climax of the swell falling on the weak beat of the "measure." Leichtentritt treats these climaxes as downbeats, in keeping with his general tendency to interpret accented notes as downbeats. To my ear, though, the nuances seem insufficient to override the other factors I have cited; I therefore understand the climaxes as accented weak beats.

On the other hand, the nuances written above the melody and pertaining only to it—a *diminuendo* in each case—have to do with the way in which the repeated note is articulated. Here Chopin seems to be imitating a vocal effect, derived from Italian opera. A relatively high pitch—usually $\hat{3}$ above the cadential dominant—is sung twice; the second note is longer than the first, and it is syncopated. Example 11a shows such a cadence from Donizetti's *Elisabeth, ou La fille du proscrit* (1833).⁴⁵ The cadence in Example 11b, from Chopin's First Ballade, is similar. In Example 10d, Chopin modifies this cadence by using $\hat{4}$, rather than $\hat{3}$, as the repeated note; he also composes the syncopation—the accented long note—as a series of repeated eighths, with the first eighth attacked rather sharply (this is indicated by a staccato dot) and the remaining eighths gradually diminishing. In one sense, of course, the repeated eighths derive from the introduction (mm. 1-7), but they also compensate for the natural decay of the piano's sound. The effect is a beautiful one, but it is usually not performed very well—perhaps because pianists have not recognized the cadence's operatic origin.⁴⁶

⁴⁵From the romance "Faut-il, hélas! sans espérance" (Act I). *Elisabeth* is a revision of Donizetti's 1827 opera *Otto mesi in due ore, ossia Gli esiliati in Siberia*.

⁴⁶Compare the aria "Addio del passato" from Verdi's *La Traviata* (1853). The aria, like the Fourth Ballade, is composed in $\frac{6}{8}$ meter; it uses the repeated-note idiom in a non-cadential context. The comparison is instructive, despite the late date of the aria, because Verdi's repeated notes are often preceded, like Chopin's, by groups of four sixteenths.

Returning to the metrical analysis in Example 9, an additional factor that might be taken as counter-evidence is the “extra” first half of m. 8 (Example 12). Many pianists play this half-measure slowly, as part of the preceding *ritenuto*, but Chopin clearly marks it *in tempo*. The resumption of the original tempo itself creates a kind of accent, which might encourage a pianist to place the theme’s first articulated downbeat not one but two beats later, at the beginning of m. 9.⁴⁷ Making the diminished-seventh chords metrically strong—that is, playing them more strongly than the tonics to which they resolve—sounds expressive and suitably operatic. While this interpretation conflicts with the metrical implication of the bass (the low-high alternation), such conflicts between melody and bass do occur in tonal music, though not often in Chopin’s.⁴⁸ If a listener were to hear this alternate meter in mm. 8-10, the interpretation of the cadential motive shown in Example 9 would follow naturally. But the strophe still contains an odd number of beats, so an irregularity arises if one seeks to repeat the same pattern in the second strophe; also, $A\flat_1$ strongly suggests a downbeat at the beginning of m. 13. Another clear downbeat falls at the beginning of m. 23, where Variation 1 begins, so the variation seems to follow the meter of Example 9, not that of the alternate analysis. According to MPR 1 (parallelism), theme and variation should be heard in the same way.

Some might argue that MPR 1 should be abandoned in this case—that the opening motive, at least, can or even should be played differently on different occasions. Thus, one might play mm. 8-10 according to the alternate analysis (with the

⁴⁷See Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s MPR 10 (binary regularity).

⁴⁸See Roger Kamien, “Conflicting Metrical Patterns in Accompaniment and Melody in Works by Mozart and Beethoven: A Preliminary Study,” *Journal of Music Theory* 37/2 (Fall 1993):311-48. Similar situations are discussed in my “Beethoven With and Without *Kunstgepräg*’: Metrical Ambiguity Reconsidered,” in *Beethoven Forum* 4, ed. Christopher Reynolds, Lewis Lockwood, and James Webster (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming).

Example 11a. Donizetti, "Faut-il, hélas! sans espérance" (from *Elisabeth*), mm. 24-26

(Andante espressivo)

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system is for the vocal line, starting with the lyrics "pi - tié" and "pour le pauvre é - ri -". The second system continues with "lé" and "pour le pauvre é - ri -". The third system shows the vocal line continuing with "lé!" and "[etc.]". The piano accompaniment features triplet patterns in the right hand and chords in the left hand. Dynamic markings include *pp* (pianissimo) and *ppp* (pianissimissimo). The tempo/mood is marked "(Andante espressivo)".

pi - tié
 pour le pauvre é - ri -
 lé
 pour le pauvre é - ri -
 lé!
 [etc.]

Example 11b. First Ballade, mm. 80-82

Musical score for Example 11b, First Ballade, mm. 80-82. The score is written for piano in 6/8 time. It features a treble and bass staff. The right hand (treble) begins with a piano (*p.*) dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The left hand (bass) starts with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The piece concludes with a repeat sign and a fermata over the final notes.

Example 12. Fourth Ballade, mm. 7-10

Musical score for Example 12, Fourth Ballade, mm. 7-10. The score is written for piano in 6/8 time. It features a treble and bass staff. The right hand (treble) begins with a piano (*p.*) dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure. The left hand (bass) starts with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The piece concludes with a repeat sign and a fermata over the final notes.

diminished-seventh chords falling on strong beats), while playing mm. 13-14 as in Example 9 (with the diminished sevenths falling on weak beats); and so on. In other words, one might interpret the meter exactly as Chopin wrote it. While in general I am strongly, and deliberately, prejudiced in favor of a composer's metrical notation (especially at the beginning of a work),⁴⁹ in this case I do not know how one could successfully communicate the notated meter (and thus a fluctuating metrical interpretation of the theme) without creating a performance that sounded either insensitive or mannered.⁵⁰ At any rate, I have never heard the Ballade performed in such a way that the notated meter could be heard consistently. After considering the alternatives, therefore, I have settled upon Example 9 as the best option for the performer.

Chopin himself supplies the last bit of support for Example 9, in the embellished fermata at m. 134 (Example 13). This measure, which immediately precedes the wrong-key "recapitulation" of the principal theme, corresponds closely to m. 7 at the end of the introduction; the arpeggio from C[♯]₄ to A₆ expands the earlier ascending sixth, E[♯]₄-C₅ (in each case, from $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{8}$ in the local key). In m. 134, however, the "extra" first half of m. 8 appears at the end of the expanded measure—still written in small notes, and still part of the general *rallentando* (in contrast to the beginning

⁴⁹My prejudice applies most strongly to music of the Classical period, where I believe that the notated meter should almost *always* be projected at the beginning of a movement, even where doing so requires active intervention on the part of the performer. See, for example, the slow movement (*Largo, con gran espressione*) of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 7.

⁵⁰An insensitive performance would result from a steady and obvious alternation of strong and weak beats (ONE-two-ONE-two); exaggerating a fluctuating metrical interpretation of the theme in some other way—for example, by stressing some diminished-seventh chords and backing off from others—would probably sound mannered. Since both performances seek to override MPR 1, a strong preference rule, exaggeration is necessary if the listener is to hear the intended meter. Otherwise MPR 1 will "win" by default.

Example 13. Fourth Ballade, m. 134

Musical score for Example 13, Fourth Ballade, m. 134. The score is in 6/8 time and features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The right hand plays a melodic line with a *dolciss.* marking, and the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment. A large bracket spans across the middle of the score, indicating a re-barring section. The re-barring section is marked *rallent.* and shows a change in the rhythmic pattern of the left hand. The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Example 14. Fourth Ballade, re-barring of mm. 6.5-9.5

Musical score for Example 14, Fourth Ballade, re-barring of mm. 6.5-9.5. The score is in 6/8 time and features a piano accompaniment with a treble clef. The right hand plays a melodic line with a *dolciss.* marking. The score shows a re-barring section where the rhythmic pattern of the right hand changes. The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

of m. 8, marked *in tempo*). Furthermore, an entire $\frac{6}{8}$ measure is carefully notated at the end of m. 134, leading naturally (in combination with the *a tempo*) to an implied downbeat at the beginning of m. 135.⁵¹ Example 14 presents a corresponding re-barring of mm. 6.5-9.5; the first beat shown is to be understood as a weak beat (since mm. 4-5 sound in the notated meter) that has been reinterpreted as strong. The ascending sixth is bracketed. This analysis is intended to lead into, and to provide the context for, Example 9.

If Chopin's metrical notation is not to be respected in performance, then why, it may be asked, did the composer notate the entire work in $\frac{6}{8}$? Why, in particular, did he go to the trouble of making sure that the meter came out "right"? After all, he needn't have added half-measures both in m. 8 and in m. 37: he could have used a single measure of $\frac{3}{8}$, or a measure of $\frac{9}{8}$, to account for the odd half-measure. Surely, too, it is no accident that each of the three variations begins on a notated downbeat; the chances of this happening randomly, in a two-beat meter, are only one in eight ($1:2^3$).

I am convinced that these correspondences are *not* random, and that the pairing of metrical adjustments *is* significant. The large-scale regularities that I have indicated point to the existence of a regular metrical "background," of which the irregularities shown in Example 9 are "foreground" disturbances. The "background" should surely be allowed to emerge by itself; the performer need do nothing consciously to promote it. Comparisons might be made to many works by Brahms—for example, the first movement of the Violin Concerto, in $\frac{3}{4}$, which comes out "right" despite numerous irregularities (including passages in an apparent $\frac{5}{4}$). Brahms did not always make his irregularities

⁵¹The theme's opening motive is imitated canonically in mm. 135-36; the repetition within the *dux* establishes the $\frac{6}{8}$ meter. As is normally the case in imitative counterpoint, the meter of the entire texture is taken from that of the *dux*. See *Phrase Rhythm*, pp. 204-213 and note 31.

“add up” in this way—witness the Intermezzo in A minor, Op. 76, no. 7, which includes a single measure of $\frac{3}{2}$ —but usually he did. Chopin did, too, and so did Haydn and Mozart.⁵² Not every Classical and post-Classical composer was so scrupulous about these matters: Hummel, for example, was not.⁵³

Toward the end of Variation 1, the regular “background” and the irregular “foreground” come into open conflict (Example 15). After the stability of mm. 38-45—where the notated meter reigns unchallenged, and where a clear hypermeter emerges at both the two- and the four-measure levels—the bass continues to conform to the notated meter (notice the recurrence of B \flat every two measures). The melody takes up the theme’s cadential motive, thus suggesting a $\frac{6}{8}$ meter that is shifted by half a measure (recall that the four sixteenth-notes in this motive always defined an upbeat to the repeated eighths). Here, however, it is clear that the bass governs the meter, and the right hand soon falls into line (mm. 51-52).⁵⁴ In mm. 53-54 the bass drops out, and the cadential motive very nearly succeeds in re-imposing its original meter. (A clever pianist will abet the motive here by aiming for the long notes, resolving their dissonance with an appropriate *diminuendo*.)

⁵²For Chopin, see also the Nocturne in B Major, Op. 62, no. 1. Examples by Haydn and Mozart are given by Grave (see note 39). Maury Yeston has pointed out an implied $\frac{5}{4}$ meter in a famous passage from Mozart’s Piano Quartet in G minor, K. 478 (see Yeston, *The Stratification of Musical Rhythm* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976], 130-39).

⁵³See, for example, the first movements of the Piano Sonatas in F \sharp Minor (Op. 81) and D Major (Op. 106). Both movements are in common time, and both contain isolated measures of $\frac{2}{4}$. The effect is particularly weak in Op. 106.

⁵⁴A sign of the bass’s dominance here is the subtle change in the nuances that Chopin writes for the melody (above the treble staff). Each *diminuendo* now begins from the *last* of the repeated eighth-notes—i.e., on the notated downbeats of mm. 47 and 49. Compare mm. 15-18 and m. 21.

Example 15. Fourth Ballade, mm. 46-57

MEZZA VOCE

46

50

tr.

Example 15, continued

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a piano part (left hand and right hand) and a vocal line. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The vocal line is written in a single staff with a treble clef. The second system continues the piano and vocal parts. The piano part includes a section marked *ten.* (ritardando) in the right hand. The vocal line has several notes marked with a sharp sign (#) and the word *rit.* (ritardando). The score is written in a key signature with one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The page number 54 is circled in the top left corner of the first system.

Only in m. 57, where the interpolation ends and the variation rejoins the theme, is the metrical imbroglio resolved.

Returning one last time to Example 9, the brackets above the first strophe reveal a sentence-like organization of 1+1+2 “measures.” Earlier I labeled the parts of the strophe AB, but a more accurate representation might be AAB; for the theme as a whole, AAB | AAB | AAB. Each “A” motive contains a strong beat (marked by a low bass note) followed by a weak beat (with a high bass note), even though the melody itself is silent on the strong beat and dissonant on the weak beat. The “B” or cadential motive includes two strong beats with a weak beat between them (although here the register of the bass notes does not reflect the relative strength of the beats). The versification of the first strophe may be represented as follows (S=strong, W=weak): SW | SW(W) | SWS. With the exception of the extra weak beat at the end of the second “line,” this is a reasonable approximation of ballad meter. Each of the first four beats represents a dactylic foot. The end of the second “line” is where dactyls give way to anapests; the third “line” is entirely anapestic (the articulation of the repeated note supports this scansion). A closer prosodic analysis would thus be: dactyl-dactyl, dactyl-dactyl; anapest-anapest-anapest. Four feet (subdivided 2+2) are succeeded by three. While the poetic meter is not iambic, a suggestion of ballad meter is present nevertheless.

In this Ballade, however, it is the second theme and not the first that evokes the simplicity of a popular ballad. The simplicity is partly deceptive: metrical conflicts complicate this theme as well. Example 16 presents a durational reduction of the second theme both as it appears initially (mm. 84-99) and as it is recapitulated (mm. 169-84); the “recapitulation” is transposed to B^b major for ease of comparison. The $\frac{12}{8}$ meter of the example represents the two-measure level of hypermeter. The theme’s “exposition” consists of two eight-measure strophes in antecedent-consequent relation; the second strophe is incomplete in the “recapitulation.” (Strophes are separated by double bar lines in the example.) The meter—as portrayed in Example 16—is

essentially regular despite some significant conflicts. The conflict between melody and bass in mm. 169-70, which was noted earlier, exists in the “exposition” as well; the recurring $B\flat_1$ plays the role of timekeeper in the first strophe (mm. 84-91). The conflicting meter of the melody is shown as a shadow meter, using Schoenberg’s well-known symbols for “like a strong beat” and “like a weak beat.”⁵⁵ Measures 88-90 hint at $\frac{9}{8}$ meter, as shown; the same implication exists in attenuated form in mm. 173-74.

Leichtentritt, not surprisingly, re-bars this theme as well, treating the melody’s longer notes (those lasting a dotted quarter or longer) as downbeats. As usual, he gives the melody only; he seems to ignore the bass. He writes, “Only understood thus do the accents fall in the right place, giving the melody its proper effect.”⁵⁶ One might expect that, in the “recapitulation,” Leichtentritt would follow the steady meter of the bass, but not so. Here he adopts an openly condescending tone toward Chopin, referring to a metrical “error” (*Fehler*) and asserting that the composer could not possibly have been aware of the metrical contradiction, since he could so easily have “corrected” it.⁵⁷ (Perhaps the reader will understand why I feel embarrassed when I find myself in agreement with Leichtentritt.)

My decision to endorse the notated meter for the second theme is based partly on the symmetrical periodicity of

⁵⁵The term “shadow meter” was coined by Frank Samarotto in a paper, “Strange Dimensions: Regularity and Irregularity in Deep Levels of Rhythmic Reduction,” delivered to the Second International Schenker Symposium (New York City, 1992). The two articles listed in note 48 also employ this very useful concept.

⁵⁶“Erst folgendermaßen aufgefaßt [example follows] fallen die Akzente an die richtige Stelle, wirkt sich der Gesang gehörig aus.” Leichtentritt, vol. 1, 36-37. Starting from the second beat of m. 84, Leichtentritt’s meter runs as follows: five measures of $\frac{6}{8}$, then two of $\frac{9}{8}$; the second strophe is the same, except that the last measure is $\frac{6}{8}$.

⁵⁷Ibid., 39.

Example 16. Fourth Ballade, durational reduction of the subordinate theme (mm. 84-99 and 169-184)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a durational reduction of a subordinate theme. Both systems are in 9/8 time, indicated by the time signature above the first staff of each system. The first system begins at measure 84, marked with a circled '84' at the start of the staff. The second system begins at measure 169, marked with a circled '169' at the start of the staff. The notation consists of a single melodic line on a five-line staff. The music features a variety of rhythmic values, including quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, often grouped with beams. There are several instances of slurs and ties, indicating phrasing and continuation across measures. Dynamic markings, specifically 'p.' (piano), are placed below the staff at various points. A circled '9' over an '8' is positioned above the staff in the middle of the first system, likely indicating the time signature. The overall structure shows a melodic line that is reduced to its essential rhythmic and pitch contours.

Example 16, continued

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 90 through 175. Measure 90 is marked with a circled '90' and includes a time signature change from 6/8 to 8/8. The notation features a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and various rhythmic values including eighth and sixteenth notes. A fermata is placed over measure 175. The second system contains measures 175 through 181, marked with circled measure numbers. Measure 175 is marked with a circled '175' and includes the instruction '8va-' above the staff, indicating an octave transposition. Measure 181 is marked with a circled '181' and includes the instruction 'loco' above the staff. The score concludes with the text 'etc.' at the end of the final staff.

antecedent and consequent, which helps to set the ballad tone much as similar symmetries did in the themes of the First and Second Ballades (for the Second Ballade see Example 4, the theme's unstated "original version"). It is curious to reflect that if Chopin had not expanded his variations as he did, this second theme would not have existed, and the work would not have received the title of Ballade. It would more closely have resembled Chopin's *Berceuse*, which is also composed as a series of continuous variations.

Example 17 represents a further reduction of the theme. A simple voice-leading analysis is appended, indicating a traditional antecedent-consequent structure complete with an interruption of the theme's fundamental line ($\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ in B \flat major). I have taken a liberty in the example by substituting the melody of mm. 175-76, in the "recapitulation," for that of mm. 90-91, which is less clear in its voice leading. (In the earlier passage, $\hat{2}$ appears in an inner voice; Chopin emphasizes this voice by directing that it be played entirely with the two thumbs.) The presence of an interruption implies that this half cadence is genuine—almost uniquely among those we have seen in the Ballades—although even here Chopin creates ambiguity by including the dominant seventh.⁵⁸

V

Even if we limit ourselves to the technical aspects of Chopin's music—as we have mostly done in this study—we find ambiguities at almost every turn. The simplest formal categories, such as "cadence" and "phrase," need to be questioned and re-thought, because Chopin was continually re-thinking them. Although he often based his music on

⁵⁸The seventh makes the half cadence ambiguous by suggesting immediate resolution to the tonic. It also makes possible a reading in which the upper voice ends the antecedent on $\hat{4}$ (the upper neighbor to the primary tone) rather than on $\hat{2}$, thus eliminating the interruption.

Example 17. Fourth Ballade, a further reduction of mm. 84-99

The image displays two musical staves, each representing a further reduction of measures 84-99 from the Fourth Ballade. Both staves are in treble clef and feature a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

The top staff shows a sequence of chords: I (fingered 3), IV (fingered 4), (II) (fingered 2), and V. The sequence ends with a double bar line (//).

The bottom staff shows a sequence of chords: I (fingered 3), IV (fingered 4), (II) (fingered 6), and V (fingered 1). A slur is placed over the IV and (II) chords. The sequence ends with a double bar line.

simple and even popular genres (including the ballad, the mazurka, and the waltz), Chopin enriched and—in the best sense—complicated virtually everything he touched. The use of the popular element allies him with Haydn and Beethoven; like them, however, he used his materials in such a way that *Kenner* and *Liebhaber* (connoisseur and amateur) would be equally satisfied. Like them, too, he deployed ambiguity in a way that forces us to re-think that all-too-glibly used term. As I have written elsewhere of Beethoven:

Far from denoting mere absence of clarity—as might be the case with a composer not fully in control of his (or her) materials—ambiguity in Beethoven denotes simultaneous and conflicting interpretations of the same musical material, the conflict being fostered deliberately and used as a compositional resource. Typically, both—or all—interpretations will be explored in the course of the work; the conflict between them may or may not be resolved. Ambiguity is thus a type of musical conflict, and the creative exploration of conflict is, after all, virtually a definition of drama. To explain the dramatic content of a piece of music, one must first identify and trace its conflicting elements. ... Thus, whether one's aim is to elucidate compositional technique or to understand how a drama is depicted in tones—and these are complementary, not contradictory aims—one thing is certain: there is nothing in music about which it is more important to be precise than ambiguity.⁵⁹

Chopin's ambiguities are signs of a supremely self-aware and self-critical composer ensuring that his music would remain forever inexhaustible.

⁵⁹“Beethoven With and Without *Kunstgepräg*” (see note 48).