The scroll of Ruth re-told through librettos and music: biblical interpretation in a new key

Leneman, H.F.

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THE SCROLL OF RUTH RE-TOLED
THROUGH LIBRETTOS AND MUSIC:
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
IN A NEW KEY

HELEN LENEMAN
UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
NOVEMBER 2004
THE SCROLL OF RUTH RE-TOLD THROUGH LIBRETTOS AND MUSIC:

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN A NEW KEY

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

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Geboren te Los Angeles,
Verenigde Staten
Promotoren: Prof. dr. A. Brenner  
Prof. dr. R. de Groot

Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen

Universiteit van Amsterdam
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scroll of Ruth</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword: The Book of Naomi and Ruth according to Castelnuovo-Tedesco</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part I: The Scroll

### Chapter One: Literary Analysis: Concepts and Terminology
- Division into Narrative Units          | 7    |
- Character Depiction and Development   | 8    |
- Plot Development                      | 10   |
- Genre                                | 11   |
- Intertextuality and Allusion          | 12   |
- Gap Filling                          | 13   |
- Reader Response                      | 14   |
- Female Authorship                    | 15   |
- The Narrator and Focalization         | 16   |
- Conclusion                          | 19   | 

### Chapter Two: A Literary Analysis of the Scroll
- Division into Narrative Units          | 20   |
- Character Depiction and Development:  | 22   |
  Characters: Naomi, Ruth, Orpah, Boaz, “Chorus,” God | 23   |
- Plot Development                      | 34   |
- Genre                                | 36   |
- Intertextuality and Allusion          | 38   |
  A) Themes                            | 38   |
    1) Land, people, ancestry           | 38   |
    2) Type-scene, counter-type-scenes  | 41   |
  B) Character allusions                | 42   |
  C) Semantic allusions                 | 43   |
  D) Ancient Near East References      | 46   |
- Gap Filling                          | 46   |
- Action Time                          | 46   |
- Cause Motive                         | 48   |
- Character Appearance Personal Relationships | 48   |
- Reader Response                      | 49   |
- Female Authorship                    | 51   |
- Narrator and Focalization            | 51   |
- Conclusion                          | 52   |
Chapter Three  Ruth in Rabbinic and Related Literature
- Introduction  53
- Midrash on Ruth  53
- Gap Filling in Midrash on Ruth  54
  Action Time  55
  Cause Motive  55
  Characters  56
- Special Concerns: Conversion, Genealogy, Messiah  60
- Josephus  72
- Excursus: Reading the Trope Signs (יִשָּׁמֶשׁ) in Ruth as Interpretive Keys  76

PART II: THE MUSIC
Chapter Four  Historical Background of the Oratorio and Opera Forms
- 19th and 20th century Oratorio  85
  Germany  85
  Britain  87
  U.S.A.  88
  France  90
- 19th and 20th century Opera  91
Chapter Five  Musical Analysis: Concepts and Terminology
- Music and Culture  94
- Theories of Music and Emotion  95
- Terminology  96
Preface to Chapter Six  The Oratorios and Operas
- Gap Filling in the Librettos  101
- Gap Filling in the Music  102
- Explanation of Chapter Parts  103
- Musical Selections Discussed  105
Chapter Six  The Oratorios and Operas
Part I: 19th century
  Otto Goldschmidt (1829-1907)  107
  Leopold Damrosch (1832-1885)  107
  Alfred Gaul (1837-1913)  113
  Frederic Cowen (1852-1935)  118
  César Franck (1822-1890)  124
  Gioconda Fino (1867-1950)  130
Part II: 20th century
  Georg Schumann (1866-1952)  139
  Joseph Rumshinsky (1881-1956)  152
  Wilfrid Mellers (1914- )  178
  Adrian Beecham (1904-1982)  184
  Lennox Berkeley (1903-1989)  188
  Aminadav Aloni (1928-1999)  198
Acknowledgements

My first trip to meet with my PhD supervisor, Athalya Brenner, happened to also be my first visit to Amsterdam. During that visit in summer 2000, I went to the Flower Market and bought a succulent in a tiny Delft clog as a souvenir. I nurtured that little plant until it outgrew its clog and was transferred to a larger and then still larger pot. On each subsequent visit, after my intense meetings with both Athalya Brenner and Rokus deGroot, I would buy more miniature Delft clogs with their succulents.

Now I have a row of the third and fourth generation plants on my windowsill. One day as I looked at them, I realized it had all started with one little plant on that first visit over four years ago. This thesis, too, started as a little sapling, but continued to outgrow its “pots,” to expand and evolve under the nurturing guidance of my two extraordinary supervisors, Athalya Brenner and Rokus deGroot. They helped me water, trim, and feed the seedlings of my imagination. Without them, these seeds would have never sprouted and grown into this thesis.

Athalya Brenner challenged, stimulated, cajoled, argued, and insisted on getting every page of this thesis right. She said once she would not let go of me until this work was done, and she was good to her word. There cannot be a more supportive mentor in this community than Athalya Brenner.

Rokus deGroot encouraged my tentative early steps in musical analysis, then guided and encouraged me through my exploration of this new territory. Exacting and thorough, he too did not let go until every word was right. Through our discussions and the literature he led me to, I have been enriched by a deeper understanding of music, my lifelong passion.

Last but by no means least, I acknowledge Sima, my life partner, who read and commented on every draft of every page, for her constant insights and unflagging encouragement. Special thanks are due to both her and our daughter Maya for their constant love and support, as well as their patient and essential help with all the technical aspects of this thesis.

With the help of these nurturing hands, my little seed of an idea has finally grown to its full potential.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABBREVIATIONS</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANE</td>
<td>Ancient Near East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDB</td>
<td>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</td>
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<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>Babylonian Talmud</td>
</tr>
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<td>HAL</td>
<td>Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the OT</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal for Biblical Literature</td>
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<td>JPS</td>
<td>Jewish Publication Society</td>
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<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal of Studies in the Old Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>KBI</td>
<td>Bilingual Dictionary of Hebrew and Aramaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version</td>
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<td>MT</td>
<td>Masoretic Text</td>
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<td>OLD</td>
<td>Oxford English Dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBL</td>
<td>Society for Biblical Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>TY</td>
<td>Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the days when the chieftains ruled, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab. 

Then those two—Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there.

Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth, and they lived there about ten years.

Then those two—Mahlon and Chilion—also died; so the woman was left without her two sons and without her husband.

She started out with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab; for in the country of Moab she had heard that the Lord had taken note of His people and given them food. Accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living; and they set out on the road back to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Turn back, each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! "May the Lord grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband." And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping and said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

But Naomi replied, "Turn back, my daughters.
Iers should view with nur. Have I am -
mo;; e mmv mnv bod bv mg might b c husband >
to rr you r -" I turn back, my daughters, lor I am lon -
old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the Lord has struck out against me.

"They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. "So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law." But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go wherever you lodge. I will lodge your people shall be my people, and your God my God. "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me - if anything but death parts me from you."

When Naomi saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her; and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, "Can this be Naomi?" "Do not call me Naomi," she replied, "Call me Mara, for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. How can you call me Naomi, when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, when Shaddai has brought misfortune upon me?"

Thus Naomi returned from the country of Moab; she returned with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabitite. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.
Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a man of substance, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

"Ruth the Moabitite said to Naomi, 'I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness.' "Yes, daughter, go," she replied; and off she went. She came and gleaned in a field, behind the reapers: and, as luck would have it, it was the piece of land belonging to Boaz, who was of Elimelech's family.

"Presently Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. He greeted the reapers, 'The Lord be with you.' And they responded, 'The Lord bless you!'

Boaz said to the servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'Whose girl is that?' 'The servant in charge of the reapers replied, 'She is a Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.' She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' She has been on her feet ever since she came this morning. She has rested but little in the hut.'

'Boaz said to Ruth, 'Listen to me, daughter. Don't go to glean in another field. Don't go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them. I have ordered the men not to molest you. And when you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink some of 'the water,' that the men have drawn.'

'She prostrated herself with her face to the ground, and said to him, 'Why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?'

'Boaz said in reply, 'I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband. how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. 'May
the Lord reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge."

She answered, "You are most kind, my lord, to comfort me and to speak gently to your maidservant—though I am not so much as one of your maidservants."

"At mealtime, Boaz said to her, "Come over here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel in the vinegar." So she sat down beside the reapers. He handed her roasted grain, and she ate her fill and had some left over.

"When she got up again to glean, Boaz gave orders to his workers, "You are not only to let her glean among the sheaves, without interference; "but you must also pull some 'stalks' out of the heaps and leave them for her to glean, and not scold her."

"She gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned—it was about an ephah of barley—and carried it back with her to the town. When her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned, and when she also took out and gave her what she had left over after eating her fill, "her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be he who took such generous notice of you!" So she told her mother-in-law whom she had worked with, saying, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz."

"Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not failed in His kindness to the living or to the dead! For," Naomi explained to her daughter-in-law, "the man is related to us; he is one of our redeeming kinsmen."" 13 Ruth the Moabite said, "He even told me, 'Stay close by my workers until all my harvest is finished.'" And Naomi answered her daughter-in-law Ruth, "It is best, daughter, that
you go out with his girls, and not be annoyed in some other field." So she stayed close to the maidservants of Boaz, and gleaned until the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were finished. Then she stayed at home with her mother-in-law.

3 Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, "Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight. So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do." She replied, "I will do everything you tell me."

"She went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grainpile. Then she went over stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back—there was a woman lying at his feet!

"Who are you?" he asked. And she replied, "I am your handmaid Ruth. Spread your robe over your handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman."

"He exclaimed, "Be blessed of the Lord, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich. And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do in your behalf whatever you ask, for all the elders of Bethlehem and their kinsmen say, 'The young women are not better than these.'"

"And Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, "Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight. So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do." She replied, "I will do everything you tell me."

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my town—know what a fine woman you are. 

But while it is true I am a redeeming kinsman, there is another redeemer closer than I. Stay for the night. Then in the morning, if he will act as a redeemer, good; let him redeem. But if he does not want to act as redeemer for you, I will do so myself, as the Lord lives. Lie down until morning.”

So she lay at his feet until dawn. She rose before one person could distinguish another, for he thought, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.” And he said, “Hold out the shawl you are wearing.” She held it while he measured out six measures of barley, and he put it on her back.

When she got back to the town, she came to her mother-in-law, who asked, “How is it with you, daughter?” She told her all that the man had done for her; and she added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying to me, ‘Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’” And Naomi said, “Stay here, daughter, till you learn how the matter turns out. For the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.”

Meanwhile, Boaz had gone to the gate and sat down there. And now the redeemer whom Boaz had mentioned passed by. He called, “Come over and sit down here. So-and-so!” And he came over and sat down. Then [Boaz] took ten elders of the town and said, “Be seated here”; and they sat down.

“He said to the redeemer, ‘Naomi, now returned from the country of Moab, must sell the piece of land which belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. I thought I should disclose the matter to you and say: Acquire it in the presence of those seated here and in the presence of the
elders of my people. If you are willing to redeem it, redeem! But if you will not redeem, tell me, that I may know. For there is no one to redeem but you, and I come after you." "I am willing to redeem it," he replied. "Boaz continued, "When you acquire the property from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitte, you must also acquire the wife of the deceased, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate." "The redeemer replied, "Then I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own estate. You take over my right of redemption, for I am unable to exercise it."

"Now this was formerly done in Israel in cases of redemption or exchange: to validate any transaction, one man would take off his sandal and hand it to the other. Such was the practice in Israel. So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Acquire for yourself," he drew off his sandal.

And Boaz said to the elders and to the rest of the people, "You are witnesses today that I am acquiring from Naomi all that belonged to Eimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate, that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsmen and from the gate of his home town. You are witnesses today."

"All the people at the gate and the elders answered, "We are. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem!" And may..."
your house be like the house of Perez whom
Lamar bore to Judah through the offspring
which the Lord will give you by this young
woman.

So Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife,
and he cohabited with her. The Lord let her
conceive, and she bore a son. And the women
said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has
not withheld a redeemer from you today! May
his name be perpetuated in Israel! He will re
new your life and sustain your old age; for he
is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you
and is better to you than seven sons.”

Naomi took the child and held it to her
bosom. She became its foster mother. And the
women neighbors gave him a name, saying, “A
son is born to Naomi.” They named him Obed;
he was the father of Jesse, father of David.

This is the line of Perez: Perez begot Hez
ron. Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Ammi
nadb. Amminadab begot Nahshon. Nahshon
begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz. Boaz be
got Obed. Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot
David.
The text on the preceding pages, the Scroll of Ruth, has inspired many composers to set it to music. In this thesis, I treat musical settings of the entire Scroll, but these works for the most part are not well known. There are settings of only parts of the Scroll by more well-known composers, and I am starting with a composer who set some of the most familiar passages in the Scroll of Ruth. As an introduction to the idea of “the Scroll re-told through librettos and music,” I will briefly discuss a very short and beautiful work that was not included in this thesis because of its brevity. I am including it here because of the importance of this prominent 20th-century composer, and its availability on CD.¹ This cantata, however, cannot be considered a full musical interpretation of Ruth of the kind treated in this thesis.

The short cantata Naomi and Ruth (op. 137, 1949), a musical setting of Ruth 1:1-17 (in Italian and English, KJV) by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968), is a significant work by an important 20th century composer. The Bible was an inspiration to Castelnuovo-Tedesco, an Italian Jew, throughout his life. He was inspired not only by the narratives, but by “the Jewish spiritual and liturgical heritage that had accumulated from and been inspired by it over the centuries” (Levin, 5). In addition to biblical oratorios and cantatas, Castelnuovo-Tedesco also wrote other short choral works based on the Bible, such as the Lament of David and Proverbs of Solomon (Rossi, ii). Naomi and Ruth was his first nonliturgical biblical choral work.²

In Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s 11-minute setting, the only soloist is Naomi, a soprano. This is consistent with the title, which places Naomi’s name before Ruth’s. This casting is interesting since the norm is to cast Naomi as a lower voice, depicting age and or authority (ch. 6, p. 104). Ruth’s part is taken by the chorus, because the composer thought Ruth’s responses were “characteristically universal.” Castelnuovo-Tedesco described Ruth as “mild and faithful,” adjectives he also used to describe his wife (Autobiography, 95).

Naomi and Ruth was premiered in Los Angeles in 1949 with the composer at the piano. The work was later orchestrated (Levin, 7). We can only speculate on what moved Castelnuovo-Tedesco that same year to complete a full oratorio based on Ruth, since that work remains unpublished. The choral setting of Ruth’s words “Entreat me not” that close the cantata was later published separately for solo voice.

Though written in 1949, the music is very accessible, i.e., melodic and based on harmonic tonality, not what we would normally associate with “modern” or “20th-century” music. Castelnuovo-Tedesco himself stated:

I have never believed in modernism, or in neoclassicism, or any other isms.

I believe that music is a form of language capable of progress and renewal...

Yet music should not discard what was contributed by preceding generations.

² Later works include the following:

The Queen of Sheba, a small cantata for women’s voices, op. 161, 1953, Belwin Mills Publishers;

Book of Jonah, biblical oratorio, op. 151, 1954, Belwin Mills Publishers;

The Song of Songs, A Rustic Wedding Idyll, op. 172, 1954-55 (unpublished);

The Fiery Furnace, a small cantata (based on the Book of Daniel), op. 183, 1958, Belwin Mills Publishers;

Esdras, biblical oratorio, op. 201, 1962 (unpublished);

Tohu and the Inex, A Scene Oratorio (based on the Apocryphal Book of Tobit), op. 204, 1964-65 (unpublished) (Rossi, 4-5).
Every means of expression can be useful and just, if it is used at the opportune moment... The simplest means are generally the best (Castelnuovo-Tedesco, "The Composer Speaks," quoted in Ricci, viii).

I will offer a few comments about the musical aspects of this work. This is a sample of the kind of technical analysis found in chapter 6 of this thesis and explanations of the terminology can be found in chapter 5. The narrator's voice is taken by a women's chorus for 1.1-7 (chap. 1 vv. 1-7). As the story is told, the music reflects changes in mood through key changes and variations in the rhythm and style of accompaniment under the voices (p. 8, m. [measure] 1, pp. 10 and 11, m. 1, for just three examples). Naomi's first solo, "Go, return" (1.8; p. 12, 3rd staff), is melodic and flowing. Her second solo, "Turn again" (1.11; letter E, p. 15, top) is more agitated and dissonant, both in the vocal line and accompaniment. The second time she sings these words (letter G, p. 16, 2nd staff), her melody is almost the same but sung in a higher key, with the chorus humming descending chromatic passages underneath her voice, all of which create a mood of increasingly intense emotion. Naomi reaches her highest pitch, a', on "Nay, my daughters" (1.13; m. before letter H; p. 18, 3rd staff, m. 2) in a forte (loud) phrase marked allargando (broadening).

There is a dramatic shift in mood on the chorus's words "And Ruth said" (1.16; p. 21, top), where a progression of high chords ends in the bright key of C major (the only place in this work that this chord is heard), which then shifts immediately into A major (p. 21, letter K). This is the key for "Entreat me not" (1.16-17), sung in 3-part harmony by the women's chorus, with an arpeggiated accompaniment throughout. The effect of calm reflects the composer's view of Ruth as "mild and faithful." The key remains A major, but the ending is in the tonality of E major.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco gave Naomi more prominence through her solos, but the last word in this cantata belongs to Ruth. Even in such a short work, the characters of Naomi and Ruth (albeit sung by chorus) are differentiated musically. Naomi's music is filled with flats, while most of Ruth's contains sharps. Music that is flattened has the sense of being "lowered," while sharps have the effect of "raising" the pitches (ch. 5, p. 97). Naomi's few short solos take the listener through a gamut of emotion, from despair to encouragement to determination. Ruth's one "solo" projects mostly one mood, that of calm hope. Hearing these words through the music allows us to feel and hear these biblical passages in a new way, in the sense that the music generates greater empathy with the characters.

Though the cantata ends on the words "Entreat me not," (the only verses, incidentally, never omitted from any musical setting of the Scroll), in the biblical narrative these verses set the plot in motion, and are thus a beginning rather than an ending. Perhaps the composer wished to leave the door open for the listener to either imagine the rest, or to seek out the original biblical story.

We now go through that open door to begin our journey deeper into the Scroll of Ruth, through a textual and musical analysis of twelve diverse 19th and 20th century works.

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1 This is based on the piano vocal score, published by Mills Music, 1950 (now out of print but available at both the Library of Congress and the British Library).
THE SCROLL OF RUTH RE-TOLD THROUGH LIBRETTOS AND MUSIC:
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN A NEW KEY

Helen Leneman
University of Amsterdam

INTRODUCTION

The biblical book of Ruth (henceforth to be referred to as either Ruth or the Scroll) has three major characters—Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. Boaz is not as developed or interesting a character as the two female figures, either in the original or in the later, musical versions. The uniqueness of Ruth is its development of two central female characters and its portrayal of a bond between two women. Biblical stories generally show very limited interest in women, which may reflect the inferior status of women in biblical societies or a lack of interest on the writers’ part, or both.

In this thesis I treat both the music and librettos as midrash (creative re-telling) of the biblical narrative. The analysis of music and librettos in twelve works—oratorios, cantatas, and operas—will illustrate how musical settings can alter our attitudes towards a biblical book and its characters, as well as how a biblical book such as Ruth can be made relevant for changing eras. Each work offers an alternative reading, featuring voices known and unknown, from the text and the margins of the Scroll.

The musician will find it interesting to discover how commonly utilized musical techniques were used to re-imagine a biblical story. Entering the world of biblical interpretation through the familiar doorway of music will open the musician unfamiliar with this field to new discoveries. How the music is used to breathe life into the text will be understood on a more technical level by the musician than the biblical scholar, but both groups will learn to read between the lines and find new and interesting possibilities there. Biblical texts will be of greater interest to musicians when approached through their musical settings than as written narratives. This interest may in turn inspire musicians to find and explore other biblical texts that were set to music.

The Scroll is our most comprehensive biblical source for information about women’s in-gender and trans-gender social relationships and behavior patterns (the other is Song of Songs). It is often problematic to understand social relationships in the period when the biblical narratives were written, because the only viewpoint presented is that of the high status males who generally wrote them. It is wrong to assume women belonged to a separate domestic sphere in ancient societies. This assumption has colored modern views of Israelite gender roles. In fact, the public and private were not two distinct social spheres; women’s roles in the domestic, so-called “private” life could have consequences in the “public” sphere, the wider community, as well (Meyers 2000, 111-115).

The plot of Ruth takes place in an agrarian community. Women’s alliances in such communities were not casual or irrelevant to their society, any more than they are irrelevant in such societies today. Women performed functions that were essential to the economic and social stability of their small communities (Meyers 2000, 126). But the reader would not guess these facts based only on a reading of Ruth: for example, women are totally absent from the legal proceedings at the city gate in chapter 4. On the other hand, narratives can both reinforce and implicitly question the dominant culture. The centrality of women in the
Scroll’s plot can and should be read as an example of a writer challenging the cultural norms of his or her day. We can never know the identity or intent of any biblical writer, but considering different possibilities opens us to alternative ways of reading and interpreting the text.

The thesis will consist of four parts, as described below.

**Part I  The Scroll**

Chapter 1 will introduce the concepts, methodology, and terms I use in my subsequent literary analysis of the Scroll. The literary analysis itself, chapter 2, will include discussion of the most important commentaries and articles on *Ruth*. The English translation of the Scroll that I use is from the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Jewish Publication Society, 1999) except where otherwise indicated. An analysis of gaps and ambiguities in the biblical text will highlight the places that allow for variable responses and multiple interpretations.

As Meir Sternberg notes, literary works all establish a system of gaps that must be filled in. He defines a gap as:

...a lack of information about the world—an event, motive, causal link, character trait, plot structure, law of probability—contrived by a temporal displacement (Sternberg 1987, 186).

Aihalya Brenner points out that narrative gaps are a distinctive feature of biblical writing, resulting from narratival economy (Brenner 1993, 11). The end result of the discontinuity caused by gaps is ambiguity, which later librettists take advantage of in their re-telling of the story. How gaps are filled in rabbinic midrash and Josephus is the subject of chapter 3.

**Part II  The Music and Libretto s**

Chapter 4 is a brief historical survey of oratorio and opera, with particular emphasis on the place and time of the works discussed. Chapter 5 sets out general concepts and terms used for musical analysis. For example, musical characterization depends on certain technical devices, including harmony, rhythm, and orchestral texture. I will explain the importance of these elements in the context of treating music as a kind of midrash. Chapter 6 contains detailed analyses of libretto s and music from the 12 works. More detailed information on the composers and works can be found in Appendix I.

The 12 works to be considered in this thesis are oratorios, cantatas, and operas. The musical forms of the three are very similar, but oratorios and cantatas (a shorter form of the oratorio) are not staged; that is, acted out with sets and costumes, while operas are. An oratorio is defined as

An extended musical setting of a sacred text made up of dramatic, narrative and contemplative elements (Smither in *New Grove* v. 18, 503).

I have chosen a widely diverse group of oratorios and operas. These scores (piano-vocal) were available at the U.S. Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., enabling me to delve into the music as well as the texts. I studied many other scores (see Appendix II), but in some cases I found the music unappealing or unimaginative, while in other cases, there was no biographical or other information on the composers.

For example, I studied two 19th-century American works, by Eben Andrews (1882) and James Butterfield (1877). The music was uninteresting, and the composers’ names did not appear in any edition of the *Grove’s Dictionaries of Music*. With no bibliographical...
information, it would have been hard to find out more about these composers. I confronted the same problem with American composers Gill (1948), Hughes (1935), Noss (1904), Bliss (1925), and Boatner (1968). Some of these works are hand-written manuscripts donated to the Library of Congress. There is no way of knowing if they were ever performed.

Two categories of *Ruth* works not included in this thesis are: solo settings of specific verses; and very short choral settings (mostly cantatas) of only one chapter of the Scroll. Most solo settings are of Ruth’s words “Entreat me not...Whither thou goest” (1.16-17)', which are often used for weddings. The most well-known solo setting of this text is that of Charles Gounod (1872). The most well-known short choral work is *Naomi and Ruth* by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1947), a setting of 1.1-17 of the Scroll for soprano and women’s voices. These works are listed in Appendix III. p. 276.

I was able to obtain an orchestral score of only one work, Georg Schumann’s. I also obtained performance tapes of two works, Berkeley and Aloni, which enabled me to write longer and more thorough analyses of those three works. In addition, I attended a performance of Schumann’s *Ruth* in November, 2003.

There are several stages in this kind of analysis:

- **Stage one: the libretto.** This is a midrashic retelling of the Scroll, and when it is available in printed form separate from the musical score, can be read by anyone. Otherwise it can be read only between the lines of music.
- **Stage two: the score.** This can be either the original full orchestral score or a “piano reduction,” adapted from the original. It can be read only by persons with musical training. Musicians can play and or sing through the score, or “hear” it as they read.
- **Stage three: the performance.** This is the ultimate goal for each score, that it be performed and heard. In the case of operas, the visual element is also essential. Hearing and enjoying the music is not limited to musicians, but most of the works treated in this thesis have not been performed for many years.
- **Stage four: the recording.** Since the early part of the last century, much music has been made more widely available to the general public through recordings. In this way, even non-musicians could hear works when performances were not easily accessible. Most music discussed here has never been recorded.

My interpretation of any work is partly influenced by which of the above stages I was able to reach. In most cases I was working only with a piano score. Reading the libretto literally “between the lines” of music, I was able to extract important information about musical styles and techniques and how they were used to set specific parts of the text. Playing and singing through the music gave me a general impression of the sound. Reading the libretto literally between the lines of music is a perfect metaphor for reading “between the lines.”

When I obtained tapes of two works (Aloni and Berkeley), I instantly realized what a large gap existed between what I was reading off the page and what was reaching me through sound. The level of performance includes interpretation in sound, missing from a silent reading. The sound of a particular voice portraying Ruth, Naomi, or Boaz in any work will instantly create a character for the listener. When I later attended a performance of Schumann’s *Ruth* in Berlin, the effect was even more powerful. Though it is an oratorio, and

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This is the KJV translation used in almost all musical settings of these verses.
was not staged, seeing singers portray Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz added an important dimension. Interpretation is a large step beyond what exists on the printed page of music.

Yet score analysis is valid on its own, for many features may be obliterated in performance. Silent reading of music represents an inner hearing, translating signs into sound. Musical meaning, in contrast to linguistic meaning, Dahlhaus contends, is only slightly detachable from the sounding phenomena. It is true that a composition in one sense only becomes musically “real” when interpreted in sound: musical meaning exists only insofar as a listener grasps it. Yet music does not divulge all its meanings in performance. Elaborate thematic or motivic relationships may disclose themselves more easily through a reading of the music and imagining the sound. The difference between written speech and notated music is a difference of degree, not of principle (Dahlhaus 1982, 12-13).

My background and training have enabled me to do a thorough analysis of each work. But my awareness of the power of hearing the music on these pages brought to life highlighted the limitations under which I have done my analysis. In addition, I have been inspired to seek out possibilities to bring other Ruth scores to life and let the public hear and enjoy the Scroll re-imagined through music.

In Chapter 6 I discuss how the musical characterization of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz might affect our understanding of these characters. I point out how the librettos and musical interpretation fill in narrative gaps, possibly altering our perception of the biblical text. I examine how the librettos and music either parallel, enhance or contradict the biblical narrative.

I have divided the works according to periods, since similar musical conventions allow a proper context for comparison between the works. The group includes five British composers, one German, one German-British, one German-American composer, two American (one born in Poland, the other in Israel), one French and one Italian. Two of the composers are Jewish (Rumshinsky and Aloni), three are converts from Judaism to Christianity (Goldschmidt, Damrosch, and Cowen), and the rest are Christian-bom. I have not located any personal documents to indicate the level of religious commitment of any composer which might have motivated him to set a biblical book. In only two of these works is the text exclusively from the Scroll (Beecham and Aloni). Others use librettos that are either stitched together from various biblical texts, including only parts of the Scroll, or are original librettos based on the Scroll (Preface to ch. 6, p. 101).

The works to be analyzed and discussed are:
1. 19th Century
   Ruth, A Sacred Pastoral (English), 1868
   Words from the Bible
   Otto Goldschmidt (1829-1907, German British)

   Ruth and Naomi: A Scriptural Idyll (English), 1875
   Words from the Bible
   Leopold Damrosch (1832-1885, German-American)

   Ruth, A Sacred Cantata (English), 1880
   Words by Edward Oxenford
   Alfred Gaul (1837-1913, British)
Ruth, A Dramatic Oratorio (English). 1887
Words selected from the Bible by Joseph Bennett
Frederic Cowen (1852-1935, British)

Ruth, Eglogue Biblique (French). 1844-1872
Text by A. Guillemin
César Franck (1822-1890, Belgian French)

Noemi e Ruth, Poema Biblico (Italian). 1908
Libretto by Saverio Fino
Giocondo Fino (1867-1950, Italian)

II. 20th Century
Ruth, Oratorio (German, English). 1909
Text by the composer, based on the Bible
Georg Schumann (1866-1952, German)

Ruth, Biblical Opera in Two Acts and Seven Scenes (Hebrew). 1949
Libretto by I.L. Wohlman
Joseph Rumshinsky (1881-1956, American)

The Song of Ruth, cantata (English). 1950
Words written and arranged from Ruth by R. J. White
Wilfrid Mellers (1914-, British)

Ruth - Cantata (English). 1957
Text from the Scroll
Adrian Beecham (1904-1982, British)

Libretto by Eric Crozier
Lennox Berkeley (1903-1989, British)

Ruth (Hebrew and English). 1986
Text from the Scroll
Aminadav Aloni (1928-1999, American)

Part III: The Scroll and the Music
Chapter 7 includes a quantitative analysis (including tables and graphs) of such elements as what percentage of scenes is allotted to each character in both the Scroll and subsequent librettos. This, in turn, can form the basis for indicating which roles are expanded or reduced in librettos by comparison to the biblical text.

The “new key” of this thesis’s title refers to how the musical works reflect a certain traditional strand of interpreting the biblical story as a pastoral, idyllic love story. Questions to be addressed will include: Is the “traditional” characterization of roles reflected, or transformed, in each musical work? What additional plot lines, scenes, and characters appear
in the different musical works? How do these additions alter the original text? What elements of the biblical story usually remain unchanged and which are most frequently altered? And ultimately, can we understand these changes as culturally motivated, or as individual choices made by each composer and librettist?

**Part IV  Ruth and Beyond: Illustrating the Paradigm**

In Chapter 8, I discuss some of the "what ifs..." of the Scroll and how these were addressed by the librettists and composers. I then offer suggestions on using this thesis as a paradigmatic model for future studies of musical settings of biblical narratives.

Librettists and composers from different eras and cultures chose to emphasize different aspects of the story and its characters. Audiences in different eras and places read and heard *Ruth* with their own cultural biases. As "literary archaeologists," we can uncover the frame and even the foundations of an ancient house—or narrative—but we can never inhabit it. This thesis will be an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of how different generations "lived" *Ruth*. In Part I, I analyze the bricks and mortar that made up the ancient dwelling, and attempt to re-assemble it. In Parts II and III, I show that the composers and librettists who put this story to music were not so much interested in finding or preserving the biblical frame as they were in decorating and embellishing what they found for their own purposes. In the first case, my working metaphor is the architect; in the second, it is the interior decorator. And when the decorator’s job is done, we may have an altered and even distorted version of the original, with only its frame intact. But music has the power to illuminate texts in an entirely new way. It can inspire us to go back and hear the voices of Ruth and Naomi and Boaz between the lines, and to hear other, newer voices found only in the margins of the ancient scroll.
We can enjoy the beauty of a flower without knowing all the components of the soil from which it grew, but our enjoyment will be enriched by a scientific understanding of its development and evolutionary history. Similarly, we analyze and try to appreciate the literary techniques employed by biblical writers not merely in order to appreciate their art: the techniques are the medium through which the writers transmitted their meanings. Modern readers can only begin to grasp the meanings by paying close attention to their methods (Alter, World, 64). In this chapter, therefore, I will briefly discuss concepts and terms of literary analysis which will subsequently be applied to Ruth in chapter 2. These are:

- Division into Narrative Units
- Character Depiction and Development
- Plot Development
- Genre
- Intertextuality and Allusion
- Gap Filling
- Reader Response
- Female Authorship
- The Narrator and Focalization

**DIVISION INTO NARRATIVE UNITS**

Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, specified three requirements for a drama, called the three unities. These are unity of action, of place, and of time. They require a play to have a single action represented as occurring in a single place and within the course of a day (Online Encyclopaedia Britannica). These have continued to be operative models in which all subsequent drama has been rooted. The unities of place and time are a consequence of unity of action. By “action,” Aristotle meant not random acts but action initiated with a view to an end, and carried out in its pursuit. Thus, action can include a whole complex of subordinate actions (Lucas, 96).

The analysis of time in narrative is complex, involving a link both with objective time outside itself (narration time) and with the literary time inside it (narrated time). Examining the relationship between these two can be fruitful (Bar-Efrat, 143).

In general, time can be viewed from three perspectives: order, duration and frequency, to answer the questions “When?” “How long?” “How often?” There is a discrepancy between the amount of time events are supposed to have taken, and the amount of text devoted to their narration (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 46). Biblical narration and narrated time are the same, and are based mostly on conversation, or “scenes.” Therefore, the speed of time within scenes is about the same as narration time, requiring the convention of a suspension of disbelief for the reader.

The variation between narrated and narration time, between scenic representation and summary account, highlights the focal points of the narrative and the relative importance of its different subjects (Bar-Efrat, 151). The more important the subject matter in a narrative, the longer its time of narration will generally be. The longest scenes are the highlights of the story, and length is usually created by repetition or the use of dialogue. The amount of text devoted to particular scenes as opposed to others may be seen as an indication of the writer's priorities. But it is not always so simple. Ordinarily, more important events or conversations are decelerated, while less important ones are accelerated. But sometimes the effect of shock or irony can be produced by reversing this expectation (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 56) (ch. 2, p. 21).
In some biblical narratives, the movement of the characters from one place to another is a focal point of the plot, though the significance of each place may not be as fully comprehensible to the modern reader as it was to the reader in ancient times (Bar-Fralt. 186). Nonetheless, the choice of a place is never random: when the author of any narrative wants to give the story a feeling of historical reality, he chooses familiar places. The place aspect is always functional, and understanding its function in the story can lead to a better grasp of the story's meaning (Amit. 124). For example, the city of Bethlehem plays an important part in the Scroll because of its strong biblical associations with food (ch. 2, p. 38). My own division of the Scroll into acts and scenes can be seen along with other scholars’ divisions in chapter 2 (p. 21).

CHARACTER DEPICTION AND DEVELOPMENT

A major attraction of narrative is the possibility of identifying with the characters. Characters are often attacked or defended as if they were people that the commentators like or dislike. Literature is written by, for, and about people. It is important to state this banal truism to remind ourselves that the people with whom literature is concerned are not real people, not flesh and blood, but fabricated paper people. Characters are not human beings; they only resemble them; lacking a real psyche or ideology, they only have characteristics that make possible psychological and ideological descriptions of them (Bal 1997, 115, 118).

The question of God as a character in the Bible has been raised by diverse commentators. There has been much debate over whether God is a developing character, a type, or a flat character (Amit. 73). The depiction of God determines how the characters in a given biblical narrative are portrayed. When God is depicted as distant, humans are painted as more complex (Amit. 83). This is generally the case in the later biblical books. God can be seen variously as intervening or observing, among or above humans, acting or merely supervising. The more God is viewed as commanding, the more the characters in the story are flat or one-dimensional. From a literary perspective, the relationship between God and humans can be seen as part of the world of the text, the vision of reality embodied in the biblical narrative (Culley. 38). In the Scroll, God is virtually absent from the action and God’s name appears primarily when referred to by the characters. References to God by the characters are often increased in librettos (Table E, p. 221).

On the level of the story, characters differ from one another, and in that sense they are individual. On the basis of the characteristics allotted to them, each functions in a different way with respect to the reader. Characters also may change, and these changes may alter the configuration of that character. The reader gets to know the characters (though not equally well), will find some more appealing than others, and will identify more easily with some than with others (Bal 1997, 115).

To state these ideas in more technical language, in mimetic theory, characters are equated with people, while in semiotic theory they “dissolve into textuality” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 33). It is possible to reconcile these two theories by seeing the characters both as part of the design of the text, and as abstractions or constructs in the story. Though these constructs are not human beings in the literal sense, they are in part modelled on the reader’s conception of people, and in this way they are “person-like” (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 33).

Four different principles together construct the image of a character: repetition, accumulation, relationships to other characters, and transformations (Bal 1997, 126). In the case of the Scroll, the last two are most relevant and I will focus on these. We obtain information about a character in three ways:

1. Characteristics can be mentioned explicitly by the character itself;
2. We deduce characteristics through the character's speech and actions (implicit and open to different interpretations):

3. The narrator makes explicit statements about a character (Bal 1997, 129-30). Information about the inner feelings of characters in literature may be supplied by the narrator, by other characters, or by the subjects themselves.

Four general criteria can be used to determine who is the leading character in a narrative: the focus of interest; the comparative number of verses devoted to each character; the structure of the story; and the theme, when it can be determined (Amit, 88, citing Sternberg, 1970). Each character observes the world from his or her own perspective. Their divergence--in interest, interpretation, attitude--propels the action forward, and their convergence leads to plot resolution (Sternberg, 172).

Biblical narrative utilizes more indirect than direct depiction of characters. This indicates the biblical writers' greater stress on action, since, as Bal puts it, "Direct characterization posits the priority of being, while indirect characterization favors the priority of action" (Bal 1987, 107). The reader must try to understand characters mostly through their speech and action. Underlying this attempt is a search for consistency. Because a narrative is circumscribed within a very limited time frame, single actions must succeed in defining personal traits, contrary to real life, when actions over a lengthy period of time would define such traits. The characters in a story, like people in real life, may exhibit conflicting traits, and may seem different to different people. The mind of the reader can conjure personality traits of biblical characters with infinite nuances.

The kind of speech assigned to a character--its syntax, tone, imagery, lengthiness--help delineate the character and his or her relation to others. Narration has a subsidiary role to characters' direct speech. Biblical writers seem to be less interested in actions per se than in the response of characters to actions. Direct speech is the primary means of revealing the varied relations of characters to actions in which they are involved (Berlin 1994, 83). Speech is used to depict character, as well as for exchanging information, forwarding, or explaining the plot. The image of a character is built up through its relationships with other characters. Biblical scenes are largely dialogues (especially true for the Scroll), indicating an assumption that whatever is significant about a character can be manifested almost entirely in that character's speech. In some cases characters are distinguished by their manner of speaking. In the Scroll, for example, Naomi's and Boaz's speech patterns differ from those of other characters, signalling their different social standing (ch. 2, p. 22).

In a dialogue, one person is trying to arouse a certain emotion or attitude in the other person; and by this means, the reader can learn about both the characters. Much of what is spoken in biblical narrative is directive speech, meant to impel someone to a particular action. This kind of speech can reveal the speaker's intentions and hopes, and through this, some of his or her characteristics. When the person being addressed responds (which is not always the case), the reader can also learn about that character through his or her reactions (Bar-Efrat, 64, 70). When a person does not respond, the silence can carry as much force as words, much like silent measures in music (Fewell and Gunn 1990, 17; ch. 6, p. 114). A failure or refusal to answer can have great significance, though it is in the reader's mind to define that significance. One of the

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Polak gives an interesting example of how just a short sentence can reveal character: the questionable mother standing before Solomon who tells him to go ahead and cut the baby in two (1 Kings 3, 26). The rhythm of the sentence highlights her cruelty and contrasts with the speech of the other mother (Polak, 273).
Indirect characterization, using words and deeds to describe characters, treats personality as something mobile. In many biblical narratives, a person's character is constantly shifting and changing, since it is revealed in transient, real-life situations. This view of human nature is represented in the Bible by a minimum of adjectives, which illustrate aspects of personality, and a higher percentage of verbs, which relate to speech and deed (Bar-Frat 90).

Character description in the Bible does not generally enable the reader to visualize the character, since physical description of characters is sparse and always seems to have a purpose. The writer's interest was to situate characters in terms of their place in society and to describe their outstanding traits: in other words, to relate to the reader what kind of people they are (Berlin 1994, 36). The biblical writers created characters of depth and complexity using spare means and many gaps.

One device in character depiction is the plot itself. Plot and character serve one another. The characters' personalities can influence the course of events, while the opposite is also true (Bar-Frat, 77). Rimmon-Kenan points out that character and action need not be subordinate to one another, but can also be seen as interdependent. Character can determine incident, and incident can illustrate character, to paraphrase Henry James (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 35-6). Changes in a character may be instigated by events, but conversely, character changes may also influence events (Bal 1997, 129).

Another action used to define character is one person's judgment of an action performed by another, which reveals aspects of both the judge and the one judged (Bar-Frat. 81). This is clearly illustrated in Boaz's speech to Ruth (2.11-12), which reveals his judgment of Ruth and also his own generous nature.

Analysis of speech patterns, dialogues, and speech-propelled action will all play an important part in my analysis of the Scroll. Speech patterns can highlight class differences (ch.2, p. 22), while dialogues predominate throughout the Scroll and most of the action is initiated by speech acts. For example, paired speech acts within a plot might be an instruction given and obeyed; a question asked and answered; a request made and accepted (Culley, 50). These can all be found in the Scroll as devices to advance the action.

PLOT DEVELOPMENT

Plot is variously defined. Culley sees it as a series of action sequences, each of which is a movement within a story from the arousal of an expectation to its fulfillment. Stories advance on the basis of what Culley calls "paired action." (Culley, 50, 53), which is not identical with plot, since there can be more than one such action sequence within a plot. Sasson, using Propp's analysis of fairy tales and applying it to folktales in general and Ruth in particular, points out that it is the various characters' functions that propel the story forward. Each character has a function, and characters' roles are determined by their influence on the development of the plot (Sasson, 201).

On a generic level, most narrative deals with a problem and its resolution (or lack thereof) (Niditch 1993, 21). One key element of plot development is the progress in knowledge that occurs through time. At least one character in any biblical narrative experiences discovery. Sternberg calls this passage from ignorance to knowledge "one of the great archetypes of literature...another Hebraic innovation" (Sternberg, 176). A more specific variation of this is the
morphology of the underdog, where the problem is a hero or heroine's lack of status and the resolution is improved status.

The classic pattern in biblical narrative, in addition to the passage from ignorance to enlightenment, is:

- from a calm point of departure through the stage of involvement to the climax of conflict and tension, and from there rapidly to the finishing point and tranquility (Bar-Efrat, 121).

The two main principles in combining events to form a story are temporal succession and causality (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 16). Speech-propelled action is the most relevant element of plot for reading the Scroll. There certainly is a problem and a resolution, and a progression from ignorance to knowledge. But the plot is continually propelled forward by dialogues between the characters.

**GENRE**

Four basic elements can be found in any genre: a typical structure, vocabulary, setting, and function. The function is connected to the intention. Any individual work will accomplish its goal and intention in accord with the typical function of its genre. It should always be kept in mind that genre studies are descriptive, not normative. If a work is unique, its distinctiveness must be recognized (ch. 2, pp. 37; Coats, 11). But in order to recognize a deviation from the norm, that norm must first be clearly defined.

There are many definitions and theories relating to genre. I am considering four of these ideas here.

According to Northrop Frye, the importance of establishing a genre is:

...not so much to classify as to clarify traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them.


According to LaCoque:

Genre can be determined by the date of a work's composition, and the purpose of the book could be determined by the reader based on when that reader believes it was written (LaCoeque, 84).

Barton defines genre as:

...a conventional pattern, recognizable by certain formal criteria...which is used in a particular society in social contexts which are governed by certain formal conventions (Barton, 32).

Coats clearly spells out the goals of genre studies:

To identify a class of literature that facilitates a functional definition of any given work belonging to that class, how it functioned in the context of its original place in society, what needs or goals that literature fulfilled and how (Coats, 8-9).
The first two of these fall into the trap of circular argument: by defining a story one way—say, as a folktale—elements of that genre will be found in the story in order to uphold that definition. Basing a genre on dating a text can also lead to circular arguments. Since no definitive date will ever be available for the authorship of a biblical text, dating is not a reliable means of determining genre or agenda.

If we determine social contexts and formal conventions through the literature, based on Barton’s idea, we could then turn around and do the reverse. Nonetheless, Barton makes the valid point that no text is exempt from the requirement to conform to some genre or type, with all the expectations that genre brings with it (Barton, 92). Coats makes the same point, noting that in any kind of interpretation, some classification will always occur, and it should be controlled. False assumptions about genre can lead to great misunderstandings (Coats, 9), which I pointed out in my discussion of the dangers of circularity.

Recognizing certain folkloric patterns and motifs in a given story teaches much about the worldview behind that story, even as it is found in different cultural settings. The dominant aspect of folklore is narration (Niditch 1993, 17), which dominates in many biblical narratives, certainly the Scroll. Folklore traits, such as the sharing of patterns and motifs found in different cultures, can be found throughout the Bible. Well-known examples are the motifs of birth of a hero (such as Samson, in Judg. 13.24), riddle-solving (Judg. 14.12), and tricksters (Jacob disguised as Esau, in Gen. 27.5-23). Folklore is relevant to the Bible partly because it may elucidate the process of moving from oral to written literature. At the same time, it is not possible to prove that any biblical work was orally composed; a written version could precede a later, oral version (Niditch 1993, 4, 7, 11).

Niditch believes that the Hebrew Bible evolved in an oral culture. In ancient Israel, the oral and written were part of a continuum. Oral style informs the written Bible. Yet we cannot reconstruct with certainty the social contexts that are essential to understanding folk genres as oral performance (Niditch 1993, 6). Literacy in a traditional culture such as ancient Israel would have been informed by the oral aesthetic, but oral and literate societies exist in a continuity, and there is no simple evolution from oral to written (Niditch 1993, 8). The modern reader needs to understand the oral aesthetic and the world that provided its context in order to fully understand biblical literature (Niditch 1996, 24, 45; ch. 2, p. 36).

The writing of ancient texts probably involved a mix of established tradition and new creation, like the process in oral tradition. Biblical writers could be considered custodians of the traditions they shared with their audience, though they were creative in the service of those traditions (Culley, 22). These concepts are important in analyzing the Scroll because it is often called an example of originally oral literature, and may also display elements of folklore. Labeling the Scroll as any one genre has proved problematic (ch. 2, p. 37).

**INTERTEXTUALITY AND ALLUSION**

No text exists in a vacuum; all texts are embedded in a web of related texts. For this reason, reading the Bible intertextually—i.e., hearing the echoes of one biblical story within another—is inevitable. Recognizing that what seemed to be a single voice is actually in dialogue with other voices leads to a reinterpretation of each single voice (Fewell 1992, 12, 17). Intertextuality is based on transformations, as textual elements or patterns that are repeated are also transformed when they are incorporated into a new text (van Wolde 1997, 429). The repetitions can be of textual units or structures, of themes or genres, of depicted actions, of single
words, or of narratological representations. In all cases, the perception of these repetitions is dependent on the reader's background. Not every reader will grasp every intertextual allusion.

Julia Kristeva, who coined the term intertextuality in 1969, was considering "intertexts," the books of specific cultures of which a text only forms a part. She differed in this definition from Bakhtin, who 40 years earlier had introduced the idea of "dialogicity," or dialogues between texts. His perspective was from one text to other texts, rather than only intertexts (van Wolde 1997, 427).

Intertextual allusions, echoes of one narrative within another, are text-linking devices that are common in the Hebrew Bible. They function to draw disparate elements into a certain unity. Such allusion is important in the Hebrew Bible because it replaces explicit commentary by the narrator, inviting the reader to glean connections through the awareness or intuition of correspondences between stories. It can have various purposes: to evoke a moment in an earlier story for the narrative purpose in the present story; to underline a theme; define a motive or character; or provide a particular orientation toward an event, in the service of an ideological argument. Allusion is a natural means of reinforcing ideological continuity (Alter, World, 51, 103. 128-9).1

There are major intertextual relationships in the Scroll that I will not be treating at any length because they have been done extensively elsewhere; for example, the link between the story of Ruth and that of Tamar found in Genesis 38 (analyzed in depth by van Wolde 1997, 432-451). The various types of intertextuality to be treated in chapter 2 are: themes, including type-scenes; character and semantic allusions; and allusions to other Ancient Near East literature.

The device of intertextual allusion is found extensively in librettos based on the Scroll, but new allusions are created. For example, most 19th-century librettos quote various Psalms, which would have resonated for the listener of that day in a particular way (Preface to eh. 6, p. 101).

GAP FILLING

Gaps are central in all narrative fiction because no matter how detailed the presentation is, more questions can always be asked. There may be either temporary or permanent gaps: in other words, some ambiguities are resolved before the end of the story, while others are never resolved. The reader cannot know which are permanent and which temporary, and this uncertainty is the basis of the dynamics of reading (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 128). There can be gaps in action and time, cause and motive, character and appearance (including age and class), and personal relationships.

There is a distinction between relevant and irrelevant gaps, the latter of which Sternberg calls "blanks," between what was omitted for the sake of interest and what was omitted for lack of interest. The pitfall, he notes, is that "one reader's gap may prove another's blank" (Sternberg, 236). The weakness of this argument is its sheer subjectivity. By leaving gaps, a text is

1 Berlin offers a fine analogy, comparing biblical stories to frames from which films are made. Though each one exists separately, and they are combined in a particular order to make the full narrative, an individual frame has no life of its own outside the film as a whole (Berlin 1983, 125). Though some frames may stand alone better than others, the perspective from which the reader understands each story is different when the entire Bible is seen as the context. This is presumably the perspective from which the ancient writers expected the Bible to be read, although this can never be known with certainty.
indicating that it does not prescribe its own meaning, but leaves that to the readers to discover, uncover, or create for themselves. The text can be seen as a kind of exercise for the reader, who has to interpret it as coherent, in spite of its gaps (Barton, 210).

The end result of a gap is ambiguity, a product of the discontinuity. But some see a different end result. A many-gapped scene structure may suggest to some readers that someone has taken care of the intervening stages and set the events in motion, and that this tactic underlines the central role the author has given to God (Amit. 61). Here Amit is straying into the arena of determining the author's intent, but biblical authors left no records of their motives. Amit hypothesizes that they wanted to be believed by their readers. She imagines a "contract" existing between the biblical author and the public, which states that the world depicted in the stories is real and not fictional. If we accept this, then modern readers who doubt the biblical story are violating this contract (Amit. 94), or else they are creating a new contract with the text.

I don't believe that Amit can know the mind of the biblical writer better than can any other modern reader; yet she is correct to assume (as do most commentators) that God had an important and active role in the biblical writers' worldview.

A story gains its dynamism through omissions. Gaps enhance interest and curiosity, prolong the reading process, and force the reader's active participation in making sense of the text (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 127-9). Gaps and ambiguities are best viewed as integral to the narrative art, rather than as problems to be solved. The motivations and emotional life of the characters are not unimportant, but they are not described. This forces the reader to contribute his or her own meaning to the story, based on how s/he fills in the gaps in characterization (Linafelt. Introduction, xiii, 7).

The gaps that are of greatest interest to the midrashists (ch. 3, p. 54ff.) are not the same as those that interested the librettists (Preface to ch. 6, p. 102), revealing different agendas. Music as midrash is better suited to filling gaps in character and personal relations. Age is revealed at once in the choice of voice type (ch. 5, p. 99), while relationships are depicted in musical ensembles (Table D, p. 219). The rabbinic midrashists were more concerned with understanding cause and motive (ch. 3, p. 56). Motives assigned to the characters by librettists are generally those of affection or romantic interest, which lend themselves well to musical depiction.

**READER RESPONSE**

Reading is a cultural enterprise. No scholarship is void of interpretive acts, of historical and ideological biases. Meaning is a property of the act of reading. Reading is the actualization of possibilities within each reader's mind (Bal 1989, 13-15). Traditional interpreters have insisted there are correct answers, even if we cannot find them. Historical critics believed that biblical texts ultimately had a single correct meaning, and that their method was the correct way to find it. Gunn and Fewell find "the arrogance of this position...breathtaking" (Gunn and Fewell 1993, 8).

Reader-response critics acknowledge that there is no one correct reading—a position to which I subscribe. How any text is interpreted is always based to some degree on who is doing the interpreting. A biblical interpreter such as Carol Meyers brings an understanding of archaeology and other ancient Semitic cultures to a biblical text, which might bring her interpretation closer to the original meaning. A literary critic such as Robert Alter brings a deeper understanding of methodology to biblical narratives. Yet there can never be one correct reading, because no one can read the mind of the writer or fully understand the intended audience. Every reading differs from the text itself (Bal 1987, 132).
Meaning is not somewhere in the text waiting to be discovered. Meaning is, in the end, the reader’s creation, guided by the writer; and readers, like texts, come in an infinite variety. The meaning of a text lies somewhere in the interaction between the text and the reader (Gunn and Fewell, Preface, xi; and 193). All authors and editors serve ideological agendas, whether expressed or not, which shape their stories (Gunn and Fewell, 6, 91).

For example, gender and sexual orientation also affect reader response, a factor that has not been noted until more recent times (Exum, 174). Some women scholars reading the Scroll have posited a female authorship (see below). Though this idea was first posited by a male scholar, S.D. Goitein, it was subsequently supported and developed by women scholars, who have found it a more convincing reading (ch. 2, p. 50).

Bal seems to believe that we can grasp what effect the author wanted the narrative to have on the reader. She suggests we should ask not only who is speaking the words or where they come from, but what is being suggested for us to believe or envision, to hate, love, admire, or argue against (Bal 1997, 224). She believes there is a motive hidden in the text and that we should try to understand why we respond a certain way, rather than just responding. Though this does take cultural bias into account, nonetheless individual reader response precludes the possibility of any universal or “correct” way to interpret any narrative. In fact Bal says this herself: “the point of literary analysis is that there is no truth, and that this contention can be reasonably argued” (Bal 1987).

Reader response theory is particularly appropriate to reading the Scroll. Three women, of Jewish, Cherokee, and African heritage, would be likely to read Ruth’s profession of devotion to Naomi in three entirely different ways (ch. 2, p. 50). The librettists who interpreted the story were also readers, and they incorporated their responses to the Scroll in their re-writing of it.

FEMALE AUTHORSHIP

When the language of female experience can be heard in a narrative, it is plausible evidence for a female text, because that language is rare. The unusual phrase “mother’s house” found in Ruth 1.8, Genesis 24:28, and Song of Songs 3.4 and 8.2, is a possible example of Israelite women’s language. These stories involve a female perspective on issues normally seen from a male perspective. In each example, a woman’s story is being told; features of wisdom literature are present; women are agents of their own destiny, and as such, they affect others; the setting is domestic; and marriage is part of the plot. Even though these features were recognized by earlier commentators, Meyers notes that there was a tendency to impose contemporary models of family structure on the ancient society depicted in the Bible (Meyers 1993, 109-111).

The distinction between household and workplace that exists in modern society was absent in the society of biblical times. Meyers believes that women probably had much more power in certain spheres than has been recognized. This is not always easy to detect in androcentric texts, but the verses Meyers highlights in Ruth, Genesis and Song of Songs offer glimpses into this reality. For example, she theorizes that Israelite women probably had a role even greater than their husbands in arranging the marriages of their children (Meyers 1993, 112).¹

Though these implications are conjectural, there are strong arguments for female authorship of certain texts. Alternately, a male author could employ a female voice, or base a

¹ This is contra Berquist, who states unequivocally that “In ancient Israel, fathers arranged marriages for their children. Naomi’s matchmaking is a male role.” He bases this on Roland de Vaux’s early work on Israel’s social institutions. (Berquist, 31).
narrative on a well-known women’s (oral) folktale. The connection between folklore and orality was mentioned earlier in this chapter (p.12). Women’s literary traditions are presumed to have been largely oral (Brenner 1996, 4). The danger of circular argument rears its head here once again: if the text is read as if the author is a woman, the effect will be different than if it is believed to be written by a man. Awareness of the gender origins of a text could profoundly alter the reading of it (Meyers in Brenner 1993, 90). Once an assumption is made, the arguments can be made from the text or from the assumption itself.

THE NARRATOR AND FOCALIZATION

The act of narration does not represent the world directly, but only modes of representation in the worlds inhabited by the characters. The interaction between reader and text ultimately involves a leap of faith, governed by convention.Narration simultaneously assumes a narrator and creates him/her in the process of telling (Rimmon-Kenan 1996, 20-22). The narrator can be defined as the narrative “voice” or “speaker,” while the implied author is, in opposition and by definition, voiceless and silent (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 87). The identity of the narrator is fictive, and is based on his/her role as storyteller. Yet he/she shares a narrative life, together with the characters, in the reader’s consciousness. We imagine a person behind the voice we are reading (Bach, 14).

Central to the reading of fiction is the act of imagining both a reader and a narrator. Recognizing that the biblical narrator is telling a slanted story, in Bach’s view, has been undervalued. Bach’s solution is to imagine the narrator as a “combination of dual subjectivities, as presenter of Israel’s oral and theological position, and as the one whose version of the stories we are hearing” (Bach, 13-14).

The biblical narrator is inside the narrative, an integral part of the work, one of its most important structural components. The narrator exists alongside the characters, and his voice is heard along with theirs. The reader sees and hears only through the narrator’s eyes and ears. The nature of a narrative depends on the point of view from which the events are portrayed, and this comes from the narrator, who is an intermediary between the worlds of the narrative and the reader (Bar-Efrat, 13-15).

The narrator has the power to mould the reader’s attitude to characters and events through his or her comments, and to transmit his/her values to the reader (Bar-Efrat, 24-33). The values transmitted by the narrator are a clue into understanding those of the biblical writer and his/her times, because the implied audience presumably shared the cultural world and attitudes of the narrator (Berlin 1983, 53).

The reader’s perception of the story depends on several factors: the narrative level to which the narrator belongs; the extent of the narrator’s participation in the story; the degree to which her/his role is perceivable; and the narrator’s reliability (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 94). Information conveyed directly by the narrator is generally more reliable than information mediated through another source, such as a character. The revelation of internal thoughts or feelings can be accepted without question and used in our reconstruction of character. Action is usually reported by the narrator without interpretation, and the burden is on the reader to understand a character’s motivations (Gunn and Fewell, 54).

* Meyers quotes a letter to the New York Times that supports the important effect knowing the authorship of a work can have on the reader: the writer points out how if Shalom Aleichem were somehow proved to have composed Mein Kampf, reading that book would suddenly become a very different matter from what it is now.” (in S.G. Hellman, Book Review, January 5, 1992; p. 4). This is a rather extreme example in the service of a very salient point.
There are different degrees of narratorial involvement. The more the author wants to make a story dramatic, the less narration and the more dialogue there will be. The difference between “showing” and “telling” is clearly up to the author (Gunn and Fewell, 51). In biblical narrative, unlike most other literature, the implied author and the narrator assigned the task of communicating the story, practically merge into each other. There is no distance between “maker” and “teller” (Sternberg, 75). The narrator of a biblical story is, in Amit’s words, a “mediating element, chosen and fashioned by the author...an attempt to understand the world of the narrator is, in effect, a glimpse into the author’s world” (Amit 101-2). The narrator has also been described as “scriptwriter and stage manager rolled into one” (Sternberg 1991, 28), who speaks in voices other than his own but in words of his own devising.

Biblical narrators are complex, and we tend to identify them with “the implied author” (Rosenblatt, 7). The narrator is a fictional construct, virtually another character in the narrative. Readers in the ancient world recognized the distinction between author and narrator. Therefore the modern reader should be careful to keep the author and narrator separate (Gunn and Fewell, 52-3). There is no textual distinction between implied author and public narrator, leading readers to equate the two. They are most easily distinguished in the case of the omniscient narrator.

The theological term “omniscient” is used for the biblical narrator because this narrator is presumed to know, literally, what God knows. The omniscient narrator knows what is in each character’s heart, because the writer invented them. This is true of all literature, but omniscience is a particularly important feature in biblical literature, considered by many readers’ traditions to be God-inspired.

Alter states unequivocally that the ancient Hebrew writers “were obviously motivated by a sense of high theological purpose” (Alter, Ar 155) and that biblical literature is “ultimately oriented toward a horizon beyond the human” (Alter, World, 20). The biblical writer, in his view,

conceives of the world as a place full of things to understand in which the things of ultimate importance defy human understanding...The repeated point of the biblical writers is that we cannot make sense of God in human terms (Alter, World, 22)."  

Yet it is fair to assume only that the writer was influenced by his (or her) cultural context and was writing what was expected by the readers of that time. Alter is in a kind of “interpretive alliance” with the author, an alliance running straight from author to narrator to reader. He and Sternberg find a code of conventions within the text, and feel obligated to obey that code, which includes an omniscient and reliable narrator (Bach 20, 22). But in the end, this is only the writer’s construction, not a reality.

An omniscient narrator serves the purpose of staging and glorifying an omniscient God, because the biblical narrator’s omniscience is equivalent to God’s own, a difficult concept for the modern reader to accept. According to the “inspirational convention” on which the Bible is founded, the narrator’s omniscience is assumed in the “name and service of divinity rather than art” (Alter, Ar 125). Sternberg, who fuses the identity of the fictive narrator with the author

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"Sternberg states that “To undercut the narrator’s cognitive authority is thus to launch a chain reaction that ends by undercutting God’s own...for God to be exalted, the narrator must be equally exempted from the darkness that he throws about human action and vision” (Sternberg, 184). This assumes that the biblical writer was inspired by God or at least wanted to inspire a belief in the God he wrote about. This is presumably what differentiates the Bible from all other literature, ancient or modern.
(Bach, 19), believes that “The Bible’s art makes resistance difficult, certainly to the implied audience of believers” (Sternberg, 87). Bal takes issue with Sternberg, arguing that omniscient narration is not an expression of divine omniscience, and that to say as Sternberg does that the reader must accept the “divine power” of the narrator severely circumscribes the reader’s freedom of response (Bal 1991, 61). Bal is correct: only the reader who assumes biblical narrative is divinely inspired will view the omniscient narrator as a reflection of God. The secular reader, instead, assumes it is another facet of the writer’s literary technique. As Bach points out, the redactors have spliced the biblical narrator’s voice with the author’s and with God’s voices, so we must separate the narrator’s agenda from his simple story-telling (Bach, 15).

Even though the narrator is omniscient, she still chooses what to tell and when to tell it. Sternberg sees this choice as a means of manipulating the reader into the desired attitude; thus it is a means as well as an end. The disparity between the narrator’s assumed omniscience and the knowledge he chooses to impart to the reader, is motivated by communicative purposes (Sternberg, 87).

The omniscient narrator is never really absent from the narrative, for the characters’ speech is embedded in the narrator’s, who might also define the nature of the speech. The omniscience of the narrator can serve varied purposes. Through the narrator’s total disclosure, the reader can fathom secret thoughts and plans of the characters. In this way, the reader is elevated into a similar state of omniscience (Bar-Efrat, 41-2).

The reader can only “see” the story through the narrator’s lens. The biblical narrator is like a camera’s eye, selecting what he will show and from what perspective; he can survey a scene from a distance or zoom in for a detail. He can choose which character to focus on (Berlin 1983, 44). Precisely because the narrator’s is a view from above, the characters can never have the same knowledge or perspective. They must find their way without the sort of “aerial map” the narrator is presumed to have.

The intermediary between the reader and narrator—the “photographer” role—is the “focalizer,” who influences how the reader will perceive the characters in the story. Three agents function in three layers, sometimes overlapping: the narrator, focalizer, and actor (Bal 1997, 22). The focalizer, standing midway between the narrator and the character (Bal 1991, 87) is an aspect of the story told by the narrator, the represented “coloring” of the story by a specific agent of perception. Focalization is interpretation, because what the reader sees has already been interpreted.

There is an external focalizer distinct in function, not identity, from the narrator (Bal 1999, 19, 63). There is a distinction between the one who sees and the one who speaks, or “the vision through which the elements are presented and on the other hand, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing the vision” (Bal 1985, 101). This external focalizer can sometimes embed an internal one who will then mediate or even produce the “fabula.” So the same object or event can be interpreted in different ways by different focalizers, which leads to ambiguity (Bal 1997, 29).

The embodiment of the narrator’s privileged but covert “voice” is expressed by the focalizer of the text. The dominant voice of a passage is embodied in the textual figure who speaks, who focalizes the action, and whose viewpoint predominates (Brenner 1996, 7). The term “focalization” stands for the mediation of a particular perspective or point of view verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his. The terms focalization and point of view encompass a cognitive, emotive, and ideological orientation along with a purely visual one, analogous to photography.
In the Scroll, far more is revealed about plot and character through direct speech than through narration. There are sudden shifts, when the characters are silent and the narrator speaks, a change between “inset and frame,” in Sternberg’s words (Sternberg 1991, 50). These shifts may call attention to a new perspective.

The part of the Narrator is significant in only some librettos (Graph B1, p. 212) and is assumed variously by solo voices of different ranges or, more often, by the chorus.

CONCLUSION

Any artistic work adheres to certain conventions, is based on previous compositions, and is grounded in a particular cultural and artistic context (Niditch 1993, 12). One of the problems modern readers of the Bible encounter when trying to understand the artistry of biblical narrative, is the loss of “most of the keys to the conventions out of which it was shaped” (Alter, Astr. 62). These conventions involve words, which have no more inherent meaning than gestures, both are dependent on their cultural system. (Barton, 108-114). Meaning is a function of the structures of a cultural system. And in that respect, literature is analogous to language or society; all are cultural systems. It is possible to gain a better understanding of a cultural system through its texts, just as texts can be better understood and appreciated through better understanding of literary concepts and terms. As “literary archaeologists,” we must use the proper materials and begin our reconstructions with the foundation and frame before we can even begin to visualize how the frame should be filled.
CHAPTER TWO  A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE SCROLL

In this chapter, using the concepts and terms discussed in chapter 1 as bricks and mortar (Introduction, p. 6), I will attempt to reconstruct and then interpret the frame of this ancient duelling. With the text as a metaphoric house, once reconstructed it must be true to its own time but comfortably inhabitable by successive generations.

DIVISION INTO NARRATIVE UNITS

Dividing a text into units is complex (ch. 1, p. 7). How to divide the scenes in Ruth is a matter of interpretation. The biblical Scroll is divided into four chapters, roughly equivalent to four acts of a play. But there are other ways of dividing it.

Campbell divides this way:

I. “A Family of Sojourners” 1.1-5
II. “Returning Home” 1.6-22
III. “Amid Alien Corn?” 2.1-23
IV. “Encounter at the Threshing Floor” 3.1-18
V. “The Resolution at the City Gate” 4.1-12
VI. “A Son is Born to Naomi!” 4.13-17
VII. “A Genealogical Appendix” 4.18-22
Total: 7 scenes

Campbell’s division is based on theme rather than location. His choice of the number 7, which resonates for Bible readers, may not be an accident. He points out that the writer rounds off each episode in the book, giving each its own emphasis, using the devices of inclusio and repetition of key words to do this. For example, in 1.6-22 the words “return from the Moab plateau” bracket the scene: they open the scene with what is planned, and close it with the accomplishment of the plan (Campbell, 78). Campbell does not, however, consider the Ruth-Naomi scenes (1.18-23, 3.16-18) as separate, which Sasson and I do.

In Sasson’s commentary, the Scroll is divided as follows (in the Contents under “3. Philological Commentary”):

Chapter 1:
In Moab 1.1-6
The Parting 1.7-14
The Pledge 1.15-19a
Back to Bethlehem 1.19b-22

Chapter 2:
A Plan 2.1-7
Boaz and Ruth: First Encounter 2.8-13
Boaz Responds 2.14-18a
The Report 2.18b-23

Chapter 3:
Naomi’s Plan 3.1-5
Ruth and Boaz: Second Encounter 3.6-15
Nothing to do but Wait 3.16-18

Chapter 4:
Legal Discussions 4.1-12
Birth of Obed 4.13-17
The Ancestry of David 4.18-22
Sasson has a larger number of subdivisions, because he divides based on change of speaker and not only of location. For that reason his divisions of chapters 3 and 4 do not differ from mine: in those chapters the speakers change with the location, whereas in chapters 1 and 2 there are more changes of speakers in a single location.

I treat the Scroll as a play, dividing it into acts and scenes:

Prelude (providing summary of background) 1.1-6

Act I
Scene 1: On the road to Bethlehem 1.7-19a
Scene 2: Arrival in Bethlehem 1.19b-22

Act II
Scene 1: In the fields 2.1-16
Scene 2: Evening at home 2.17-23

Act III
Scene 1: Naomi’s instructions 3.1-5
Scene 2: On the threshing floor 3.6-15
Scene 3: Going home 3.16-18

Act IV
Scene 1: At the city gate 4.1-12
Scene 2: Ruth conceives and gives birth 4.3-17

Postlude: 4.18-22 (genealogy)

Total: 14 scenes

These act and scene divisions are based on change of location and time shifts. They differ from Campbell in several places because his division is based on theme rather than location. What I have called “Prelude” and “Postlude” are not really scenes in the sense of the rest of the book, because they contain no dialogue and belong to the pre- and post-action.

Scene division is also dependent on the difference between narration and narrated time (ch. 1, p.7). A dialogue creates the closest match between narration and narrated time, as in a play (Amit, 108). Dialogue scenes are stretched out, with some repetition and long, solemn speeches. This can be seen in the scenes between Ruth and Boaz in both chapters 2 and 3. Yet there is variation in this pattern: for example, the scene at the city gate is less prolonged than earlier scenes. Whenever the pace does slow down, it is a signal for the reader to look more carefully and watch for key words (Campbell, 17). 1.6 through 4.12, comprising seventy verses, cover a period of only a few weeks. In contrast, 4.13 describes the events of at least nine months in fifteen words, an example of a summary account (Sasson, 161). Another example of summary account is where months pass in a single verse (2.23) (ch. 1, p. 7). Ruth and Boaz’s marriage and the birth of their child is the climax of the entire story, yet is related in a summary account of only one verse (4.13)! An effect of shock or irony is produced here by reversing the expectation that more important events will be decelerated, while less important ones will be accelerated (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 56).

Since the postlude, or genealogy, is absent from the libretto, I will not be discussing it in any depth.

Though the writer never specifically mentions the passage of time, based on the Gezer calendar we know how many weeks would have elapsed between the beginning and end of the barley harvest. The reader of the time would surely have known this.
The Scroll is composed largely of dialogue, with narration utilized to move quickly from one scene to the next. This is why it has the feeling of a play, and was so adaptable to librettos and musical representation.

CHARACTER DEPICTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Determining who is the main character in the Scroll based on the accepted criteria (interest, number of verses, story structure, theme) is not straightforward. In some regards Ruth is the main character, since the writer named the Scroll after her and she is the focus of interest; while in others it is Naomi, who appears slightly more often (Table Graph B, pp. 209-211). It is not clear until near the end of the story that all the characters are heading for the same goal--Ruth's marriage to Boaz--even if they are not equally conscious of this convergence. Different actions by the different characters propel the action, and indicate individual personality traits, while also de-emphasizing the importance of one character over another.

Characters' responses to others' actions can often reveal points of view, but in Ruth this is ambiguous, because one character's point of view is often reflected through another's. For example, Boaz bases his perception of Ruth on the foreman's report (2.7); Ruth perceives what Boaz knows about her (2.11), while Naomi perceives what Ruth perceives about Boaz (3.17). When the narrator is absent, evaluations are made as if by the characters themselves (Berlin 1993, 97-8), typical in any narrative.

Interpersonal relationships can sometimes be understood through use of language. Naomi addresses Ruth as נֻלֵּב (my daughter) in several places: 2.2, 2.22, 3.1, 3.16, and 3.18. Boaz addresses her with this term three times: in 2.8, 3.10, and 3.11. In two of these three, the word נֻלֵּב is immediately followed by a command: נֻלֵּבָא נֻלִּי הָאָבְרָהָם (2.8); and נֻלֵּב הָאָבְרָהָם (3.11). In the third example (3.10), the word is followed by a formal expression of appreciation for Ruth's kindness. In all these examples, Boaz seems to use the term to establish his superior social position.

By contrast, only one of Naomi's uses of this term includes a command: נֻלֵּב הָאָבְרָהָם (2.2) and the נֻלֵּב follows rather than precedes the command, softening it. In other instances, its usage, though expected in the in-law relationship, might also be interpreted as a term of affection. It is also the only place נֻלֵּב is found in the mouth of a woman in the entire Bible.\(^1\)

Campbell and others have noted that Naomi and Boaz tend to use more archaic morphology and syntax, and based on this, they have assumed they are older. They also refer to everyone around them as young, which could be indicative of their assumed perspective (Campbell, 17, 110). Boaz comparing himself to the "young men" has been seen by many commentators as proof of his old age. Bal, for example, states that "Boaz admits his old age when he compares himself to the young man" (Bal 1987, 85). But in fact, the language used by Naomi and Boaz can also be indicative of their social standing and not only their age (Brenner 2002, 306).

\(^1\) There are 15 occurrences of נֻלֵּב in the Bible, 8 of these in Ruth. The two in Deuteronomy (Deut. 22:16-17) both involve a dispute about a daughter's virginity. In Josh. 15:16 and Jud. 1:12, (the same verse), Caleb offers his daughter to the victor in a battle; in Jud. 19:24, the virgin daughter is offered to the strangers; in 1 Sam. 18:17, Saul offers his daughter Merab to David. These are all fathers referring to their daughters in the third person. The only time נֻלֵּב is used in a direct address is in Jud. 11:35, when Jephthah boasts the appearance of his daughter after having pledged to sacrifice the first thing greeting him on his return from battle. It is a moment of heightened emotion and in that context, the term could seem laden with affection to the modern reader, although in fact it is simply a statement of Jephthah's parental role.
Ruth’s response to Boaz: “She prostrated herself with her face to the ground, and said to him, ‘why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?’” (2.10) shows a high degree of humility in her personality not previously evident. It could also be interpreted as deliberate manipulation, using this kind of language to make a certain impression. Her consistent response to Naomi’s requests or demands is complete compliance in speech, but her actions tell a different story. So Ruth’s speech may be an indication of how she uses language to manipulate others.

Bal has charted the number of speeches each character has in Ruth (Bal. 1987; 77; 1993, 54), because quantity of speech is indicative of character in addition to quality of speech. Bal’s chart does not represent number of verses or words, so it is not a complete picture. The total number of words for each character is as follows: Ruth has 123, Naomi 225, Boaz 290; in addition, Orpah has 4, the head reaper 25, the redeemer) 21, and the different choruses have 42, 31, and 30. These numbers are startling at first glance. The Scroll is commonly thought of in terms of its spotlight on women’s relationships, yet Boaz is the most talkative character, followed by Naomi, while Ruth speaks fewer than half of Boaz’s words. The choruses have more text than Orpah, the head reaper, or the redeemer, highlighting their relative importance (which is greatly increased in the musical works).

It is noteworthy that with only two exceptions, Boaz’s exchange with his servant overseer, and at the gate with his kinsman, all dialogue in Ruth involves either Ruth and Naomi together, or one of them with someone else. This highlights the centrality of the women in the story, even though neither of them speaks as many words as Boaz.

Since all other characters stand in relation to her, most of the story’s perceptual point is viewed through Naomi, even if Ruth is the focus of the interest viewpoint (Berlin 1994, 84). In terms of frequency of mention, Naomi dominates: in chapter 1 her name appears 8 times, mostly as the active subject of verbs. Her name is the first word in chapter 2, and she is the last to speak in this chapter. Naomi initiates and concludes the exchanges with Ruth at the opening and closing of chapter 3, making her voice the first and last to be heard there. Even though she does not appear in chapter 4, her name appears there 6 times. Naomi is mentioned a total of 20 times in the Scroll, compared to Ruth’s 12 mentions and Boaz’s 18. These numbers differ from the actual number of words spoken by the characters: Boaz is mentioned slightly less often than Naomi, though he speaks more. Ruth is mentioned less than either of them, as well as speaking less. Based on these figures alone, Ruth would be perceived as the least significant character, even though the story revolves around her.

Characters: Naomi, Ruth, Orpah, Boaz, “Chorus,” God

Because the Scroll is so short, there is not as much character development as seen in longer biblical narratives such as the story of David (1 Sam.16-1 Kings 12) or Joseph (Gen. 37-50). There seems to be more development and change in the character of Naomi than in either Ruth or Boaz.

Naomi’s presence throughout the story is both commanding and ambiguous (Trible 2000, 121). Naomi is the central character in terms of discourse, which can be seen as a form of

5.Caspi sees this scene as “a parody of patriarchal transactions” and the “bombastic formality of the male scene...especially humorous” in contrast to Ruth and Naomi’s scenes (Caspi Havrelock, 129). Caspi is looking at the scene as a modern reader, and his refreshing approach makes no assumptions about the writer’s original intent.
domination (Rashkow, 28). Ultimately it is Naomi’s discourse in 3.1-4, where she gives Ruth instructions, that moves the plot to its conclusion.

Naomi is a unique figure: as a widow with no sons, she might be expected to disappear from a story, having no status. Instead, she becomes a “mother-in-law,” and in this identity she continues her textual life. She is initially named as Elimelech’s wife, in 1.2, but in the next verse, Elimelech is called “Naomi’s husband.” This technique of shifting the spotlight to a woman after initially introducing a man is also seen in 1 Samuel. There, Elkanah is introduced in 1.1, but the focus shifts gradually to Hannah in 1.5 and becomes her story by 1.9.

More of Naomi’s personality is shown through her words than that of any other character. For example, in her retort to her daughters-in-law (1.10-13), a sense of self-deprecation and even sarcasm comes through. In this speech, her use of the word משברון (in the piel form) “wait” or “hope” (BDB 960) is unusual. In all other places but one where this verb appears in the Bible, it has the sense of waiting and hoping for God. This occurrence in the Scroll, Campbell notes, is the only pre-exilic use of the verb with a “secular” meaning (Campbell, 69). The fact that Naomi uses such a particular term lends her character a kind of gravitas.

Naomi is portrayed as a woman who can only measure her self-worth in relation to men (Linafelt, 15). When Ruth brings food home, Naomi attributes the abundance to “the man who took notice.” looking to a male figure for security. It is not clear if Ruth has the same perspective (Caspi Havelock, 172). Though a contemporary reader views that kind of self-image as negative, we have no way of knowing whether the writer meant to portray this aspect of Naomi as a positive trait, or simply a neutral and realistic one.

In the first chapter, the reader can simultaneously feel “sympathy and antipathy” for Naomi (van Wolde 1997, 15). Van Wolde sees Naomi’s apparent self-centeredness as a negative trait, and claims it is visible through the preponderance of “I” and “me” in her speech throughout the first two chapters (van Wolde 1997, 15). But this perception is inaccurate, because the total of self-referencing words (including all pronouns and verbs) is only 20 for Naomi in chapter 1, equaling 18% of her 113 words. In chapter 2 Naomi uses no self-referencing words, and in chapter 3, only one. This can be compared to other characters: Ruth uses such terms 9 times in chapter 1, 24% of her total 38 words. In chapter 2, Ruth’s 12 self-referencing terms equal 21% of her total 57 words, while in chapter 3, her 5 terms equal 18% of her total 28 words. So if this analysis is an accurate measure, Ruth emerges as the far more self-centered character. But other factors must also be considered, such as the precise contents of each self-referencing example.

Boaz seems much more self-effacing in this analysis, using only 2 self-referencing terms out of 116 words in chapter 2, and 3 out of 73 words in chapter 3. In chapter 4, his total is 9 out of 101, because he issues many commands there in the first person, but does not actually refer to himself in the same way as Ruth and Naomi in the other chapters.

In spite of Naomi’s apparent dependence on men, her speech is exclusively with women. When she addresses the women of Bethlehem, in 1.20-22, her speech displays bitterness and anger. In this speech, Naomi struggles against God’s judgment, much like Job. In this way she attains a greater narratological role by virtue of her lofter position in relation to God (Pardes, 109). The comparison to Job is apt, since her use of the three words פָּדָר שֶׁבֶם (Shaddai) has made my lot very bitter. is found with this meaning in only one other place, in Job, 27.2.

Other occurrences are: Isa. 38.18, Pss. 104.27, 119.16, 148.15, in all of which the object of the verb is God. Only in Esther 9.1 does it simply mean “hope for.”

1 Other occurrences are: Isa. 38.18, Pss. 104.27, 119.16, 148.15, in all of which the object of the verb is God. Only in Esther 9.1 does it simply mean “hope for.”
Campbell asserts that the word יְנַשֵּׁשׁ for God is usually used in contexts of lament or complaint; this aspect of God had a special connection to judging, punishment, blessing and curse. His examples are Genesis 49.25, Jacob’s blessing of his children, and Numbers 24.4 and 16, Balaam’s blessing (Campbell, 77). Though Campbell also mentions other examples of the term, a closer look at those examples would seem to contradict his conclusion. Most of the occurrences in the Pentateuch assign the role of blessing to יְנַשֵּׁשׁ. The prophetic occurrences are mostly descriptive, and the instances in Psalms do not relate to judgment. Of the 31 occurrences of יְנַשֵּׁשׁ in Job, very few involve lament, punishment, or curse.

Naomi’s expression יְנַשֵּׁשׁ (1.21) can be translated “testified against me” or “dealt harshly with me.” In no other examples of this usage, that is, in the qal form constructed with the preposition ה- (2 Sam. 1:16; 1 Sam. 12:3; Isa. 3:9; Jer. 14:7; Mic. 6:3; Hos. 5:5 and 7:10) is YHWH regarded as the one who testifies. There are, however, examples of the word יְנַשֵּׁשׁ without the ה- which have YHWH as the subject. In these cases, the more correct translation might be “afflict” (BDB, 776). Other possible definitions are “oppress, humble, torment, humble” (KBL, 739). The difference depends on the pointing of the verb, as יְנַשֵּׁשׁ or יְנַשֵּׁשׁ. The former is more generally accepted as meaning “testify against” while the latter is more commonly defined as “oppress, humiliate” (HAL, 851). If we accept Sasson’s reading (Sasson, 35), which accepts the MT’s pointed version of יְנַשֵּׁשׁ, Naomi’s application of juridical terminology to YHWH would be unique in the Bible. She certainly is portrayed as a character who has an unusual bond with her God, because whichever translation of יְנַשֵּׁשׁ we accept, she is still the only biblical character who uses the term with God as its subject.

Berlin arrives at an interesting conclusion based on a close literary analysis of Naomi’s phrase מָאָלֵאת הָאָלֶלֶת רָדִּיס אָלֶלֶת יָבֹשֵׁשׁ, “I went away full and YHWH has brought me back empty” (1.21). She notes that this is a case of subject-object parallelism, since the “I” of the first line becomes “me” in the second, implying that the emptiness was caused by YHWH even if the fullness, in Naomi’s view, was not. Berlin believes this opposition between “I” and “YHWH” is resolved at the end: בָּרֵאָר דָּרֶשׁ אִשָּׁה לָדֶשׁ, “Blessed be YHWH who has not withheld a redeemer from you today!” (4.14) (Berlin 1985, 136). Yet these are not Naomi’s words, and her own feelings about YHWH remain ambivalent.

By virtue of her complaint against God, Naomi places herself in the biblical tradition of men who challenge God for undeserved suffering; for example, Moses in Exodus 5:22 and Numbers 11:11, Elijah in 1 Kings 17:20, or Job in 27:2. The difference is that in those passages Moses and Elijah address God directly and try to reverse the circumstances. Naomi has never been addressed by God, nor does she address God or expect any chance of reversal. As the writer portrays her, she must suffer hardship and insecurity without the benefit of an active God in her corner (Linafelt, 20). Like Job, Naomi suffers at God’s hand but believes in the possibility of a reversal of fortune. In Aschkenasy’s words, “Behind the image of the woman punished by God is the image of the woman recognized by God” (Aschkenasy 1998, 148). This is almost a


In 1 Samuel 12:3, Samuel says to Israel “Teeth against me,” the same words used by Micah to his people in Mic. 6:3. In 2 Samuel 1:16, David says to the messenger “your mouth is stilled against you.” In Isaiah 3:9, the Israelites’ punishment in judgment at once them: Jeremiah says to God in Jer. 14:7, “our iniquity’s teeth against us.”

The examples are Deut. 8:2.3. 16; 1 Kings 11:39; Is. 64:11; Nahum 1:12; Lam 3:33.
simplistic view of God as the parent who says “I’m punishing you because I love you so much.” In Aschkenasy’s view, Naomi sees herself as expelled from God’s mercy, and her goal is to regain that mercy. This is not evident in the text. In my opinion, the unusual nature of Naomi’s quest is precisely that she pursues her goal without appealing directly to God.

Matters of faith in the Bible are usually the male domain, according to Aschkenasy (Aschkenasy 1998, 150). Yet there are important exceptions: Sarah (Gen 18.15), Hannah (1 Sam 1.11-12), and Judith (Judith 9.13-4-7) all address God directly. Aschkenasy claims that Naomi’s thinking is theological, her goal to “be embraced again by God’s bounty and kindness” (Aschkenasy 1998, 150). Yet the biblical text, taken literally, simply indicates that Naomi wants to find food and probably a better life. Nowhere is she depicted as longing for God’s blessing: this is Aschkenasy’s own projection. The idea of Naomi in a personal relationship with God is found in several librettos (e.g., Schumann, p. 153; Rumshinsky, p. 171).

Naomi is described through her words. Though her age is never stated, she describes herself as מִיָּהֲרָה לִבְשָׂי, “too old to be married.” This is a relative age designation, however, and only tells us that she is older than Ruth and Orpah. In chapter 1, Naomi is gentle but firm with her daughters-in-law. She does not respond to Ruth’s profession of loyalty: whether her silence comes from reticence or coldness is not revealed (this chapter, p. 48). She expresses bitterness and sadness to the community of women in Bethlehem. Yet she is not defeatist, as seen in her encouragement to Ruth in relation to Boaz in chapter 3. In her plotting of their encounter, she could be seen as clever, manipulative and controlling. These are my impressions, supported but never overtly stated by the text.

Orpah is first mentioned as one of the two “Moabite women” married to Elimelech’s sons (1.4). She is mentioned by name only once more, when she kisses her mother-in-law farewell (1.14). She is included in the expression מַלְאָה לִבְשָׂי, “daughters-in-law,” in 1.6-8, in pronominal form in 1.9-10, and in the term אָנָה לִבְשָׂי, “My daughters,” with which Naomi addresses Ruth and Orpah in 1.11-12. Orpah then vanishes from the story. Her primary function seems to be to form a binary opposition to Ruth, by obeying Naomi and returning to her own people while Ruth refuses to.

The name Orpah has been interpreted by many commentators as deriving from “nape of the neck” (לְעַף), making her act of turning her back on Naomi the defining moment in her life (ch. 3, p. 68). Her name (assuming this is its origin) is iconic rather than symbolic, because it describes not only a feature of character, but also an emblematic action (Ball 1987, 73). As Ball notes, “the character is summarized by her name” (Ball 1993, 50). But other possibilities have been proposed, notably by Sasson and Campbell. Both suggest the name could be connected with the Akkadian and Ugaritic erpetu, “cloud,” or even the Arabic ʿaraṭa, “scent” (Sasson, 20; Campbell, 55). However Orpah’s name is interpreted, though, it does not explain her action in the story.

Whether Orpah’s act of returning to her people, whom she had presumably abandoned when she married Chilion, should be seen as an act of courage or cowardice, is not dealt with in the text. The only thing the reader knows of Orpah is that, though she followed Naomi out of Moab and cried at the thought of leaving her, ultimately she did not choose to leave her own land and people permanently for Naomi’s sake as Ruth did. Her decision tells the reader nothing about who Orpah was. Librettists tried to fill the gaps by creating an Orpah who had great affection for Naomi, and who displays sadness at their parting (e.g., Damrosch, p. 114; Gaul, p. 119; Franck, p. 131).
Ruth remains an ambiguous character because her speech is both less frequent and more cryptic than either Naomi’s or Boaz’s. Although on the surface she seems to be a character with initiative, she usually acts in response to other characters in the story (Fewell and Gunn 1990, 94). The verb לְמוֹעַ, “love,” is applied only to her in the Scroll. In 4.15, the women refer to her as נָּתַּן הָגָדָה לְךָ “your daughter-in-law who loves you,” implying that Ruth has made her emotional attachment to Naomi obvious to the other women, even if not to the reader of the story. Her emotional commitment to Naomi is special and unique, especially when looked at in the context of other women’s relationships in the Bible. Ruth is a “symbol of unconditional love and loyalty,” and this love-motif lends the story depth and credibility as well as being the local point unifying the various strands of the plot (Brenner 1993, 84). Other possible motivations for Ruth’s actions will be explored below under “Gap filling” (this chapter, p. 47).

Unlike other prominent biblical women—Sarah (Gen.12.14), Rebecca (Gen. 26.7), Rachel (Gen. 29.17), Abigail (1 Sam. 25.3), Bathsheba (2 Sam.11.2), Esther (Esther 2.7)—Ruth is not depicted as either beautiful, wise, or intelligent. The reader knows her only through her actions and, even more, her words. Ruth’s speech and actions show her to be both independent and strong-willed, starting with her determination to follow Naomi. Ruth declares her allegiance to Naomi’s God and people. Aschkenasy interprets this to mean Ruth wanted to “put herself on this people’s historical track” (Aschkenasy 1998, 150). But if this means she wants to inject herself into Israelite history and destiny, it only tells us that the author wants the reader to understand Ruth in this way—or that this is Aschkenasy’s own interpretation.

Ruth’s determination to follow Naomi, for no apparent motive, is the most striking example in the Scroll of decision-making, which reveals a character’s values. It establishes Ruth as a woman with a mind of her own right from the start of the story. Ruth’s decision, which is a one-time action and thus does not reflect constant qualities, nonetheless suggests that the traits it reveals may be qualitatively more crucial than more routine habits might be (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 61). The verb הָנַּקָּל, often translated “was determined” (1.18), can also be translated as “confirm oneself in a purpose” (BDB, 55) or “exert oneself” (Sheffield v. 1. 320). The root הָנַּקָּל means “be strong” (Sheffield, 320), “be bold, alert” (BDB), “be solid, hard” (KBL. 62, HAL. v. 1. 65). In the hithpaal (reflexive) form, it is found uniquely here in the feminine form. It has the meaning of “to persist in something” (HAL. v. 1. 65) or “to prove strong, persist in an intention” (KBL. 62). Elsewhere (1 Kings 12.18, 2 Chron. 10.18, 13.7) it refers to men strengthening themselves. This verb applied to a woman implies an attempt to depict a female character of great determination.

Later in the story, Ruth seems willing to follow all of Naomi’s orders—though more in words than in deeds. She tells Naomi she will do everything she was told (3.5), but instead of waiting for Boaz to speak, as Naomi had instructed, she tells Boaz what to do before he can speak (3.9). Trible sees Ruth as a “defier of custom, maker of decisions,” working in partnership with God as a “paradigm for radicality” (Trible 1978, 184). Yet the framework within which Ruth and Naomi both work remains a patriarchal one, with patriarchal goals. There is nothing radical except perhaps Ruth’s directness, and certainly no indication in the text of any “partnership with God.”

Fuchs feels that the patriarchal ethos is the driving force behind the story. In her view, Ruth does not act independently, but rather in strict compliance with patriarchal goals, remaining faithful forever to her dead husband and his family. Ruth renounces her own culture and heritage to follow her mother-in-law Naomi, because she is the mother of Ruth’s husband. Ruth sacrifices her freedom and even identity to perpetuate the identity of her late husband and father-in-law.
Ruth, in this view, is depicted as a heroine only because of her faithfulness to her deceased husband’s patrilineage (Fuchs 1985, 118, 130). Fuchs states that “Ruth’s loyalty to her husband’s family is unprecedented” (Fuchs 2000, 74). But she cannot presume to know Ruth’s motives any more than other readers. By reading into the text and finding all of Ruth’s motives to be based on patriarchal goals, Fuchs makes unwarranted assumptions to support her own agenda: that every biblical story is inspired by patriarchal ideology (Fuchs 2000, 7).

Sasson does not deny or discuss the quality of Ruth’s determination. He claims, rightfully, that we cannot assume her motivation was affection. She may have submitted herself totally to Naomi’s will in an almost slave-master relationship because she knew this was her best hope (Sasson, 124). Brenner supports this view, arguing that Ruth could be compared to foreign workers of any era, who are contracted, basically invisible, hard workers, with their only hope of integration into the host society being marriage (Brenner 2000, 159-60). For me, this does not explain her motivation any better than affection. If these theories are correct, we still do not know why only Ruth was motivated in this way, and Orpah was not. The motivation remains opaque. In librettos and music, affection between the women is easier and more appealing to depict as a motive; but this is midrash, not simply interpretation.

Before Ruth and Orpah make their decisions, they weep for, or with, Naomi (1.9). This expression נושאות קולות, literally “they raised their voices and wept,” (my translation), or “they broke into loud weeping” (Sasson, 22), is found with a woman as the subject in only one other place in the Bible, referring to Hagar (Gen. 21.16). It is never found in the feminine plural. Other women who weep, the verb נשבה, are Delilah (Jud. 14.16-17), where it is a manipulative act: Jephthah’s daughter, who weeps for her virginity (Jud. 11.38); Hannah (1 Sam. 1. 7,10), and Esther (Esther 8.3), who cries in front of the king to manipulate him.

The expression נושאות קולות in other Ancient Near Eastern literature can indicate a formal rather than an emotional state. It is found as a formulaic expression for the speeches of gods or demigods in Ugaritic poetry. Cassuto believes the expression may have also existed in the Hebrew epic tradition, of which only traces are found in the Hebrew Bible (Cassuto, 75). The fact that this phrase was chosen rather than the simple verb נשבה could be a way of showing conventional behavior. But like women ululating at a funeral, adopting a convention does not mean there is no sentiment behind the conventional behavior.

There are several occurrences of the phrase נושאות קולות with males as the subject.12 Most of these examples are expressions of intense grieving, yet none occurs in response to a separation (except death). At the same time, the expression could indicate conventional behavior, especially in the instances of public grieving by Saul and David. The choice of this expression here may indicate the writer’s attempt to portray grief among women in a relationship who are forced to separate. Though the situation portrayed is unique, the verb has echoes of men crying out in various situations throughout the Bible, adding weight to the emotion of this scene but also highlighting the unconventional nature of the weeping as done by women.

12 Campbell finds significance in the reverse order of the verbs “wept” and “kissed” in 1.9 and 1.14. The effect is “to bracket artistically the episode of persuasion (Campbell, 32).” Also significant is the subject of the kiss: in 1.9, it is Naomi, but in 1.14 it is Orpah, who is offering a kiss of farewell.

13 In Gen. 27.38, Esau weeps over the blessing not received; in 29:11, Jacob weeps over joy at finding Rachel; in Num. 14.1, Jud. 2:4 and 21.2, and 1 Sam. 11:4, all the people weep; in 1 Sam. 24:1, Saul weeps; in 30:4, David and his troops weep; in 2 Sam. 3:32, David weeps over Abner; the princes weep over Amnon in 13:36; and Job’s friends weep in Job 2:12.
Ruth’s speech is at the center of chapters 1-3. In chapter 1, she proclaims her determination to follow Naomi (1:16-17); in chapter 2, she speaks to Boaz in a very different, submissive voice (2:13). In chapter 3, her determination is visible again in her very direct speech to Boaz (3:9b). The portrait of Ruth that ultimately emerges, through her speech, is that of a strong-minded woman who knows how to appear compliant while silently working towards her own goals.

Boaz is introduced, in 2:1, as רְאוֹז a “man of substance.” In a civil context, this would mean a man of worth or wealth. The label could indicate his financial well-being, social status, moral character, or all of these. The description could be either the narrator’s evaluation or a reflection of how Boaz is perceived in his community (Gunn and Fewell, 62). Brenner finds evidence in the text that Boaz is wealthy, has authority, and is legally knowledgeable. Readers tend to use the hypothesis of age as a marker of social standing. But none of Boaz’s qualities necessarily imply old age, and Brenner suggests Boaz may be a “young strapping adult, as in the unforgettable Hollywood movie” (Brenner 2002, 305).

The first word in Boaz’s mouth is יהוה, in his greeting to his workers (2:4). When he addresses Ruth (2:11-12), he mentions יהוה two more times, as well as the term לְעַנְתָּנוּ, God of Israel. When Boaz addresses Ruth in chapter 3, he includes יהוה in his speech two more times (3:10, 3:13). The significance of a character’s using God’s name is discussed in relation to librettos in chapter 7 (Table F, p. 221). In the Scroll, only Naomi mentions God (by any name) more often than Boaz (9 times to his 6). Ruth mentions God only twice, in her speech to Naomi when she accepts her God, לְעַנְתָּנוּ, Your God is my God (1:16) and in the next verse לְעַנְתָּנוּ. Thus may יהוה do to me (1:17). The fact that Boaz mentions God so frequently when addressing Ruth or his workers, but not at all in his legal dealings at the gate in chapter 4, could signify a greater level of formality when dealing with his social inferiors. In addition, because God as an active character is virtually absent in the Scroll (this chapter, p. 32), Boaz and Naomi could be seen as “stand-ins” for God’s role.

When Boaz tells his workers not to bother Ruth (2:15), he says עַל אֵלֶּה תַּלִּיאֲמָה יִשָּׁנֵם “without interference,” which Sasson defines “without rebuke.” In the hiphil form the verb לְסֹנָה is defined as “be put to shame, humiliated, dishonored” (BDB, 483) or “abused” (Sheffield v. IV, 426), suggesting that Boaz’s request to the workers regarding Ruth was stronger than most translations indicate. It also implies that there is greater danger to Ruth than mere rebuke or interference. The verb appears 38 times in the Bible but nowhere else in the imperative mode, lending an unusual quality to Boaz’s speech. This could be due to age or class difference, as discussed earlier (p. 22).

In chapter 3, when Boaz realizes who the woman at his feet is, he becomes quite talkative. His speech is an outpouring of relevant information, as if he had been waiting for this occasion. In the morning, his speech to her is shorter and more abrupt. A significant word that might indicate a new level of intimacy between them has been mistranslated in some commentaries (both in JPS and Sasson), though Campbell translates correctly. After Ruth and Boaz wake up, the text says: הָלַכֵּה אִשָּׁה שָׂמִית יִשָּׁנֵם “He said ‘Let it not be known that the woman came...’” This is usually translated “He thought, ‘Let it not be known...’ probably because there seems to be no object for the verb “said.” In the next verse, when he tells Ruth to hold out her shawl (3:15), there is also no object to the verb אֵלֶּה. “said.” The writer may be exploiting the general ambiguity of the biblical “said” between thought and speech here (Sternberg 1985, 97) to create a question in the reader’s mind. If Boaz mentioned the necessity
for secrecy, either out loud or directly to Ruth, it indicates a level of conspiracy that would require intimacy and understanding. This was dealt with by Josephus (ch. 3, p. 79).

Boaz’s speech patterns show the greatest variety between scenes. His speech changes depending on whom he is addressing. Thus in chapter 2 when he speaks to his workers and Ruth, he frequently inserts the name of God; he retains some of this formality when addressing Ruth in chapter 3, but seems less formal by the end of the scene. In chapter 4, Boaz is revealed as clever and manipulative, as his plan to obtain Ruth becomes clear to the reader. He no longer mentions YHWH, possibly because he is now acting on his own.

Another “character” in the Book of Ruth is the “chorus,” or “choruses,” which gain much more importance in some musical settings of the work. A chorus is absent only from chapter 3 in the Scroll, lending the scenes between Ruth and Naomi, and Ruth and Boaz, a sense of privacy absent from the rest of the narrative (Campbell, 130). The first appearance of a “chorus” is as a group of Bethlehemite women greeting Naomi (1.19): שֶׁפְּלֵה יָעַטְתִּיהָ נַעַם, “they (fem.) said, ‘Is this Naomi?’” (my translation). In chapter 2, the chorus is a team of reapers and gleaners who respond to Boaz’s greeting (2.4): יָעַטְתִּיהָ לְבַכֶּם יְהוָה. “They said to him, ‘may YHWH bless you’” (my translation). The chorus has the largest role in chapter 4 of the Scroll, where they are first the people and elders, then the women, then the women neighbors.

The women of the city who recognize Naomi (1.19) are in Campbell’s words “a Greek chorus” (Campbell, 166). Wherever they appear, they suggest a public and open setting. The reader can both hear and visualize the group of women, in spite of the very few words they speak. They are therefore a true character in the story. In addition, because women townspeople are present both at the beginning and ending of the Bethlehem scenes, they represent female solidarity and highlight the theme of female bonding (Meyers 2000, 253). This feminist interpretation is not overtly found in the text but is strongly suggested, merely by the fact that both groups are identified as female in these places.

When the women first see Naomi, the word used for their reaction (1.19), נִפְחָל אֶלְלֹהִים (niphal, waw conv. impf. of either the root בֵּיהַ or בֵּיה (Sasson, 32), has been translated several ways. In its qal form, the root means “to confuse or discomfit” (BDB, 243; Sheffield v. II, 504), to “rush about madly” (KBL, 228), or to “be out of one’s senses” (HAL, v. I, 243). In the niphal it means “to be in a stir” (BDB, 223; KBL, 228), “be in uproar, be distraught” (Sheffield, 504), or “be beside oneself, go wild” (HAL, v. I, 251). Sasson notes that the verb could mean “buzzing with excitement” or “expressing shock” (Sasson, 32). Zornberg defines the verb as “panic” and claims it is a very strong word (Zornberg, 66). In its noun form (נִפְחַל), the word means tumult and confusion (BDB, 223). Based on other appearances of this word, it seems to generally have a positive connotation, one of thrilled excitement (Zornberg, 66). Campbell, based on references to 1 Sam. 4.5 and 1 Kings 1.45, believes the verb connotes a reaction of delight, not pity (Campbell, 75). Based on other occurrences of the root, I think the only conclusion that can be
supported textually is that this verb connotes tremendous excitement, either joyful or frightened.1

The women’s excited response directs the reader’s attention to Naomi’s appearance. Though the writer left out any physical description of Naomi, the use of this strong verb paints a more vivid picture for the reader than any adjective could. It means the reaction of the women was intense, with an implication of either joy or chaos. It is left to the reader’s imagination to conjure an image of Naomi that might stir such excitement. This is expanded in the midrashic retellings (ch. 3, p. 62).

It is particularly interesting to compare the minimal appearance of the chorus of reapers in chapter 2 of the Scroll to the musical settings, in several of which they sing numerous and lengthy “peasant” choruses to musically establish a place and mood.

In chapter 4, the choruses at the city gate are made up first of the elders and people (4.11) and then the woman neighbors (4.15, 17). The “woman neighbors” may be a subset of the “women of Bethlehem” who welcomed Naomi on her return. The term for “woman neighbor,” שגרה, is found in only one other place in the Bible, in Exodus 3:22. The fact that such women’s networks existed is evident though barely visible (Meyers 2000, 254).

The women’s choruses seem to act as a mirror for Naomi’s condition. In chapter 1, they merely listen to her as she expresses her bitterness. Their lack of response to her, either positive or negative, is perceived as a gap that is filled creatively in several libretti (e.g., Franck, p. 135; Schumann, p. 158). At the end, in Naomi’s happiness, they name her grandson. This is assuming it is the same women, or a subset, as Meyers suggests (Meyers 2000, 120). In the three references to the women, three different terms are used. In 1.19, the women are not identified at all; only the female form of the verb נָפַל indicates a female group. In 4.14, they are called נָפַל, and in 4.17 נָפַל.

A female chorus ends the story (though not the text) in the Scroll, and Sasson sees special significance in this fact. He finds a vestigial trace of other Ancient Near Eastern literature in the naming scene. Female deities (transformed here into the women neighbors) were traditionally given the task of establishing the fate and future of newborn males, who in this tradition would invariably be kings (Sasson, 235). If there is any foundation to this theory, it would mark off the female chorus at the end of the book from the earlier choruses, primarily because of its unique function in naming the baby. This is the only place where the feminine plural form נָפַל.

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1 I located 5 other occurrences of the root:
Deut. 5:23: נָפַלְתָּה אֲלֹהֵי-אָדָם פָּנָיו מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַחֲרֹסַת גְּדוֹלָה

The use of both the qal perfect form of the verb along with the noun based on the same root makes it mean literally “threw into confusion and tumult.”

1 Sam. 4:5: נָפַלְתָּה אֲלֹהֵי-אָדָם פָּנָיו מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַחֲרֹסַת

In these two examples, the verb in the same niphal form found in Rashi, so the earth city was literally “in an uproar.”

Micah 2:12: נָפַלִּים נָפַלִים נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים

The verb here is in a hiphil form and is translated (JPS) as “noisy with.”

Psalms 55:3: נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים נָפַלִּים

The same verb in a cohortive hiphil. It is usually translated as “I moan” (JPS, for example).
appear in the Bible. Mothers name their children far more often than fathers in the Bible (a full listing is given in Pardes, 163), but never is more than one woman involved in the naming.

Though they have few words in the biblical book, the choruses still serve to establish a certain mood. Bal calls the “collective speakers...remarkable,” and describes their function as “thoroughly social.” They represent and express public opinion, much like the chorus in classical tragedy (Bal 1993, 54). They also serve this function in many of the librettos.

The character God is undeveloped in Ruth, yet nonetheless, commentators differ in their perceptions of God’s role. My interest is not primarily theological, yet because God is mentioned so frequently in many opera and oratorio adaptations of Ruth, I will present several views of God’s role in the Scroll.

On a superficial reading of Ruth, a reader might conclude that God plays no direct part in the action. As Linafelt puts it:

The human characters are quite obviously the primary actors, with God’s presence neither veiled nor hidden but, up until 4:13, simply missing (Linafelt, Introduction, xvii).

Readers with a theological agenda, however, believe the narrator meant to imply that God is present throughout. So Campbell, though admitting that God’s activity in the Scroll is in the shadows, also claims that “God is the primary actor in the drama.” Campbell bases this assertion on the numerous blessings and invocations found throughout the story (Campbell, 29). The fact that these expressions were probably formulaic and part of the writer’s own world or of the cultural milieu being depicted, does not deter him (Alter, World, 22).

When God “lets Ruth conceive” (4.13), God is granting something to Ruth that she never asked for or showed any interest in (Linafelt, 77). But according to Campbell, God brings about a peaceful resolution and causes human beings to care for one another (Campbell, 29). This theological interpretation predominates in rabbinic midrash, and later in oratorio settings of Ruth. For readers with this viewpoint, the underlying message is that divine and human action are often intertwined, and God blesses those who live righteous (Gunn and Fewell, 157).

This viewpoint is also found in Matthews’ commentary. When describing Naomi’s plight, he states that “Ultimately, she will be heard and her present state of emptiness will be filled” (Matthews, 223). Matthews is implying that God will take care of Naomi without actually saying so or claiming that the text says this. Matthews later states:

Behind the scenes of this domestic drama stand the covenant promise to Israel and a God who fills the needs of those who trust in that divine power (Matthews, 242).

In Matthews’ theological viewpoint, the genealogy of David demonstrates God’s devotion to fulfill the covenant (Matthews, 243), and the writer’s agenda was to show that God cared about the people.

Sasson, too, seems to believe that this was the message intended by the writer. In his words, “The tenor of the whole story makes it clear that the narrator sees God’s hand

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12 There are three other instances where the verb נשים כותבל appears: Exod. 1:10, Lev. 19:19, and Num. 25.2. In the first two of these, the use of the feminine is not significant. Only in the third does it refer specifically to a group of women, in this case the Moabites, calling the Israelites to worship their God. The only parallel with the use of נשים כותבל here in the Scroll is that in both cases, the verb indicates women imitating proactive behavior.

13 Berlin admits that these groups add interest and realism to the book, yet considers them more part of the setting than a character in their own right (Berlin 1944, 86).

14 Linafelt also makes an important point, namely that the Bible does not always assert a strictly providential view of events; it is quite diverse in its theological orientation (Linafelt, 28).
throughout” (Sasson, 44). In this view, the writer underplays God’s role for effect, subtly suggesting that even seemingly accidental events are guided by God (Sasson, 44). Elsewhere Sasson states that the episodes most often cited as indicative of a “hidden” God could also conform to Propp’s scheme of plot sequence. Since, Sasson notes, no character role can be assigned to God in Ruth, it follows that God’s involvement in the narrative is relatively inconsequential (Sasson, 221). Sasson seems to be making a distinction between what he perceives as the writer’s agenda, and what is actually in the narrative.

In my opinion, there is no basis for reading God into either the narrative or the writer’s intention. This impulse is an example of reader response. It is not really even gap-filling, since there is no gap in the story that needs God to fill it! But God is there in the background, frequently mentioned or invoked in blessings by the characters, until coming forward dramatically in 4.13.

Whatever God’s role is, it is closely bound up with the human characters. A picture of God can be constructed from the different beliefs of the characters. Boaz and Ruth seem to have a conventional, unquestioning attitude towards God (Gunn and Fewell, 83-5). Because Boaz believes in a God that rewards and redeems, Ruth can challenge Boaz to be a redeemer himself. Ruth calls on Boaz in his religious language, and he responds to the call (Fewell and Gunn 1990, 104). Yet Boaz does not fully respond to the foreign, infidel widow, Ruth according to his own religious law until she pushes him. This leads Phillips to the conclusion that the Scroll is more about shame than about God. It can be read as an indictment of the writer’s contemporary society for failing to give effect to principles of Hebrew law (Phillips, 16). Phillips here not only accepts the absence of God from the narrative, he also elaborates on the effect of God’s absence: namely, lack of adherence to God’s laws. Yet if the Scroll is an indictment of this lack, why does the situation end happily? In many narratives in the Book of Judges, a kind of anarchy takes over when Israel stops following God’s commandments (Jud. 2.18-20, 4.1-2, 6.1-2, 10.5-6, and many others). It is true that Boaz does not immediately take in the two indigent widows; yet he does treat Ruth with generosity and kindness (2.8-9, 14-15). He is following the spirit, if not the letter, of Hebrew law.

Naomi blesses her daughters-in-law by saying: "May YHWH deal kindly with you” (1.8) while a few verses later she complains that "היה טעם יתא行き, "the hand of YHWH has struck out against me” (1.13). Why is she calling on the same God who has made her life difficult, to bless Ruth and Orpah? Naomi apparently has a complex personal relationship with her God, accepting that the same God can mete out punishment and blessings.

In spite of this obvious ambivalence in the text, Tribe interprets the story theologically. She believes that human speech in Ruth interprets divine activity, and this speech itself is ambivalent. She admits that Ruth and Naomi move the plot forward, yet attributes a large role to chance, which to Tribe is a “code for the divine” (Tribe 1978, 170, 178). But any code is in the mind of the de-coder. Another place where Tribe detects a hidden code is in the vague phrase והיהether transmits "until you know how the matter turns out” (3.18) uttered by Naomi to Ruth. Tribe interprets this as “the divine plan in, through, and by human agents” (Tribe 1978, 187). But there is no reason not to take the phrase simply at face value: she and Ruth had done what they could; they now had to wait for a resolution, over which they no longer had control.

One of only two verses in the entire book that attribute activity directly to YHWH is בם יתא行き נוא "YHWH let her conceive and she bore a son” (4.13)”. This wording is unique in the Bible, as is God causing conception at the end of a story. The word נוא, pregnancy, appears only one other time in the Bible, in Hosea 9.11. Attributing conception to
Go does exist standard in the Bible; with different wording in each instance, the idea is the same in Gen. 21.1, 29.31, 30.22, and 1 Sam. 119-20. Yet Tribble takes God's role one step further, stating that "The gift of life resides neither in male nor in female, but in God...Intercourse between Ruth and Boaz is itself divine activity." Based on these observations, Tribble calls her interpretation of this "human comedy" a "theological interpretation of feminism" (Trible 1978, 193). This is an egregious example of interpreting a text based entirely on a particular viewpoint, in this case, a theologically affirmative one, and then forcing all the elements in the text to conform to that viewpoint.

Feminist interpretation adds a new twist to theological interpretations, by granting women a greater role in effecting change, viewing them as guided in this role by the same God that guides men. Frymer-Kensky approaches biblical texts with the same assumption. In an otherwise balanced chapter dealing with gender and image of women in the Bible, she inserts the sentence "The cunning and sometimes deceptive women in the Bible serve to effect God's purpose and actualize God's designs" (Frymer-Kensky 1992, 137). She may be speaking of the author's intent rather than her own view; Sasson was also unclear on this distinction.

Underlying theological assumptions remain common. Even Fewell and Gunn, who admit to having "rewritten" much of the Scroll when they say "Part I [of their book] is a retelling of the biblical story," claim that God pervades the story. They feel the reader "with ears to hear and eyes to see" can find God in much of the story (Fewell and Gunn 1990, 18, 104). But this is only because readers have been conditioned to find God at least lurking in the shadows of biblical narratives. There is no reason to insert God into a story when the writer did not do so him or herself. The evidence of a proactive and involved deity in the story of Ruth is scant, and to try to create a greater role for God in the story necessitates a firm belief that God simply had to be there or that at least the narrator wanted his readers to believe that.

There are similarities to the book of Esther, in which an active God is also absent. In the case of Esther, the later Greek translators altered the story, adding God's name, prayers, and other new elements. This is true for both Greek versions, the Septuagint and the second version, known as the A-version. This "correcting" of a text occurred in the case of the Scroll in rabbinic midrash (ch. 3, p. 57) and later in librettos (Table F, p. 221).

**PLOT DEVELOPMENT**

The initial situation in *Ruth* is famine in Bethlehem, leading to Elimelech's family migrating to Moab. The sequence leading to change comes ten years later, with the end of the famine and Naomi's return to Bethlehem after the deaths of her husband and two married sons. The outlook for a widow with her daughter-in-law struggling to make a life for themselves is not good, until the revelation of Boaz's presence as a potential redeemer, which leads to the eventual reversal of this dire situation. His presence leads to his nighttime encounter with Ruth, which leads to his manipulation of the legal situation allowing him to "redeem" Ruth by marrying her, leading to the final reversal, the birth of their son.

There is no true conflict in this story. There is no antagonist except chance (or God, as some would read it) which caused Naomi to find herself in such desperate straits in the first place. In the course of the story, Ruth and Naomi learn of Boaz's existence, while Boaz learns of theirs in relation to himself. All of this increased awareness leads to a happy conclusion. The "witness who learns" (ch. 1, p.101) is initially Boaz, who learns about Ruth; then Naomi, who learns of Boaz's presence; and ultimately, it is the reader who learns, about the role and importance of the redeemer (in chapters 3 and 4 of the Scroll).
An alternative way of describing the plot of the Scroll is to see it as a social drama focussed on Ruth, which involves a process in four stages. Anthropologist Victor Turner describes this pattern:

1. Breach between social elements;
2. Crisis;
3. Adjustment;
4. Reintegration of the group, person or "element" into the social structure. (Turner, quoted in Matthews, 207-8).

The story of Ruth fits neatly into this paradigm. In stage one, Ruth’s separation from Moab is her “breach,” which leads directly to the “crisis,” her need to face her liminality in the new social setting of Bethlehem. Obviously the famine itself is a crisis, but in this analysis the focus is on Ruth and not the external situation. For the “adjustment,” Ruth and Naomi must operate within the legal and social customs of the village culture. Ruth’s liminal character allows her to transgress certain physical and social barriers, and she and Naomi take advantage of this to move toward “reintegration” into the community. In this reintegration, Ruth finally moves from “outsider” to “insider” status (Matthews, 208).

A shift from the usual focus on men to a focus on women is seen near the start of the Scroll. The literary device that allows this shift is the death of all the men in the story. The women then set the story in motion, make plans, and carry them out to the desired resolution, albeit within a patriarchal framework. The Scroll opens with the phrase "and Naomi...heard and shared and comforted,” “A man went...with his wife and his two sons” (1.1: italics mine). In the opening two verses, the reader is told where Elimelech came from, why he emigrated, whom he married, and where he died. The lack of lineage, which is usually included when a male character is first introduced, is a clue that this will not be Elimelech’s story. The story starts with the death of males and ends with a female giving birth (Caspi Havrelock, 68), albeit to a boy.

Elimelech dies in 1.3, and his sons die in 1.5, where we read "לָכְשָה הַאָשֶׁר מִסְתַּנְנֵי לֶדֶר הַמִּצְרִי" “the woman was left without her two sons and without her husband” (italics mine). This progression can be clearly seen in the structure of chapter 2. In 2.2, Ruth speaks to Naomi; in 2.22, Naomi speaks to Ruth. The action that takes place in the field, described in 2.3-17, is bracketed by these verses. The women surround the episode with Boaz. Tribe offers a feminist interpretation in both design and content: the women shape their own story by planning (2.2), executing (2.3-17), and evaluating (2.18-22) (Tribe 1978, 180). This analysis could be applied to the Scroll as a whole. Encounter scenes of women together are key points of transition in the plot (ch. 1, p.11).

Female marginality in the Bible is often based on the condition of infertility; improvement in status in this instance would involve having children (Nuditch 1993, 21). A variant of this theme is present in the Scroll. Ruth is not marginalized because she is childless, but because she is a widow and a foreigner. Hers is a unique story of a non-Israelite widow who re-marries and bears a son.

Tribe highlights an interesting progression from the very start of the narrative. The opening verses relate what has happened and are all in the third person. Though this is fairly standard form. Tribe feels “the form of the introduction mirrors content, and its content mirrors

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15 Even Jephthah is described as the "son of a prostitute," whose father was Gilead (Jud. 11:1); Eleazar is introduced as "son of Jeroham son of Liba son of Lohu son of Zuph" (1 Sam. 11) even though he will not be the main focus of the story.
form” (Trible 2000, 166). Naomi gradually becomes less bitter and passive, more positive and active, in the story. The steady progress of her mood in the course of the narrative is an “action sequence” (ch. 1. p. 10), moving from an expectation to fulfillment of the expectation.

Numerous examples of speech-propelled action (ch. 1. p. 11) could be cited from Ruth, indicating the centrality of dialogue in biblical plot development. In 1.8, Naomi commands Ruth and Orpah to return to their mothers’ homes. Orpah obeys, but Ruth does not, setting the stage for all the subsequent action. The Bethlehemite women ask (1.19) “Is this Naomi?” and Naomi’s lengthy answer gives voice to the themes of emptiness and fullness as well as expressing her own bitterness. In 2.2, Ruth asks Naomi for permission to glean, setting off the chain of events leading to her encounter with Boaz. In 2.10, Ruth asks Boaz why he has favored her, and his answer makes clear that her kindness to her mother-in-law is not a secret in her new community. In 3.3, Naomi tells Ruth to go to the threshing floor dressed in her finery.

**GENRE**

If the Scroll is not a pre-exilic text, it could be considered a polemic against Ezra, in favor of intermarriage. But no matter when the Scroll was actually written down, it could still be based on an older folktale that existed in oral form. Dating the text is not a reliable means of determining genre or agenda (ch. 1. p. 12).

It is quite possible that Ruth was read or recited before an audience at some point in its development. Sasson offers evidence for this theory. First, the narrative is full of oral word-play, typical of materials (such as prophetic and poetic), meant to be presented orally. Sasson gives several examples, the most convincing of which is the play on the root word הָעִיר, “to recognize or know,” which appears in 2.10 in the same verse as הָעִיר, a (female) foreigner. This word appears again in 2.19, when Ruth is recounting her meeting with Boaz to Naomi. Second, Ruth is divided naturally into four major episodes or acts (the chapters), at the end of three of which there are verses summarizing previous action and previewing what is coming. Third, the language in several places suggests interaction between speaker and audience. There are two examples of “breaking frame,” in 2.1. and 4.7, where the narrator pauses to address the audience (or reader) directly. Because this only happens twice, it is the least convincing of Sasson’s arguments. Lastly, Ruth contains the highest ratio of dialogue to narrative text of all biblical books, making it potentially rich for dramatic presentation (Sasson, 227). Taken together, these elements do not prove Ruth was ever an oral work, but they offer strong evidence of that possibility.

Sasson considers the form of the Scroll to be that of a folktale. He attempts to substantiate this by reference to Propp, charting the plot side by side with Propp’s outline of the sequences and functions common to folktales. Sasson is careful not to label the Scroll an actual folktale, since this implies an “original” oral form, which cannot be determined with certainty. But he is convinced that the Scroll at least was created according to a folktale model (Sasson, 227). Brenner finds Sasson’s approach novel and attractive, but also finds weaknesses in it. I agree with her two main points. The first problem as she sees it—the exchange of roles between Naomi and Ruth throughout the plot—is not addressed by Sasson. Also, the “initial lack” as well
as the “reversal of fortune” pertain to both Naomi and Ruth (Brenner 1996, 76-7), where in the Proppian model it pertains only to the hero (Sasson, 201).

Life as depicted in the story is metahistorical, though it depends on the illusion of history (Landy, 293). Though Ruth is a story, not a history, Sasson believes the narrator nonetheless gives the tale “historicity.” For example, the story is introduced with the expression: יָניָיָי, “In the days when...” equivalent in folk literature to “Once upon a time.” The narrator then places the story in the time of the Judges. Sasson claims that because many biblical books presumed to be “historical” open with the word יָניָי, “and it was,” it can therefore be assumed that the author of Ruth regarded the events he recorded as belonging to his past (Sasson, 14, 36), and wanted the reader to draw that conclusion. The weakness in Sasson’s argument is that the word יָניָי appears 750 times in the Bible. It is standard vocabulary, part of a narrative formula marking that element of structure called exposition (Coats, 11). The particular expression יָניָי is found in only nine places, none of which opens a historical book. The only place using the expression to similar effect as the Scroll is the opening of the book of Esther. So its use in the Scroll would seem to be a signal that this is more a “fairy tale” than a historical account. The effect of this expression on the reader will differ based on the presumption of genre (chap. 1, p. 12).

Campbell labels Ruth a “historical short story.” Characteristics of this genre, which he believes to have been a new form, are, according to him: a distinctive literary style; focus on typical people; multiple messages; and a plausible plot (Campbell, 3, 5-10). Because of its realistic psychology and the way Ruth treats actual social institutions, Alter considers the book to be “verisimilar historicized fiction” (Alter, Art, 34). Beattie considers Ruth a short story, and lists his own three principles to support this: the narrative is coherent, intelligible, and credible (Beattie, 39-40). I think Beattie ignores the many gaps in the Scroll (this chapter, p. 45), which contradict these principles.

Humphreys also considers the Scroll to be a short story (along with Genesis 24, Jonah, and Daniel 1-6). His criteria are that these passages are brief and reveal the quality of a situation and character. The characters in these stories, Humphreys feels, are essentially the same at the end of the story as at the outset: they do not grow or develop. The reader just recognizes each character more clearly as the story progresses (Humphreys, 85). He differentiates this type of story from the novel, in which characters do develop, human beings grow and or disintegrate. Joseph is his example of a figure that is different at the end from the beginning. There is a difference between change in outward circumstances and inward change (Humphreys, 92). But Humphreys does not consider the length of time over which these stories supposedly took place. Change of circumstances normally is a factor in character development in any narrative, but the degree of development may depend on the period of narrated time (ch. 1, p. 7). For example, Naomi seems less bitter at the end of chapter 3 than she was in chapter 1, but only a few narrated months have elapsed. This is profoundly different from the Joseph saga (Gen. 37, 39-50), which takes place over a period of years.

Ultimately, any attempt to pigeonhole this narrative into one particular genre will sacrifice its uniqueness, the fact that it contains elements of more than one genre. For example, Sasson notes interpreters’ tendency to assign folkloristic terminology to Ruth and then to highlight its legal and theological aspects (Sasson, “Preface”). Ultimately it is limiting to try and categorize this (or any other) narrative (ch. 1, p. 12). Even though stories may appear similar.

17 Jud. 19.1, Isa. 7.1, Jer. 1.3 are three examples.
they are never identical. As Gunn and Fewell write, “Genres are constantly being stretched and broken, and every different text is potentially subversive of the genre.” They suggest allowing the Bible its complexity rather than confining it to convention (Gunn and Fewell, 49).

Argument can be made for the validity of approaching Ruth with no pre-conceived notions of genre classification. The Scroll can be read through different lenses, each colored by a different presumed genre. But after reading with these varied perspectives, we can go back and remove all the lenses, to read the text with at least the illusion of no preconceptions or presumptions about its genre.

INTERTEXTUALITY AND ALLUSIONS (ch. 1. p. 12)

Every biblical story is metaphorically a link in a chain, and though each link can be studied as a detached unit, its context must always be kept in mind (Sasson, 128). Though the Scroll might initially appear unconnected to the rest of the Hebrew Bible, several themes link it to that chain. The precise way in which they are linked can depend partly on the dates of the texts being compared, but as I have stated earlier (ch. 1. p. 12; ch. 2. p. 36), we never know with certainty when a narrative was written. I am aware that this element plays a part in intertextual analysis, but its complexity and tendency to lead to circular arguments preclude its inclusion in this analysis.

In this section I will discuss the following:

A) Themes
   1) Land, people, ancestry
   2) Type-scenes, counter-type-scenes, gender roles

B) Character allusions

C) Semantic allusions

D) Ancient Near East allusions

A. Themes

1. Land, people, ancestry

One theme connecting Ruth to the rest of the Bible is the land and the people. Land and people are part of the original covenant with Abraham in Genesis, and continue to be a predominant dual and interconnected theme throughout the narrative from Genesis to Kings.

The land theme is found in Ruth in several ways. Most obviously, Naomi is returning to her own land. Then there is a physical connection between Ruth and her adopted land, when she gleans in its fields. More importantly, the legal transactions around the land offered for sale or redemption by Naomi highlight the theme of proper land inheritance, a very important concept in the Bible. This concept goes back to the original covenant between God and Abraham, where God promises Abraham all the land that he can see (Gen. 13:14-16). The principle of proper land inheritance is the source of many biblical laws and narratives, from the division of property between Lot and Abraham (Gen. 13:8-12), to the claims of the daughters of Tzelotechad (Num. 27:1-11, Deut. 36), and the laws of the sabbatical and jubilee years (Lev. 23, 25). Relevant to the Scroll, in Leviticus 25, is the law of the 703 or redeemer, who must redeem land that his kinsman was forced to sell through economic necessity. In this way, the references to land in the Scroll do more than create a pastoral setting; they link the story to the biblical land theme, both private land and the land of Israel (Berlin 1994, 256-7).

Bethlehem has strong intertextual allusions through its associations with food (ch. 1. p. 8). Sasson points out that the region of Bethlehem was (and is) very fertile, producing abundant

38
wheat, barley, olive, almond, and grapes. This abundance may be the root of the town’s name, שִׁבְט יֵרְאֶה. It was known as “House of Bread Food” at least as early as the Amarna period (second half of the second millennium BCE) in folk etymology (Sasson, 15).

The harvest theme in the Scroll is linked to agricultural fertility, which is intertwined with eroticism and procreation throughout the story. Yet when Bethlehem becomes “infertile,” Llimclech seeks fertility in the fields of Moab, associated with the withholding of food. There he and his sons die childless, and the fields that had appeared fertile from afar become instead the graveyard of Llimclech’s lineage, the “burial ground of his own fertility” (Biale, 14). The Hebrew word for a barren, infertile woman or woman without offspring or descendants, כַּנּוֹל, literally means “uprooted” from the root רֶעֶנֶּשׁ ("to tear out, uproot"; HAL v. 2, 874; “to root up, weed”; KBL, 730). These allusions are used to create a paradoxical reversal of the expected. They also create a dialectic between emptiness and fullness that is a theme throughout the Scroll (Linafelt, 4). Leaving one’s land can cause infertility, and it is Ruth, the foreigner, who eventually restores fertility (Biale, 14).

Ruth, like Abraham, leaves her father and mother, the land of her birthplace, to come to a land she did not know before; Abraham does the same, except that he is carrying out God’s command and Ruth is not. The point of this allusion is to set Ruth up as a founding mother, symmetrically corresponding to the founding father (Alter, World, 51-2). In the course of their journey, Ruth and Naomi would have crossed the Jordan. Throughout the Bible, this is always documented as a momentous event (Caspi Havrelock, 150). It is not clear if it is regarded as equally momentous in this instance, where it is not specifically mentioned. If there is an intertextual allusion here it may have been unintentional.

Journeys catalyzed by famine are prevalent in biblical narrative. In most cases, these are viewed negatively; for example, in Gen. 12:10-20, Abram forces Sarai to pretend she is his sister, and she is taken into the Pharaoh’s harem. In Gen. 26:1-3, God explicitly commands Isaac to remain in the land. (This leads to Isaac calling Rebekah his sister instead of his wife, but the rape is discovered before Rebekah is endangered). Joseph might be considered an exception, but he did not leave the land voluntarily. The Scroll deviates from this negative view of a famine-induced migration, yet the rabbis in their midrashic retelling interpreted Elimelech’s departure in a negative light (ch. 3, pp. 57-58).

Closely related to the land theme, and even more prominent, is that of family and people. The ties that bind Ruth and Naomi are the most notable example. The two women were not family in any kin sense, yet Ruth chose to remain with Naomi and become Israelite. Identity was defined by religion and ethnicity: a Moabite was always a Moabite (Berlin 1994, 257). Moab and the Moabites have negative connotations in the Bible.15 That the author of Ruth was well aware of this can be seen by the frequent, often unnecessarily redundant, depiction of Ruth as the Moabiteess. For example, in 2:6 she is described as the “Moabite who came from the country of Moab,” stressing that she was not only a resident alien, but one who came from a despised country (Donaldson, 135).

In the end, though, when Ruth bears an heir for Naomi, the themes of land and family merge. The genealogy at the end raises the story to the national plane: the theme of family continuity becomes the theme of national continuity. Leah and Rachel are evoked as the two co-builders of the house of Israel, highlighting the brief but important moment of cooperation between them (Gen. 30:14-16, the story of the mandrakes). The themes found in both these texts

15 The Book of Deuteronomy explicitly states that the Moabites are to be excluded from the congregation of Israel. One reason given is that “they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt” (Deut. 23:3).
are those of the harvest season and the building of the house of Israel (Pardes, 101, 105). The Scroll is therefore part of the linked biblical stories, because it dramatizes one of the Bible’s main themes—the continuity of the land and people (Berlin 1994, 110).

If land and family are the main themes connecting Ruth to other biblical books, then David’s ancestry would be the main point of the Scroll. The connection to David elevates the status of the story, in a sense, just as much as the story seems to elevate David. Without the final verses of Ruth, the story would have remained unconnected to the Bible as a whole. The narrator in these final verses puts Ruth’s story in the proper context, linking the Scroll to the main narrative sequence from Genesis-Kings (Berlin 1994, 110).

Sasson accepts the ancestry of King David as one possible purpose of the Scroll (and the reason for its inclusion in the canon), and he makes a convincing case for the genealogy verses belonging to the narrative itself. They give the tale roots in an “historical” past, setting Boaz three generations away from David. They also offer a contrast and inclusio in a story that started in the drought of the period of the Judges and ended in the promise of the Davidic dynasty. In addition, hearing the familiar names of ancestors would have been pleasing to the audience of the time it was written, assuming it was at one point an orally presented work (Sasson, 181).

The theory that David’s ancestry was the purpose of the book is problematical, because it deflects the story of a common woman to that of a powerful king. Though this is a very common theory, it does nonetheless expose a certain prejudice (Fellwell and Gunn 1990, 92; they also give several references in an unnumbered note, 131). However, a plausible theory cannot be rejected because it is not palatable to the modern reader. Whether we read the genealogy at the conclusion of the book as a later addition or as an integral part of the story, might determine what we consider the agenda of the book—and vice versa. Such circular arguments can never be conclusive. The placement of the genealogy at the end seems to point to the ancestry of David as the overriding, if not necessarily the only, purpose of the Scroll.

Intertextual allusions can be made both forwards and backwards. Thus similarities can be found between David and Ruth. David left his parental home as a boy to become a member of Saul’s household. Like Ruth, he married into his new family and formed a close relationship with a family member of the same gender. In fact, David and Jonathan represent the only other same-sex friendship depicted in the Bible besides Ruth and Naomi (Frymer-Kensky 2002, 279).

Other possible connections between David and Ruth are the fact that David was an “eighth son” and the women refer to Ruth as “better than seven sons” (4,15). David also has a connection with Moab, as he convinced the king of Moab to allow his parents to take refuge there (1 Sam. 22.3-4). Both Ruth and David overcome social obstacles to become instrumental in redeeming the land for following generations (Matthews, 242).

Another link between Ruth and David is the city of Bethlehem itself. David’s birthplace. Amit suggests that the story of the concubine of Gibeah (Judg. 19-21) “implies that a person reflects his or her birthplace” (Amit, 125). In that story, the favorable reception of the Levite and his concubine in Bethlehem is contrasted with their frightful reception in Gibeah. Since David came from Bethlehem and Saul from Gibeah, Amit suggests that the cities acquired a positive or negative image by association with the kings who were born there (Amit, 125). By extension, Ruth’s giving birth to Obed in Bethlehem also takes on these positive connotations.

14 Sasson also insists it is an error to claim any single purpose for this book. In fact he considers it presumptuous and insensitive to claim a single purpose for any writing of the Ancient Near East (Sasson, 232). There has been much debate about whether the final verses of Ruth are even integral to the story or are only an appendix, possibly added later.
2. Type-scenes: Counter-type-scenes

According to Alter, Ruth's story is aligned with the betrothal type-scene found in earlier biblical narratives. A type-scene is significant because it attaches a particular moment to a larger pattern of both historical and theological meaning. In the standard betrothal type-scene, the future bridegroom (or a surrogate) journeys to a foreign land. There he encounters a girl or girls at a well, an obvious symbol of fertility. Someone draws water from the well, and the girls rush home with news of the stranger's arrival. The conclusion is a betrothal between the stranger and the girl (Alter, Art. 52).

In the Scroll, this betrothal type-scene has been altered: the protagonist is a heroine, not a hero, and her homeland is Moab, so she meets her future mate on "foreign soil" which is actually Judea (Alter, Art. 59-60). The well and its water are substituted by the harvest, equally a symbol of fertility. The significance of the allusion to a type-scene is its intimation of Ruth's future as the progenitrix of the divinely chosen house of David (Alter, Art. 58).

Taking Alter's ideas several steps further, the entire Scroll could actually be read as a counter-type-scene. A female encounters the male candidate for marriage after she has already traveled to a foreign land. The encounter itself is initially planned by a second female. It takes place on the threshing floor, a substitute symbol (possibly) of fertility. The gift of grain (instead of water) offered by the man symbolizes the life that will follow. The gift is passed to Naomi by Ruth, as she will later pass another gift to Naomi, her son. The woman leaves the place of encounter and announces the success of the encounter to another woman (Bos. 64). These reversals of narrative expectations regarding gender highlight the allusion, signaling that Ruth is more proactive in the narrative than traditional gender roles suggest (Linafelt, 35).

Fuch's finds more radical contrasts with the original betrothal type-scene. The water-drawing motif that usually serves to dramatize the strength and ability of the prospective bridegroom here highlights Boaz's protectiveness and Ruth's helplessness (Fuch's 2000, 106). This is not surprising, since the gender reversal that makes Ruth the heroine should not be expected to also attribute a man's strength to her. The meal Ruth is invited to is not the conclusion of a betrothal agreement as in other betrothal type-scenes, rather just another indication of Boaz's generosity and Ruth's neediness (Fuch's 2000, 107). But the plot of the Scroll differs in many aspects from the other betrothal type-scenes, and in this plot Ruth is the needy widow while Boaz is the wealthy landowner. A reversal of those roles would be completely unrealistic for a story coming out of the Ancient Near East.

As Fuch sees it, the role reversal interpreted by other commentators as giving Ruth the status of a hero, does not change the underlying power-structured relationships between the sexes as in other betrothal type-scenes. Whatever betrothal motifs there are in the Scroll, they confirm the bride's subordination to the groom, rather than extolling the woman's independence or self-determination (Fuch's 2000, 106-7). But biblical females are virtually always depicted as subordinate to males, that was the world-view of the writer and probably reflected his social reality. Within this framework, I believe Ruth can be considered a hero even if she is subordinate to Boaz.

Fuch takes issue with the comparison to betrothal type-scenes because the narrative is missing their distinctive structure, in spite of the dominance of the betrothal theme in the Scroll. One of the key functions in the normative betrothal type-scene is YHWH's involvement in the fate of his chosen heroes, and this is absent in the Scroll. The whole story revolves around Ruth's successful betrothal, while the betrothals of male heroes are never the major focus of their narratives: they are only stages on their road to greater accomplishments. Ruth's raison d'etre is
her betrothal; she exists for the betrothal, not vice versa. Ruth, as a reproductive agent, is the means to an end, patrilineal continuity from Perez to David via Obed; this is why she is transformed from a heroine in chapters 1-3 to chattel, a passive object of Boaz’s transactions, in chapter 4 (Fuchs 2000, 108).

Fuchs has argued convincingly that the Scroll cannot be read strictly as a counter type-scene. But when she claims that Ruth’s only motivation is loyalty to her late husband and his mother, not her attraction to Boaz (Fuchs 2000, 109), she is less convincing. No reader, including Fuchs, is privy to Ruth’s private thoughts, sexual needs or taste in men; but Fuchs simply finds these elements irrelevant. In Fuchs’s reading, the overriding element is the writer’s patriarchal message. Because Ruth is a childless widow, she is portrayed as acting in the interests of her father-in-law and deceased husband—and vice versa. This circular argument ignores Ruth’s professions of loyalty to Naomi and the relationship between the two women, the most unique elements of the Scroll.

B. Character allusions

There are obvious allusions in Ruth to the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38). The fact that at the end of the Ruth story, the people and elders invoke Rachel and Leah and the house of Perez “whom Tamar bore to Judah” as models for Ruth and Boaz (4.11-12), would seem to support the intentionality of the allusions. (Interestingly this verse is not found in any libretto). Yet there is an important difference. In the Genesis story, the sexual improprieties are essential elements of the drama, whereas in Ruth, the writer remains silent about these elements which may be there. The language in chapter 3 of the Scroll is certainly suggestive, but it remains ambivalent and certainly nongraphic, which cannot be said for Judah’s language in Gen. 38.16, where he says to Tamar, יִשְׂרָאֵל נָכָרָה נִני. “Let me come into you.” Therefore it is possible that the story of Ruth in some way “redeems” the antecedent story about Ruth’s and Boaz’s ancestors (in Genesis 38) (Aschkenasy 1986, 88), as well as echoing it.

The reference to Perez, Tamar and Judah is a triple intertextual link: the son Obed, in van Wolde’s analysis, is compared to Perez, Ruth to Tamar, and Boaz to Judah. Once these relationships are seen, the reader becomes aware of the many similarities between the two narratives (van Wolde 1997, 433). Some of van Wolde’s connections are inaccurate because she is seeing similarities that are not really there, and then reading relationships into the text.

Van Wolde sees numerous similarities between Ruth and Tamar: their “seductions” involve older male relations and aspects of dressing up to be more attractive, while being partially disguised; they occur in a public place; their purpose is to bear a male heir for the survival of their dead husbands’ names: both women are praised by the men of Bethlehem (4.12) but are erased at the conclusion. Both become pregnant immediately; and Ruth’s son is called the son of Boaz (4.17, 21) as Tamar’s is called the son of Judah and Tamar (van Wolde 1997, 436).

There are a few problems with this analysis. Both Boaz and Judah may be “older,” but nowhere in the text are they described as “elderly,” as van Wolde calls them. Tamar clearly “seduces” Judah, but the same cannot be said for Ruth, as the text in chapter 3 remains ambiguous. Purpose and intent on the part of Tamar and Ruth are nowhere stated explicitly in the text: so these are not facts, but mere assumption on van Wolde’s part.

Biale, n. 13, 235).
In both stories, women’s actions clearly result in transformation. The openings of both stories depict fathers leaving, while the endings depict births and name-givings of sons. The husbands of the two foreign women have no narrative significance, because the main point in these two narratives is the ongoing life of Judahites and the role of certain foreign women who made it possible (van Wolde 1997, 434).

Significantly, the narrator in both stories represents female points of view and voices. Gender, plus the theme of inside-ness and outside-ness, are important features of both stories, and are better understood when the stories are read together (van Wolde 1997, 437, 438).

Intertextual allusion may be extended from the stories of Tamar and Ruth to that of Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19,30-38). These have been called the three “temptation scenes” (Fuchs 2000, 74: in my view an inaccurate term, as discussed above). All three open with a woman for two women in the case of Lot’s daughters) without a husband or child. The fate of the mother in all cases is incidental to the product, namely a male son. The mother-figures in all three cases are valorized for their promotion of the stability of a patriarchal genealogy. Ruth’s story, in this analysis, can be seen as a glorified example of the temptation type-scene (Fuchs 2000, 90). I do not consider Ruth a temptress, but I agree with Fuchs’s view of the writer’s agenda.

There are other similarities between the stories of Lot’s daughters and Ruth. The posterity of their houses, in both stories, is in peril, leading the women to act unconventionally to preserve it. In order to support the primal principle of patrilineal lineage, the women subvert the cultural norm of conventional sexual mores (Frymer-Kensky 2002, 263).

There is also an intertextual allusion to Rachel and Leah. Commentators have noted the difference between Rachel and Leah’s competitive relationship and the more cooperative one between Ruth and Naomi. The Scroll seems to revise the earlier story, transforming it from rivalry to harmonious sharing. There is a brief prefiguration of female cooperation in one scene, when Rachel sends Leah to lie with Jacob in exchange for mandrakes (Gen. 30,14-16). That momentary change in dynamics, occurring during the harvest season, becomes a continual moment in the Scroll, which occurs entirely in that season. The season of ingathering highlights another key issue linking the two texts: building the house of Israel. The past is invoked to empower and consecrate the marital union of Ruth and Boaz (Pardes, 105).

Brenner discusses the Ruth-Naomi relationship in terms of paradigmatic pairs of women involved in the birth of a hero (Brenner 1993, 209). Within this paradigm, the cooperation between Naomi and Ruth is exceptional. In their story, a hero is born through the abolition of what had previously been considered conventional female behavior, namely, strife. Brenner sees this change in depiction of women as a possible indication of female authorship (Brenner 1993, 221). It could also indicate a male writing from a female perspective.

C. Semantic allusions

A single word with particular intertextual resonance is another kind of allusion. The Scroll is a straightforward narrative about people, so it is not valid to ascribe figurative or

71 Paired women throughout the Bible tend to be in opposition to one another (for example, Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, in Genesis). Two exceptions, where women speak directly to each other in a cooperative fashion, are also in Genesis. In one of these (Gen. 19,32), Lot’s unnamed daughters conspire to get their father drunk and then lie with him. One result of their incestuous acts was the birth of Moab, progenitor of the nation of Moab. Therefore their act (in the biblical story) ultimately made Lot the ancestor of Ruth. Similarly, the dialogue between Rachel and Leah (Gen. 30,14-15), in which Rachel gives Jacob to Leah for one night in exchange for the supposed fertility plant, the mandrake, may be implied to lead to Rachel’s pregnancy and the eventual birth of Joseph. It may or may not be coincidental that these lone examples of women in dialogue had such monumental historical import, leading directly or indirectly to the story of Ruth and Naomi, in which women in dialogue take center stage.

43
symbolic meaning to terms found there (Beattie, 3). On the other hand, Liniafelt correctly points out that the reader can see the hint of a secondary meaning without denying the primary sense of a word: that is the whole point of allusion (Liniafelt, 39). Whether an allusion is in the reader's imagination or was the author's intent will never be known.

The word "cling, cleave, keep close" (BDB, 179; KBL, 199), "adhere" (Sheffield v. II, 385), or "stick to" (HAL, v. 1, 209) may signify desire, love, affection, or loyalty. It is an example of how words for various manifestations and levels of "love" are loaned from other semantic fields. The word essentially has a concrete physical reference, "to be physically very close to" (Brenner 1993, 20). As applied to Ruth, "cling" to Naomi, the word has been connected by most commentators to its first biblical usage, Gen. 2.24. Where a "man clings to his wife." Berquist extends the allusion much further. He claims that this verb is most commonly used to describe clinging to God, but I disagree. In reality, out of a total of 56 biblical occurrences, only eight have God as the object (Deut. 10.20, 11.22, 13.5, 30.20; Josh. 22.5, 23.8; 2 Kings 18.6; Ps. 63.9), fewer than references between humans. Of these eight, the first six are commands by Moses or Joshua to the Israelites, addressed either in the male singular (twice) or the plural (four times). In 2 Kings 18.6, Hezekiah is the subject of the verb; in Ps. 63.9, the "soul" of the psalmist is the subject.

Berquist claims there are only eight references to clinging between humans, four of which are in Ruth, but there are actually eight in addition to Ruth, even if they do not all refer to only two people (Gen. 2.24, 34.3, Num. 36.7 and 9, Josh. 23.12, 2 Sam. 20.2, 1 Kings 11.2, Prov. 18.24). The most often cited references are Gen. 2.24, where a man "clings" to his wife, and Shechem's soul "cling"ing to Dina in Gen. 34.3. Those occurrences referring to more than two people are Num 36.7 and 9, where the Israelites "cling" to the remnant of their tribe; Josh. 23.12, where the Israelites are instructed not to "cling" to the remnants of the other nations and intermarry among them; in 2 Sam 20.2 the Judaithes "cling" to their king, from the Jordan to Jerusalem (the verb is mis-translated in JPS as "accompanied"); 1 Kings 11.2 refers back to the command given in Josh. 23.12 not to "cling" to the remnants of other nations, precisely what Solomon did "cling" to, as well as "love"; Prov. 18.24 refers to a friend who "clings" more than a brother.

Of the numerous other uses of 727, several refer to the tongue "clinging" to the palate (Ezek. 3.26, Ps. 137.6, Job 19.20, 29.10, Lam. 4.4). Other things that "cling" are sins, evil, famine, leprosy, bones to skin. This all points to a word standing for an intense joining together. It is not coincidental that this root is found in the modern Hebrew word for "glue."

Berquist further claims that the verb refers to a male's initiating love, marriage, or sexual relations, which I have just shown is only so in two instances, although in all cases it refers to men only. He is correct that it never describes a woman's act except in Ruth. Berquist explains this exception by calling it "role dedifferentiation": there are not enough men in this story to fill typical male roles, so women fill some of them (Berquist, 26-7; this chapter pp. 40, 43 for gender reversals). But text analysis shows that the verb 727 is not necessarily an allusion to sexual love; it is rather a general indication of a powerful attachment which may or may not include sexual

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1 Beattie refers specifically to the error of using an Ezekiel passage, clearly figurative, to define the meaning of "spread the skirt over" in the more literal Ruth passage.

2 Liniafelt further remarks that the writer's choice of words with potential double meaning is deliberate. These ambiguities are part of the narrative art (Liniafelt, 55). But caution must be taken as always in trying to determine the writer's intent. We can judge only the effect of the ambiguity, not whether it was intentional or not.
love. The fact that it is used only here to describe a woman's actions towards another woman may indicate an unusual attempt by a writer to depict a strong attachment between two women.

The oath formula Ruth uses in her pledge to Naomi resonates with other biblical passages referring to covenant and contract (Frymer-Kensky 2002, 241). King Jehoshaphat of Judah used the same form twice, in 1 Kings 22.4 and 2 Kings 3.7 (with an almost exact repetition in 2 Chron. 18.3). In both of these, he says: "I will do what you do; my troops shall be your troops; my horses shall be your horses." Jonathan's oath to David (1 Sam. 20.42) uses similar wording, but unlike Frymer-Kensky, I do not see the precise similarity in form of that oath to Ruth's. "May the Lord be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!" does not have the same sense or rhythm of the other oath quoted here.

Another word with possible allusions is אַלָס, "open field, land, country" (BDB 961). It can also mean "pasture, territory of a tribe or people" (HAL. v. 3, 1508). The word appears about two hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. In the Scroll, it appears 16 times, four of which are in the first six verses, and six of these times together with אַלָס. In some biblical passages this noun conveys an esoteric message, such as the coming of a miraculous event (Caspian and Cohen. 79). Several examples would be Isaac meeting Rebecca (Gen. 24.63); Joseph wandering in the field (Gen. 37.15); Samson's mother encountering the angel in the field (Jud. 13.9); and Jonathan meeting David in the field (1 Sam. 19.3, 20.35). We do not know if אַלָס (also found in Gen. 36.35) is the name of a specific place, such as the "domain of Moab" (KBL. 915) or of a generic field. Any allusion could be imaginary--sometimes a field is just a field. And sometimes it isn't. But nonetheless we should never jump to allusions.

Ruth and Boaz's encounter occurs at midnight: (3.8), another intertextual allusion. Sasson points out numerous other examples of midnight as a "time of reckoning" in the Bible (Exod. 11.4, 12.19; Job 34.20; Jud. 16.3, 1 Kings 3.20; and others; Sasson, 74). Linfelt, too, notes that the term is often used to indicate a time of ambivalent destiny, "the moment of both terror and exhilaration, of promise and threat" (Linfelt, 52). In addition to the Exodus moment, he also mentions Jacob wrestling with an angel in the middle of the night. Midnight as a liminal moment is also a theme in folklore of other cultures.24

The word גַּלָס, threshing floor (chap. 3), according to some commentators is biblically associated with fertility and licentiousness (Landy, 289). The intertextual allusion here would be Hosea 9.1, מֶלֶךָ אֶלֶף הֵלַם נֵלָס נֶלָס נֵלָס אִישׁ לַמֶּלֶךָ הֵלַם, "You love fornication on every threshing floor."

Linfelt notes that if this Hosea verse is any indication, threshing floors were associated in the Israelite mind, even if not in actuality, with illicit sexual activity. This could be associated with the simple fact that working men took advantage during the harvest to have sex with women workers (or prostitutes).

Words can have multi-layered meanings. There are 35 occurrences of the term גַּלָס in the Hebrew Bible, and only in two is it found in a scene of licentiousness: besides the Hosea reference, in Jer. 51.33. Babylon is said to be "like a threshing floor ready to be trodden." Hosea (9.2) and Micah (4.12) use the term גַּלָס in metaphors. Elsewhere, it is simply a threshing floor in the plain sense of the word, until 2 Sam. 24.16, where an angel was seen at the גַּלָס, the threshing floor of Araunah. After this incident, this particular threshing floor takes on great importance: later David sacrifices there and Solomon builds a temple on that site. The term גַּלָס

24 Two examples that spring immediately to mind are Hamlet's vision of the ghost of his father, and the story of Cinderella. Both depict midnight as a liminal moment between fantasy, or the spirit world, and this world.
seems to take on an aura of sanctity after the story in 2 Samuel, and it was clearly an important symbol of the harvest and hence of Israelite survival throughout biblical history. There are many examples where the threshing floor, coupled with the winepress, is an economic indicator of prosperity or the abundance of the land (Matthews, 231, footnote 34). But to claim it is a symbol of sexual licentiousness is not supported by textual evidence.

Though the Scroll plays on the image of fertility, with Boaz lying “beside the grainpile” (בר Cp 30), and though there is an abundance of verbs such as “know, come to, lie” together with “feet” and “expose,” all of which are usually found in a seduction context (Brenner 1993, 22), it still cannot be claimed that the writer was making a deliberate allusion to any of these broader themes through the use of the word נַשֵׁה.

D. ANE References

Intertextual reading is not limited to the Bible itself, but can encompass other literature of the Ancient Near East. Sasson suggests that the activities described in 4.16-17 are vestigial motifs, decipherable according to Near Eastern symbolism (Sasson, 237). He refers to Near Eastern documents that allude to divine interference in human affairs with the goal of singling out a future king as a favorite of the gods. The acts include visitation for the purpose of establishing fate, placement on a woman’s lap for the purpose of breast feeding, and conferring a name on the child—all of which are found in those two verses of chapter 4 (4.16-17). In addition, the involvement of a group of women, and non-relatives, in naming the child is unique in biblical texts (Sasson, 173), and has not been satisfactorily explained otherwise.

In conclusion, understanding biblical references places Ruth in a particular context, and understanding that context becomes, in Amit’s words, “a two-way process of enrichment: it enhances the framework, which in turn enhances and deepens the story itself” (Amit, 146).

GAP FILLING

The numerous details absent from the Scroll result in ambiguities. We are not told what Ruth, Naomi, or Boaz look like, how old they are, how shy or open, effusive or reticent, they are (except based on our individual interpretation of their speech). This could be an argument for the Scroll as an oral narrative, where characters are more “universal” and the blanks are left up to the individual story-teller to embellish. Much readerly gap-filling falls into the category of what Exum calls “romantic gap-filling” (Exum, 163).

I will list and discuss the main gaps in the story by category, chapter by chapter. How these gaps are filled by the rabbis in midrash and later by librettists and composers, will be the subject of subsequent chapters.

Action Time

Chapter 1: After Naomi’s husband had died, her sons married Moabite women and lived in Moab for about ten years (1.4). We can only speculate about that time interval: At what point in that ten years did the marriages take place? Were they happy marriages? How were Israelite men married to Moabite women treated? Was the (presumed) inability to bear children an issue for the couples? The ten-year period without children is a central theme of other biblical stories; here it is just glossed over. Perhaps this is because it is never overtly stated that the couples were married at the start of that ten-year period.

Naomi hears there is food in Bethlehem (1.6). Did this news reach her by courier? Was it common to know where there was famine and where there was food? The story of Joseph and his brothers would seem to indicate there was some way of communicating this information in the
ancient world: Jacob tells his sons, “I hear...that there are rations to be had in Egypt” (Gen. 42:2). The trip to Bethlehem is not described in terms of duration or difficulty. Scholars who know the geography well have estimated the length of such a trip. Was it more than a week? Did they have all their belongings with them? How did they carry it all themselves? How far did they walk before Naomi sent them back?

When Naomi enters the city, the whole city is astir (1:19). It is vague whether people are surprised when they first spot her, or whether they had advance notice she was coming. Did a scout spot her and Ruth’s approach? Could the whole city have appeared on such short notice? (for the midrashic response, ch. 3, p. 55).

Chapter 2: Only Ruth goes out to glean; why Naomi does not is left to the reader’s imagination. Perhaps she was too bereft in her mourning to go out among people. Or maybe she was too old to work, or perhaps she thought the younger woman would be more likely to attract a potential patron to help them (Matthews, 225).

One of the more striking contrasts between summary account and described scene is where 2:1-22 describe the events of Ruth’s first day, and 2:23 recounts that Ruth remained with her mother-in-law while she gleaned through the barley and wheat harvests. Whether the two women grew closer as they shared meals every night, and whether Ruth continued to see Boaz on a regular basis in the fields all this time, are left to the reader’s imagination.

Boaz asks the overseer to whom Ruth belongs, when he comes to supervise the day’s reaping (2.5); but a few verses later, he turns to speak to her (2.8). Where is Ruth when he asks the initial question? Are we to suppose she stealthily approached when she first saw Boaz? Then Boaz informs Ruth he already knows all about her history: if this is all the same day, did word travel that fast? Did everyone in Bethlehem already know the whole story—without ever going online?

Ruth has food left over after her meal with the reapers (2:14). Four verses later (2:18), this food reappears as a gift to Naomi. Where and how did Ruth keep it while she gleaned? Did they provide her with a doggy bag? And when Ruth returns to Naomi every day after gleanings, where exactly are they living? Has Naomi forgotten she owns a field?

Chapter 3: Boaz first mentions the next of kin in 3:12. If he knew about this person all along, why did he never tell Naomi? He must have realized that this male relative could be the key to solving all their problems. Did he only now recall his existence? How did Naomi know Boaz would be at the threshing floor (3.2)? Since she was aware that Boaz would be spending the night there after eating and drinking, this particular group of activities was obviously known to the society for whom the author wrote. It was probably a Bethlehemite practice linked to ceremonial or even cultic preparations (Sasson, 65).

One of the most glaring omissions in the story is, what happened on the threshing room floor? How much is the reader supposed to read between the lines? On certain occasions, some interpreters believe a gap is intentional. For example, both Campbell and Sasson believe the writer of Ruth meant to be “ambiguous and hence provocative” in the scene on the threshing floor (Sasson, 71; Campbell, 121). Caution should be exercised here as always in trying to determine the writer’s intent, even though there are several clear allusions. Expressions like the

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5 Caspi suggests 4-5 days, over challenging terrain and across the Jordan (Caspi Havlock, 150).

6 The contemporaneous reader would not have found this at all confusing, whereas interpreters of our day have come up with a variety of (probably incorrect) explanations for what appears to us an odd custom. Boaz’s nocturnal activity is usually explained as a vigil to protect his grain from thieves.
down,” “to know,” and uncovering the legs, are all well-known biblical euphemisms for sexual relations.

Later readers really cannot know if the language used in that scene would have been understood less ambiguously in an earlier era. It is possible that the writer thought the action was so obvious that there was no gap at all. In any case, the fact that we will never know what the writer wanted us to think is an indication of the level of his or her art.

Chapter 4: Are we to believe it is more than mere coincidence that the redeemer Boaz wants to see, appears the moment Boaz sits at the gate? Or is it such a small community that this would not have been unusual? And why is this person, so important in the plot, never given a name? (for midrashic response, ch. 3, pp. 55-6)

Another summary account that leaves much time unaccounted for is in 4.13: Boaz took Ruth, she conceived, she gave birth. After this verse, Ruth and Boaz drop from the story. What kind of a relationship did they have? Were they happy to have a child together? Was Ruth surprised, after her presumed previous ten years of infertility? The reader with imagination can even conjure an old Boaz and Ruth surrounded by children.

Cause-Motive

Chapter 1: Why did Ruth and Orpah marry foreigners? Were there no Moabite men available? Or were Israelite men a better catch? The text states that Naomi set out for Bethlehem with her daughters-in-law (1.6). Then two verses later, she tells them to go back (1.8). Had they accompanied her just to say goodbye? Or did she have second thoughts about bringing them with her? And why did they want to go with her? Were they perhaps outcasts for having married Israelites?

Nothing in the text explains a bond between the women more powerful than their ties to their own people and their own land. And if this kind of bond was the motivator, why did Orpah (after weeping) so abruptly change her mind? And why did Ruth not change hers? The tendency to base motives on emotional attachment is an example of “romantic gap-filling” (Exum, 163), and is predominant in all the librettos I will analyze (ch. 6).

Chapter 2: What is Boaz’s motive for his kindness towards Ruth? Is it, as he says, because he appreciates how loyal she has been to Naomi? Does he realize Naomi is a relation before chapter 4? And if he does, why does he ignore that fact until then?

Chapter 3: Why does Ruth answer Boaz’s question “Who are you?” with the request to spread his robe over her, against Naomi’s orders to let the man speak first? Is Ruth just impetuous, or does she realize she has to be proactive?

Character: Appearance Personal Relationships

Chapter 1: Naomi’s silences are as enigmatic as her speech. Her silence after Ruth’s eloquent pledge to her (1.16-17) can be interpreted a multitude of ways, running the spectrum from indifference to overwhelming emotion. Many librettos assign words to Naomi in this scene (e.g., Franck, p. 135; Mellers, p. 180; Berkeley, p. 191). By not describing how Naomi felt, the writer leaves her personality a blank to be filled by the reader. But the fact that the writer has provided such minimal dialogue for Ruth and Naomi on their journey to Bethlehem, or in the time they live together, should not lead the reader to believe they never spoke (Beattie, 68). The writer simply did not include what seemed superfluous to the plot.

17 In an intriguing interpretation, van Wolde argues that Ruth was naked during the encounter. This is based on the word הָרָותבּ missing its accusative marker נ, leading to the conclusion that Ruth was uncovering herself at the place of Boaz’s feet. Yet van Wolde does not suggest there were sexual relations (van Wolde 1997, 443). If this is accurate, then Boaz’s degree of self-control was justifiably lauded by the later rabbis (ch. 3, p. 71).
Why do the Bethlehemite women ask “Is this Naomi?” Is her appearance so profoundly altered after ten years? The rabbinic midrash is particularly creative in filling this gap (eh. 3, p. 62).

Chapter 2: Why, when Ruth mentions Boaz’s name, does Naomi only now tell Ruth he is a redeeming kinsman (2.20)? Did she forget such an important person, or did she withhold the information for some secret purpose? The fact that Boaz was a kinsman of Elimelech’s is mentioned in 2.1, but this is the narrator’s voice. It is not clear if Naomi remembered him at that point. She repeats the fact that he is a kinsman to Ruth in 3.1, at the end of the harvest, presumably because she thinks Ruth might have forgotten. The reader is never told the familial relationship of Boaz to Elimelech, or what the exact range of responsibilities of the (redeemer) are (Campbell, 109).

Chapter 2: Boaz praises Ruth for not going after young men (3.10). Whether rich or poor (3.10). This implies either that Boaz is not himself as young as these other men working alongside Ruth, or he is of another class. Is Ruth ever tempted to go after the “younger” men? Or does she have her heart set on Boaz from the start? Without knowing her appearance, the reader can only guess at her level of attractiveness to the men around her.

How the reader visualizes the threshing floor scene will be influenced by how that reader imagines Ruth and Boaz: young and attractive, older and plain, or a mixture of these. Readers might prefer to think of a sexual or even emotional attraction between Ruth and Boaz, and strong emotional ties between Ruth and Naomi. But such emotional responses between the characters can only be found in the blank spaces between the words of the text. Music, even more than librettos, fills in these spaces wordlessly but effectively (e.g., Fino, p. 148; Schumann, p. 163; Rumshinsky, p. 174).

Even the most sanguine of biblical interpreters, claiming to be interpreting the text and not writing a midrash on it, intersect their feelings. The first half of Fewell and Gunn’s Compromising Redemption is a modern midrash, and the second half is a commentary on that midrashic retelling. When they quote Boaz in 3.10, they claim “the sexual longing slips out from under a paternalistic and pious blessing extolling the virtues of loyalty. ‘May you be blessed by YHWH, my daughter,’ breathes Boaz” (Fewell and Gunn 1990, 85, italics my own). They continue in this vein when they claim “his desire for Ruth cannot be cloaked,” and “prove” this with the fact that his last, most telling move is to have intercourse with her (Fewell and Gunn, 87). They seem to ignore the dictates of the narrative itself, in their eagerness to portray a libidinous, heavy-breathing Boaz!

After Ruth’s night with Boaz on the threshing-room floor, Naomi says that she is sure he will settle the matter the same day (3.18). What makes her so sure? Does she know more about the night’s events, Boaz, and even the future, than anyone else in the story, or indeed, even the reader?

Whatever went on under Boaz’s cloak, or in Naomi and Ruth’s house, is as masked by midnight darkness as when it was first written. And that is how rabbis, poets, playwrights, scholars, artists, and composers, could return time and again to the Scroll to find what might be hidden there between the lines of rich absences and ambiguity.

READER RESPONSE

Commentators, like any readers, perceive and fill gaps based on their own personal perspective and agenda. For example, Tribe reads from a theologically positive stance, and therefore any gap or coincidence in the action is interpreted as “blessed chance which aids these
women in their struggles for life" (Trible 1978, 183). Trible sees all the characters as simply human agents for the divine plan.

Fuchs has an entirely different perspective. She feels that patriarchal ideology permeates the Bible and that critics tend to ignore this. In her view, all biblical narrative "universalizes and legislates its hierarchical endorsement of power relationships between male and female characters. The Bible not only shows women as marginal, it also advocates their marginality" (Fuchs 2000, 7-10). For her, then, the characters and relationships in the Scroll are incidental and almost irrelevant to the writer's agenda. The points she makes are valid, but in my view she lets her anger cloud her reading and keep her from an appreciation of the Scroll as a literary work rather than a political manifesto.

In Brenner's analysis, which has a radically different perspective, Ruth could have resembled today's foreign workers in Israel. Therefore Ruth may have had less free choice than readers usually imagine. She basically would be contracted to Naomi. Similarities Brenner points to are Ruth's work as a menial laborer, her industriousness, her eventual partial integration into the host society via marriage. Yet Brenner argues that this final integration might be seen as less than complete, since Ruth disappears from the final verses of the book. Perhaps the issue of class interfered with her total integration, and she is "absorbed" rather than "integrated" (Brenner 1996, 159-60). She also could have disappeared because once she bore a son, her job was done.

In a provocative article, Laura Donaldson discusses an unusual perspective on Ruth, that of a Cherokee woman reader. To Cherokee women, Orpah is viewed as a positive role model, representing hope. She is the one who does not reject her tradition or her sacred ancestors, and in their society, that is a higher value. For Ruth, moving from Asherah to YHWH involved giving up her ethnic and cultural identity. Orpah, on the other hand, chose the indigenous mother's house over that of the "alien Israelite Father," an act of self-affirmation (Donaldson, 143).

Another unusual perspective is that of an African woman writer, Musa Dube, who creates a fantasy scenario in which she finds "The Unpublished Letters of Orpah to Ruth," the concept being that Orpah is an African woman. In each of these "letters," Dube assumes the voice of Orpah, who identifies herself as Ruth's eldest sister, "the one who returned to her mother's house and to her Gods." She tells Ruth the story of their Moabite origins. She says she understood Ruth's decision to stay with Naomi, but she herself had to return to her old widowed mother who, like Naomi, had no son or husband to care for her. Orpah also felt it was right to return to her people and religion (Dube, 147-150). Dube, by injecting her own personal experience, humanizes Orpah, giving her an identity and motives that are absent from the Scroll.

This kind of modern midrash gives contemporary readers--especially Jewish readers--a jolt at the realization that from where we stand, Ruth's acceptance of Naomi's people and God has always been seen as a positive and brave act. Yet Jewish readers see it that way because we are reading it from the narrator's, and our own tradition's, perspective. Turning the lens around flips the view of which act is really heroic, Ruth's or Orpah's. Moving beyond my own traditional boundaries (as a Jewish woman), I see the value of what Gunn and Fewell call "a worthwhile enterprise," namely crossing and even subverting those boundaries (Gunn and Fewell, 31).

Every reader sees the text through a different lens in the prism, colored by that reader's culture, background, religious tradition, gender, and other factors. Each listener hears Ruth's and Naomi's words sung to a different tune, as did the composers who set those words. Precisely because Ruth is so filled with gaps, it can be seen with various colors and heard in many keys.
FEMALE AUTHORSHIP

Some scholars have posited a female author for Ruth. As early as 1957, Geniza scholar and folklorist S.D. Goitein proposed that the Scroll was composed by a "wise, old woman" (Goitein, 1957-1988). His reasons are that it is basically a women's story: the plot opens and closes with Naomi, the older woman; Naomi's advice moves the action forward; and the story ends with blessings to Naomi, not to Ruth (Brenner 1993, "Introduction," 10). Brenner notes that though authorship can never be established, Ruth can undeniably be read as an expression of women's culture and concerns (Brenner 1993, 143).

Naomi and Ruth provide a rare example of biblical women cooperating rather than competing—a non-androcentric portrait. Dialogues between Naomi and Ruth show distinctly female attitudes. Van Dijk-Hemmes finds it plausible that the story is a collective creation of women's culture, shaped by the cooperation between wise women narrators and their engaged female audience. She supports this with three criteria for recognizing a female voice: the text's intent is less than usually androcentric; reality is defined from a female perspective; there are obvious differences between the view of the male and female figures. She finds that the story of Ruth satisfies these criteria (van Dijk-Hemmes, 136-9). In addition, the phrase “through the seed which YHWH will give you by this young woman” (4.12) is indicative of a view that the foundation of this genealogy is through a woman, an example of a female worldview (or of matrilineal descent).

The story contains no religious creed or moral dictums, and the way the events are presented implies an audience familiar with agricultural life, and the importance of the woman's role in this kind of life. All of this suggests a story told by women to an audience of women (Caspi and Cohen, 100). It is also probably one of the first stories in any literature to show what can be accomplished by an alliance between women (Bos, 64).

Brenner also points out, in her analysis of the “Birth of the Hero” paradigm, that the representation of female cooperation seen in the Scroll seems to originate in female circles that viewed their own species in a different light than the more common male-oriented and male-written representations. The women in this second type of paradigm are depicted as strong, while the role of the male remains skeletal. The other stories that belong to this category are Exodus 2 and Luke 1.1-2.7 (Brenner 1993, 221).

The Scroll is virtually the only biblical source for information about women's social relationships and behavior patterns (the other is Song of Songs) (Meyers 2000, 111). It is often problematic to understand social relationships in the period when the biblical narratives were written, because the only viewpoint presented is that of the high status males who generally wrote them. Narratives can both reinforce and question the dominant culture. I read the centrality of women in the Scroll's plot as an example of a writer—whether female or male—challenging the cultural norms of his or her day. This is my own response, supported by a text that deviates in fundamental ways from the standard depiction of women's relationships in that period.

In the end, the author of the Scroll will remain anonymous and gender-less. No amount of elaborate guessing will contribute to either a better understanding or appreciation of this work. And in spite of the great appeal of a woman author for modern readers, it should not lead us to make any unwarranted assumptions.

NARRATOR AND LOCALIZATION

At the end of chapter 1, Naomi speaks of her great misfortune, while the narrator suggests hope, with the key words “Bethlehem” and “barley harvest.” The reader can contrast the
voices of character and narrator. When there is a discrepancy between what a character says and what the narrator reports, the narrator's report of action is usually a more reliable indicator of character than that character's speech (Gunn and Fewell, 71). At the end of each scene in the Scroll, narration seems to oppose dialogue, putting the narrator in tension with the characters. This opposition serves to heighten suspense, and this technique places the author and narrator in different spheres (ch. 1, p. 17).

McKinlay makes the interesting observation that "perhaps Naomi and the narrator had different views... but what can a mere character achieve against the powerful ideology of a narrator's text?" (McKinlay, 155). This view seems to attribute too much historical reality to the characters, who are still, after all, the author narrator's construct.

The reader knows that Boaz is a kinsman before, presumably, either Ruth or Naomi do. But the reader does not know exactly why Ruth goes to the threshing floor, though we assume the writer did know. As Ruth leaves Naomi to go to the threshing floor, the focus—like a camera—shifts completely to Ruth, leaving Naomi in the shadows. The narrator's silence about Naomi at that moment is the focalizer's interpretation (ch. 1, p. 18).

When Ruth lies at Boaz's feet, he does not know who she is or her motive. The narrator reports only her action and his reaction. Ruth probably does not exactly understand why Naomi wanted her to perform these particular actions either. These are all examples of the focalizer's role (ch. 1, p. 18).

The reader does not know why a group of women name Ruth's son and call him Naomi's, because the focus at that moment in the story is not on Ruth.

Examples of withholding of information, from the reader or from the characters within the story itself, abound in Ruth. Many of these have been discussed under the heading of "Gap-filling," and will be analyzed further in the next chapter, on midrashic re-interpretation.

CONCLUSION

As in archaeology, we can uncover the frame and even the foundations of an ancient house—but we cannot inhabit it (or meet the owners). In each generation we try anew to re-create this house, using the bricks and mortar of our own day. We re-construct the house room by room and stone by stone. Gaps will be filled, rooms visualized on top of the sparse ancient frame. Yet a house in one era might be a hut in another. Our imaginations are limited by our culture. What I am doing remains a re-construction only.

The remainder of this thesis will focus on how subsequent generations of readers built an interpretive "dwelling" in which they felt they could comfortably live, and in whose structure they could understand Ruth in their own times. There were vast differences in both the materials and methods of "construction" between the rabbinic midrashists of the first centuries of the millennium, the librettists writing in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the composers setting those librettos to music. The agendas and methodologies of each of these groups formed the foundation upon which each built their interpretive "dwellings" utilizing the materials and methods of their time.

The narrator (or writer) chooses to withhold certain information for rhetorical, aesthetic, or other purposes (Sternberg, 183).
CHAPTER THREE  RUTH IN RABBINIC AND RELATED LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The term midrash can be loosely applied to any re-telling of a biblical story. The gaps found in biblical narrative are filled in, one way or another, by each reader (ch.1, p. 13). An interpreter that fills the gaps by re-telling parts of the story creates a midrash. Midrash is the paradigm of interaction between the text author and the reader. Midrash derives from readers of the Bible who were stimulated by the text to indulge in imaginative comments, that sometimes went against its natural meaning (Weiss-Halivni, 159). This is as true for the librettists who wrote versions of the Scroll to be set to music in the 19th and 20th centuries as it is for rabbinic interpreters writing 1400 years earlier. In fact, the common rabbinic device of placing other biblical texts alongside the Scroll to support or highlight certain points was also used by the librettists (Preface to ch.6, p.101). When the librettos are sung, this adds an entirely new dimension. Both the libretto and music are forms of midrash, as will be discussed in chapter 6. Long before oratorios and operas based on the Scroll were written and sung, the Scroll was chanted as part of the Jewish liturgy on the holiday of Shavuot. Aspects of this tradition of cantillation will be discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

The gaps in the text that the rabbis perceived, or chose to fill, are culturally determined (as for any reader or commentator). In some cases, they grappled with the same gaps and ambiguities as modern readers; in many other cases, issues or inconsistencies that troubled them would seem irrelevant today. The midrashists' moral and philosophical approach to the text can only be understood in the context of their contemporary mindsets, since all exegesis is time-bound and historically conditioned (Weiss-Halivni, vii).

The context for midrash is always the entire Bible. Rabbinic exegetes typically would connect and reconnect texts from throughout the Hebrew Bible, harmonizing the contradictory sometimes new and surprising concordances (Fishbane as quoted in Darr, 37). In their method, any biblical verse could be used to clarify the original, base verse (Neusner, 3, 16). Their interest was in interpreting verses, not entire stories; they were concerned with the smallest details, such as a troubling or suggestive word or phrase within a specific verse (Kugel 1997, 28).

All ancient interpreters started from four basic assumptions, which must be kept in mind when discussing rabbinic midrash.

- First: the Bible is fundamentally a cryptic document, which may seem to be saying one thing while really meaning another;
- Second: the Bible is a book of instruction and relevant;
- Third: the Bible is perfect and harmonious and contains no mistakes;
- Fourth: the Bible is divinely sanctioned.

Partly due to these assumptions, there is really no distinction in rabbinic midrash between “exegesis” (reading from) and “eisegesis” (reading into) (Kugel 1994, 18-20).

These points are intricately connected. Because the rabbis viewed the Bible as perfect and divine, they felt it their duty to explain those parts that might trouble readers. They recognized the existence of troubling passages as part of the cryptic nature of the Bible. But in the course of their explanations, they felt it their duty to teach a lesson, since they viewed the Bible as a book of instruction. Therefore the aim of the rabbis writing midrash was a polemical one. Even when a midrash seems to obscure the original text it is explaining, its purpose is ultimately to illuminate what is in that text (Kugel, 248). The rabbis wrote midrash not only to fill in the gaps in the
MIDRASH ON RUTH

The primary midrash on the Scroll is Ruth Rabbah, which is part of the larger collection known as Midrash Rabbah. This collection is the oldest Amoraic midrash (c. 400 C.E.) on the Pentateuch (Five Books of the Bible) and the five Megillot (scrolls). Ruth Rabbah falls between the oldest midrashim—Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, and Ekhah Rabbati (from which much of its material is taken)—and the later midrashim such as Exodus Rabbah and Deuteronomy Rabbah (L. Rabinowitz, "Introduction," Ruth Rabbah, vii). The compilation draws on all of these, as well as on the Jerusalem Talmud and Pesiqta de Rab Kahana. It covers the biblical text of the Scroll verse by verse (omitting only 4.16-17).

Ruth Rabbah opens with a long Introduction, called a Petihta, composed of several unconnected proems. The commentary is divided into eight chapters of differing lengths. The exposition is largely homiletical, or instructional, with a few passages of literal exegetical value.

The male voice and prerogatives dominate in Ruth Rabbah, even though the major characters are women. Aggadic midrash reveals much more about men's assumptions and anxieties than about women's concerns. "To study women in rabbinic literature is actually to study men" (Baskin 2002, 11). According to Neusner, it is not only a male perspective that governs, but also the rabbinic mind-set in which all things are possible when biblical laws are observed. The outsider—a woman—can become an insider; the Moabite can become an Israelite, and her offspring, a king or even the Messiah, as long as biblical laws are followed (Neusner, 13).

In addition to Ruth Rabbah, other sources to be included in this discussion are passages from various tracts of the Babylonian Talmud (B. H.: Ruth Zuta), compiled by Buber from the MS Parma De Rossi dated to c.1400; Pesikta Rabbati; Zohar Balak; Yalkut Shimoni from the 12th or 13th century; and Sekhel Tov: a midrashic anthology on the Torah drawn from various earlier sources by Menahem b. Solomon in 1139 (Stemberger, 321, 351, 357). When no page reference is given, translations from these sources are my own. Many midrashic interpretations appear in almost identical form in several sources. I will also refer to commentaries by several post-Enlightenment modern Orthodox commentators, such as Malbim, for purposes of comparison.


All Hebrew texts are from the Bar Ilan Responsa CD Rom version 10, 2002.
GAP FILLING IN MIDRASH ON RUTH

In this chapter I will develop the motifs discussed in chapters 2 and 6; this includes gaps in action time: cause motive: and character appearance. I will discuss these as they relate to the Scroll.

ACTION TIME

Chapter 1 Naomi decided to leave Moab when she heard that God “had remembered his people” (1.6). How did she hear? According to Ruth Rabbah:

She heard from peddlers [sic] making their rounds from city to city (Ruth Rabbah 2.11: 33).

This is a logical conclusion for the midrashists, who probably received news in this same way in their own day. (I commented on the same gap in ch. 2, p. 46).1

Why did Naomi tell her daughters-in-law to return home after allowing them to accompany her (1.8)? Malbim explains that Naomi had assumed they were accompanying her merely out of respect and courtesy, not with the intention of leaving permanently (Zlotowitz, 71).

Chapter 2 Why was the entire city present as Naomi and Ruth entered (1.19)? (chap. 2, p. 46). R. Samuel b. Simon suggests:

That day was the day of the reaping of the omer [the measure of barley offered on the second day of Passover], as we have learnt elsewhere: all the towns nearby assembled together that it might be reaped with great ceremony (Ruth Rabbah 3.6: 47).

This immediately establishes that the Bethlehemites are observant Jews, and creates a context for the subsequent events.

R. Tanhumah in the name of R. Azariah and R. Menahema in the name of R. Joshua b. Abin explained:

The wife of Boaz died on that day, and all Israel assembled to do charity, and all the people came for the charity-giving. Ruth entered with Naomi. Thus one went out and the other entered (Ruth Rabbah 3.6).4

The fact that a wealthy landowner like Boaz was not married was perceived as a gap by these rabbis. Their solution was imagining the death of his wife, fortuitously the same day Ruth and Naomi came on the scene.

1 A much later commentator, Malbim of the 19th century, presumes that Naomi must have heard it from Israelite peddlers, since a Moabitite would not have invoked God’s name as the cause of both the famine and its end (Zlotowitz, 68). This is an example of a change in perception between the early and much later midrash. The centuries of persecution and oppression seem to have fostered a deeper distrust of the foreigner than was found in earlier midrash collections. The country and culture in which a particular midrash was written would also have had strong influence.

4 This is also found in B.T. Baba Batra 91a, where R. Isaac says it, in the T. T. Kebur 1.25 column 1, and in the words of R. Isaac again in Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 601.
Chapter 4  Boaz sits at the gate and the near kinsman he needed to see appears (4.1). This seems too coincidental to be arbitrary, to the rabbis.

Was he [Boaz] then standing behind the gate? R. Samuel b. Nahman said: Had he been at the uttermost ends of the earth, the Holy One, blessed be He, would have flown him and would have brought him there in order that the righteous man should not grieve while sitting there. Rabbi Berekiah said: thus did these great men, R. Eliezer and R. Joshua say. Rabbi Eliezer said: Boaz played his part, and Ruth played hers, and Naomi played hers, whereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'I too must play Mine.' (Ruth Rabbah 7.7).

The rabbis see God's hand in the convenient appearance of the relative Boaz needs to find. At the start of the story, they interpret the famine as God's punishment. God is not depicted as an active agent in either of these cases in the Scroll. The Scroll assigns an active role to God only in two spots: in 1.6, where God is said to be providing food to his people; and causing Ruth's conception (4.13). The midrashists assign God a larger role.

Ruth gleaned till the end of the barley and wheat harvests (2.23). According to R. Samuel b. Nahman, that period is three months (Ruth Rabbah 5.11: 69). An editorial footnote suggests that Boaz had to wait this period of time before marrying Ruth to ensure she was not pregnant by her former husband, assuming she had left Moab immediately after his death (Ruth Rabbah 5.11, note 4, 69).

CAUSE MOTIVE

The major gaps in cause noted by the midrashists that I will discuss are:

1. The reason for the famine that forced Elimelech to move to Moab:
   - Punishment because the people had sinned;
   - Idleness;
   - Lack of Torah;
   - Testing strong people.

2. Reasons for Elimelech's punishment:
   - He betrayed people who depended on him;
   - He left Judea for a foreign country;
   - His sons took Moabite wives without converting them.

3. God's involvement in Ruth's conception:
   - A structural explanation relating to Ruth's womb;
   - The pregnancy was due to blessings.

1. Reasons for the famine
   - Punishment
     The rabbis believed no punishment, such as a famine, was undeserved. Rabba said: (Ruth Rabbah 1.3, 18).

Blessings bless those who deserve them, and curses curse those who deserve them (Ruth Rabbah 1.3, 18).
They wondered if this particular famine was connected in some way to the strange construction “in the days when the judges ruled” (1.1).

Woe unto that generation which judges its judges, and woe unto the generation whose judges are in need of being judged! (Ruth Rabbah 1.1.16).

- **Idleness**

The rabbis believed that a famine was always a mark of punishment; and the phrase “the judges judging Israel” was understood to be an indication that the people had sinned. The verse used to prove this is Proverbs 19.15-16. “An idle person will suffer hunger.”

Ten famines have come upon the world. One in the days of Adam, one in the days of Lamech [these first two are not explicit in the biblical texts suggested. Gen. 3.17 and Gen. 5.29], one in the days of Abraham [Gen. 12.10], one in the days of Isaac [Gen. 26.1], one in the days of Jacob [Gen. 41.54, 43.1, 45.6], one in the days of Elijah [1 Kings 17.1 refers to drought, not specifically famine], one in the days of Elisha [2 Kings 6.25], one in the days of David [2 Sam. 21.1], one in the days when the judges judged [Ruth 1.1], and one which is destined still to come upon the world (Ruth Rabbah 1.4).

- **Lack of Torah**

In Ruth Zuta, the famine is connected to a hunger for Torah:

The word וְהוּא (there was) is repeated twice: once is the hunger for Torah, the other is hunger for bread; to teach you that in every generation where Torah is not available, famine comes (Ruth Zuta 1.1.7).

The conclusion for the rabbis in the first instance is that any famine was due to idleness (Neusner, 23), and in the second, to lack of Torah. In both cases they are teaching an important lesson based on a single passage of the Scroll.

- **Testing the strong**

In another interpretation, R. Huna said in the name of Samuel:

All these [famines] did not come upon feeble people, but upon strong ones, who could withstand them. (Ruth Rabbah 1.4; 19-20).

The midrashists are trying to provide moral justification for a famine. The notion of random suffering was apparently difficult in the worldview of some rabbis.

2. **Reasons for Elimelech’s punishment**

- **Betrayal**

The rabbis wondered why Elimelech, in particular, suffered this famine. One reason they considered was that Elimelech was punished for an act of betrayal:
Elimelech was one of the notables of his city and one of the leaders of his generation. And when the famine years came he said, 'Now all Israel will come knocking at my door, this one with his basket and that one with his basket.' So he arose and fled from them (Ruth Rabban 1.4).

Elimelech was afraid the famine would bring people begging to his door, so he left, and was subsequently punished.

- *Leaving Judea*
  Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel said:

In time of pestilence and in time of war, gather in [thy feet] (ed.note: stay home), and in time of famine, spread out [thy feet] (ed.note: go abroad). Why then was Elimelech punished? Because he struck despair into the hearts of Israel (Ruth Rabban 1.4: 20).

R. Simeon b. Yohai said:

Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion were great men of their generation, and they were also leaders of their generation. Why, then, were they punished? Because they left the land for a foreign country (B.T. Baba Batra 91a; cf. Midrash Tanhuma Behar 8, which adds that God was angry).

R. Hanan b. Raba said in the name of Rab:

Elimelech and Salmon and Peloni Almoni and the father of Naomi all were the sons of Nahshon, son of Amminadab (Exod. 6.23, Num. 10.14). What does he come to teach us [by this statement]?—That even the merit of one’s ancestors is of no avail when one leaves the land for a foreign country (B.T. Baba Batra 91a).

The rabbis’ agenda here, obviously, is to stress the extreme importance of the land of Israel. In addition, they use a circular argument that the severity of Elimelech’s punishment is proof of his importance, and his importance is proof of the severity of his punishment.

- Moabite wives
  Elimelech’s sons didn’t learn from their father to return to the land of Israel, but what did they do, even they? They took Moabite wives, whom they did not immerse (in the mikva) and did not help to become proselytes. (Midrash Tanhuma Behar 9.8, Leviticus 25.25, 354).

* This interpretation is also found in Rashi (11th century) and the Zohar Chadash (13th century).
According to the Targum (Targum Ruth 1.5), the sons died because they disobeyed God’s word and married foreigners. This is also why they died in the unclean land. In Ruth Rabbah.

It was taught in the name of R. Meir: They neither proselytized them [the wives], nor gave them ritual immersion (Ruth Rabbah 2.9; 30).

Zohar Balak states:
Ruth was not made a Jewess by Elimelech, but she learnt all the ways of his house and rules about food and when she went with Naomi, then she was converted (Zohar Balak 190a, 265).

3. God’s involvement in Ruth’s pregnancy
The midrashists were puzzled (as modern commentators have been) by the wording of 4.13, “YHWH let her conceive,” or “YHWH gave her conception” (יהוה ינתן ליה conceiveth). In the midrash, two explanations are offered for this phrase, an unusual expression for the fairly common biblical idea of God’s involvement in pregnancy (Gen. 21.1, 25.2, 30.22, 1 Sam. 1.19, 2.21: interestingly, every libretto I studied eliminates this verse; ch. 6, p. 103).

- **Structural explanation**
  R. Simeon b. Lakish explains:

  Ruth lacked the main portion of the womb, but the Holy One, blessed be He, shaped a womb for her (Ruth Rabbah 7.14; 91).

  This novel interpretation serves to heighten the miraculous nature of her pregnancy (and is certainly a vivid illustration of the degree of anatomical understanding that existed among the rabbis). It also recalls Sarah, who is described in Bereshit Rabbah 45.1 as having no womb.

- **Blessings cause conception**
  Another way God is involved in Ruth’s conception is through blessings, which help both Boaz and Ruth.

  R. Johanan said:

  "..." (in later commentaries, the 16th-century Iggeret Shemuel and the 20th-century Pri Chad, based on 19th-century commentator Malbim), the rabbis justify the deaths of the sons by stating that they might have been spared for leaving Israel, but they sinned further by marrying Moabite women and therefore had to be punished (Kidushin 66b). This interpretation is not found in the earlier period. The intervening centuries of persecution probably colored the rabbis’ view of intermarriage.

  When the sons die, the text calls them only by their names, no longer identifying them as Ephrataites or as the husbands of Ruth and Orpah. Two 16th-century commentators, Alshich and Iggeret Shemuel, see significance in this omission. Their names are repeated to stress that they not only died physically, but because they were childless, their very names died with them (Kidushin 68).

  R. Nahman in the name of Rabba b. Abbahu said that “Sarai was barren and had no child” means she “had not even a womb” (B.T. Yohanan 64a-b).
Boaz was 80 years of age, and had not been vouchsafed [children]. But when that righteous woman [Naomi] prayed for him [2. 20. בֵּן אָבֶּד]. “Blessed be he of YHWH”, he was immediately vouchsafed. Resh Lakish said: Ruth was 40 years of age and had not yet been vouchsafed children as long as [because] she was married to Mahlon. But as soon as that righteous man [Boaz] prayed for her (3.10. בֵּן אָבֶּד). “Be blessed of YHWH, daughter!” she was vouchsafed. And our Rabbis say: Both of them were vouchsafed children only as a result of the blessings of righteous people [4.2] (Ruth Rabbah 6.2; 75; cf. Ruth Zutta 4:13).

There are three opinions here: in one, Boaz was helped by Naomi’s blessing; in the second, Ruth was helped by Boaz’s blessing; and in the third, both were helped by the blessings of the righteous people of Bethlehem. Implicit in these opinions is the belief that God acts through those who offer blessings.

CHARACTERS

Naomi

I will comment on several midrashim dealing with Naomi. These will include:

- The meaning of her name:
- The idea of “being left” (1.3);
- The impact of her departure (1.7), and why she sent Ruth and Orpah back;
- Why the women ask “Is this Naomi?” (1.19);
- Naomi’s responses to this question (1.20-21);
- Her attitude to Boaz (2.1) and Ruth (3.1).

- *Her name*

Many rabbinitic midrashim begin with an interpretation of proper names, used as a device to reinforce particular aspects of the character. R. Meir and R. Joshua b. Karha interpreted Naomi’s name as meaning *[שביתות נשים נועלים]*, “her actions were pleasant and sweet” (Ruth Rabbah 2.5: 29), from the Hebrew שמות meaning “pleasant.” It is more than usually apt to glean this meaning in Naomi’s case, since she herself shows an awareness of her name’s meaning when she says “Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara” (bitter): ↩️ נקראת לא נקראה. (1.20).

- *She was left* (1.5)

Naomi is sometimes depicted in a pathetic light. For example, with her husband and sons dead, Naomi—here “the woman”—was left (1.5). R. Hanina said she was וּלְקָנֶה שָׁרֵי שִׁיָּרוֹם, “left as the remnants of the remnants [of the meal offering]” (Ruth Rabbah 2.10: 33), meaning of no value whatever.

- *Naomi’s departure* (1.7)

Naomi seemingly departed with her daughters-in-law but without servants: וּלְקָנֶה שָׁרֵי שִׁיָּרוֹם. “she left the place where she had been living.”
How many camel-drivers and how many ass-drivers also went forth? And yet it says “and she went forth”? R. Azariah in the name of R. Judah b. R. Simon [explained]: The great man of a city is its shining light, its distinction, its glory, and its praise. When he departs, its brilliance, its distinction, its glory, and its praise depart with him. And so you find with our father Jacob when he departed from Beersheba. Was he then the only one who departed from there? How many camel-drivers and how many ass-drivers went forth from there? And yet it says, “and he went forth” (Gen. 28.10). But when a righteous man is in a city, he is its shining light, its distinction, its glory. When he departs, its shining light, its distinction, its glory and its praise depart with him (Ruth Rabbah 2.12).

R. Azariah compares Naomi’s departure with that of Jacob from Beersheba, based on the same verb נפל found in both places. The conclusion he draws about Naomi from this is that “there was no other righteous person but her,” echoing the biblical description of Noah, “the only righteous man in his generation” (Gen. 6.9). To describe a biblical woman in this way is a deviation from the rabbinic norm. Though ultimately this is not a nod to feminism, only part of the larger agenda of glorifying everyone connected to David’s birth, it nonetheless shows high regard for Naomi.

Other rabbinic portraits show more sympathy than admiration. Bar Kappara explains Naomi’s situation:

Her case was like that of an ordinary cow which its owner puts up for sale in the marketplace, saying, “it is excellent for ploughing, and drives straight furrows.” ‘But,’ say [the bystanders], “if it is good for ploughing, what is the meaning of all those weals on its back?” (Ruth Rabbah 3.6; cf. Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 601).

Equating Naomi with an abused or scarred animal paints a rather pathetic picture. There is also a subtext that Naomi, like the cow, must have deserved her punishment. Rabbi Chiyah bar Abba said, more sympathetically:

All suffering is difficult but the suffering of poverty is the most difficult. All suffering comes and goes in its time and the body returns to how it was before. But the suffering of poverty darkens a man’s eyes, as it is said, “my eyes hurt from affliction” (Psalm 88.10) (Ruth Zuta 1.20; cf. Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 601).

* Bronner says “this high praise is said of no other woman in midrashic literature” (Bronner 1993, 157) yet she mistakenly attributes the words of praise to Ruth rather than to Naomi. R. Azariah is definitely discussing Naomi’s departure and not Ruth’s. The same inaccurate attribution is found in Bronner 1994, 71, where she again states (incorrectly) that “Ruth’s departure is said by the rabbis to have depleted Moab of a great and saintly person.”

* Freedman explains in a footnote that this means “it is a sorry animal,” equating the cow with Naomi (Ruth Rabbah, footnote 1.48).
This shows sympathy for Naomi, but the stress here is on her poverty, not on her greatness as in other midrashim. In Ruth Zuta, Naomi's troubles are blamed on "jealousy":

"I went out full" (1.21): from here we know that she was rich and full; and who caused her to lose her property, husband and sons, was the jealousy of others (Ruth Zuta 1.20).

Another reason is proposed for Naomi sending her daughters-in-law back:

Why did Naomi send her daughters-in-law back? Because she did not want to be embarrassed by them, as we learned: There were ten markets in Jerusalem. and they did not mix with each other. There was the market of the kings, the market of the prophets, the market of the priests, the market of the Levites, the market of Israel, and all were known in the markets by their garments: what those [one group] wore, those [the other group] did not wear (Ruth Zuta 1.8; cf. Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 66).

In other words, Ruth and Orpah could not fit in, and Naomi would be embarrassed by their different appearance. In this rather negative portrayal of Naomi, she is insensitive to others' needs and preoccupied with her own image.

- "Is this Naomi?" (1.19)

The townspeople ask "Is this Naomi?" (1.19), and the rabbis try to explain the motivation for this question. R. Tanhum in the name of R. Azariah and R. Menahema in the name of R. Joshua b. Abin both assume that Naomi's appearance is so altered that the women cannot believe it is Naomi:

In the past she used to go in her litter, and now she walks barefoot, and you said "Is this Naomi?" (1.19) In the past she wore a cloak of fine wool, and now she is clothed in rags, and you said "Is this Naomi?" (1.19). In the past, her countenance was ruddy from abundance of food and drink, and now it is sickly from hunger. And you said "Is this Naomi?" (Ruth Rabbah 3.6).

Ruth Zuta presents a slightly different version:

The handmaids went out on camels and with embroidered garments, and on their return they were dressed in worn out garments, she and Ruth her daughter-in-law, therefore all the Bethlehemite women were startled by her and said "Is this Naomi?" because the
Bethlehemite women used her jewels. ‘Is this Naomi who used to put gold to shame with the beauty of her face?’ (Ruth Zuta 1.19; cf. Yalkut Shimon Ruth 601).

In this re-telling, the Bethlehemite women were wearing jewelry, and recalled how Naomi had once shamed gold with her beauty. This 13th century midrash is completely at odds with the biblical story, but it is also indicative of the lengths rabbis will go to depict beauty as a positive trait. It is the only midrash in which Naomi is described as beautiful.

- Naomi responds (1.20-21)
Naomi complains that God has afflicted her. The midrashists find several possible meanings for the word she uses, הִיָּעָלָה:

God has afflicted me with His attribute of Justice, as in the verse (Exod. 22.22) ‘If thou afflict him.’ אדֹנְיָנֵנִי הִיָּעָלָה אל. Another interpretation is ‘testified’ against me, as in the verse (Deut.19.18) ‘he hath testified falsely against his brother.’ שֵׂכִרָנֵנִי בָאָדָם. Another interpretation: ‘All His concern was with me.’ for in this world ‘The Lord hath afflicted me, but of the Messianic future it is written, ‘Yea. I will rejoice over them to do them good’ (Jer. 32.41) (Ruth Rabbah 3.7; 48).

The first interpretation implies that Naomi deserved her affliction, though the rabbis do not explain why. The second implies she did not deserve affliction, and the third, interpreting the verb הִיָּעָלָה as בָּעֵל “concern,” indicates a certain reluctance in the midrash to accept a biblical character appearing to actually criticize God, or being punished without reason. This may be particularly true for a female character.

- Naomi and Boaz
The midrashists wonder why Naomi did not contact Boaz when she first arrived in Bethlehem. (The first verse of chapter 2 informs us that “Naomi had a kinsman...whose name was Boaz”). Two rabbis (Alshich and Alkabetz) answer this indirectly. In one interpretation, Naomi is avoiding her relative because she is ashamed about deserting her people during the famine, when Boaz had not left. Another interpretation praises the strength of the two women. Naomi did not throw herself on her rich relative; and Ruth, who according to the Midrash was the daughter of the King of Moab (בַּנְכִּית בֶּן נַגָּלָה יִדְי) (along with Orpah; Ruth Rabbah 2.9; 31), was not too proud to take on the burden of supporting herself and Naomi (Zlotowitz, 86).

- Naomi and Ruth
Naomi said to Ruth, “I must seek a resting place for you” (3.1). The midrashists state:

There is no rest for a woman but in the house of her husband, and there is no rest for a man except in his wife (Ruth Rabbah [Lerner] V).

Alshich, also spelled Alshkh, wrote Evnei Moshe on Ruth in 1615 (Zlotowitz, 139).
In the Tanhuma, the phrase is taken to mean that a woman does not have rest in the house of her father but only in the house of her husband (Midrash Tanhuma B'or. 3:16, Exodus 12:29, 67). In both instances Naomi is seen as a woman dependent on men for comfort, who feels she must find a man for Ruth even though she cannot find one for herself.

Ruth

I will comment on the following issues as treated in the midrash:
- Ruth's name:
- Ruth's appearance:
- Her modesty, righteousness, and proper conversion:
- The notion of “once a Moabite always a Moabite.”

- Ruth's name

One interpretation of the significance of Ruth's name is that she was considered well (Hebrew שרה for 'she saw' connecting it to 혼) the words of her mother-in-law” (Ruth Rabbah 2:9:31). This highlights one of the qualities she is most praised for: obedience. In another interpretation, the name Ruth derives from שרה, agitated, stating: “Ruth was agitated from crossing over to do the will of her Father in Heaven” (Ruth Zuta 1:2:13 and 1:4:16).

Another rabbi derives Ruth from דְּרָע, “the one who fills to overflowing.” R. Yohanan said: “Why was she called Ruth? Because such was her merit that from her was to issue David, who filled to overflowing [saturated] (דְּרָע) the Holy One with songs and hymns” (B. B. Berachot 7b; and Yalkut Proverbs 964).

In Ruth Zuta:

The Holy One Blessed be He said: “Let Ruth come, for she is a convert and did not disown her mother-in-law, and will admonish Israel who rebelled against me” (Ruth Zuta 1:7).

- Her appearance

Naomi addresses Ruth as "my daughter," מִי בָּה, in 2:2. In Ruth Rabbah, R. Jannai, who believed Ruth was 40 years old, wonders why she was called "daughter," and says it is because she looked like a girl of 14 (עֲנָי קַרְאָן מִי בָּה מִי לְתַחְתָּן אָמַת רָפָיִים שלֶמֶךְ) (Ruth Rabbah 4:4:52). This is probably intended to be highly complimentary, for a woman of 40 to look like a girl of 14.

- Her modesty

Ruth in midrashic re-tellings is a model of modesty and virtue, through an enlargement and embellishment of her portrayal in the biblical text.

When Boaz asks his servant about Ruth: “Whose girl is that?” לְמִי הָעַרְרוּת הַדָּאָת (2:5), the head reaper begins by praising Ruth and her modesty:

64
Indeed, she has been with us for several days, and not even a single finger or toe was seen; and as written above, we don’t know whether she is mute or can speak (Ruth Zuta 2.7).

R. Eleazar wonders if Boaz was in the habit of inquiring about young girls:

A thing of wisdom he saw in her. Two ears [of grain]—she gleaned; three ears—she didn’t glean [according to the law in Mishnah Peah 6:5]. In our Mishna it is taught: he saw something of modesty in her; the standing ears she gleaned standing, and the fallen ears she gleaned sitting (B. T. Shabbat 113b; cf. Ruth Zuta 2.3).

*Ruth Rabbah* amplifies the theme of Ruth’s modesty. R. Eliezer ben Miriam notes:

All the women hitch up their garments, and she keeps her garment down; all the women jest with the reapers, while she is reserved; all the women gather from between the sheaves, while she gathers from that which is abandoned (Ruth Rabbah 4.6).

Similar descriptions are found in *Ruth Zuta*:

When Ruth sat to reap with the reapers, she turned her face away, and not even one of her fingers was visible. When she would see an ear of corn, she would stand and pick it; and when she saw a discarded ear she would sit to glean it; since Boaz saw in her these three attributes, he immediately asked his servant, “whose is this girl?” (2.5) (Ruth Zuta 2.3).

In the midrash, modesty is detected in Ruth in the smallest gestures. For example, Ruth sits down beside the reapers. רוחב מעץ הקטרים (2.14). R. Jonathan note that this means מעץ הקטרים דאיל, “actually at their side.” rather than among them, another indication of her modesty (Ruth Rabbah 5.6; 66). R. Eleazar stresses this point even more: מעץ הקטרים ולא מתוכ הקטרים, “At the side of the reapers, but not in the midst of the reapers” (B. T. Shabbat 113b).

When Ruth returns home after her day of gleanin, she says to Naomi, “the name of the man with whom I worked [dealt] today is Boaz” (2.19). Rab Joshua points out that it doesn’t say “who dealt with me,” rather “with whom I dealt,” ראתו אתה עשה עמי suggesting that she offered many services and favors to him in exchange for the morsel he gave her (Yalkut Shimoni Ruth, 604; cf. Leviticus Rabbah 34.8). Rab Joshua said:
This is to teach you that more than the master of the house does for the poor man, the poor man does for the master of the house (Ruth Zata 2:19; cf. Leviticus Rabbah 34.8, Yalkut Shimoni Behar, 665).

The rabbis seem to be praising Ruth for offering Boaz the opportunity to do a good deed.

In yet another incident proving her modesty, Ruth first tells Naomi she will do everything she has been told to do (3:5) and then is described as going down to the threshing floor before doing everything she was told. The rabbis understand this to mean that Ruth only bathed and dressed in her finery after reaching the threshing floor (B. T. Shabbat 11b; Ruth Zata 3:2). She was afraid of attracting too much attention if she went out perfumed and dressed up, making it impossible to perform her mission discreetly (Rashi and Malbim, in Zlotowitz, 111). This interpretation, too, stresses Ruth's extreme modesty.

- **Her righteousness**

  The fact that Ruth ate and was so satisfied that she even had food left over (2:14) is interpreted several ways. Perhaps it proves Boaz's generosity: he provided so much food, Ruth could not even finish it all. R. Isaac believed the implication was that:

  "Perhaps it proves Boaz's generosity; he provided so much food, Ruth could not even finish it all."

  In a broader interpretation, it is stated that "righteous persons like Eliezer, Ruth, and Hezekiah required very little to satisfy their wants. Only the wicked like Esau...stuffed food into their mouths...All the wicked who are insatiable receive their just desserts in the end" (PK 6, 59a-b; PR 16, 82a).

- **Her proper conversion**

  Why does Naomi instruct Ruth to bathe herself (3:3)? This verse is interpreted as a reference to a spiritual bathing:

  "Wash thyself clean of the filth of thine idolatry." And "Anoint thee": these are good deeds and righteous conduct (Ruth Rabbah 5.12).

  The reference to cleansing herself from her idolatry presumably means a spiritual bathing, as in a mikvah. This may have been perceived as a gap in the text because the word "bathe" is used in a general sense, and Ruth would hardly need instruction to do such a basic thing. But the rabbis seized this chance to point out that Ruth had purified herself ritually as a proper Jewish woman before meeting Boaz. It is possible that the rabbis were also stressing that...
Ruth had been properly converted, since she was observing Jewish law by ritual immersion; in addition, she was also proving herself compliant.

- *Once a Moabitess...*

One of the rare negative comments about Ruth refers to her repetition to Naomi of Boaz’s warning to her, to stay close to his maidens. When she repeats this to Naomi, she says Boaz told her to stay close to his young men (2.21). R. Hanin b. Levi infers from this lapse that אשה תרבתה רוחא: “In truth Ruth was a Moabitess” (Ruth Rabbah 5.11: 69). The implication is that she could not overcome her origins, so though it has negative connotations, it does not precisely place the blame on Ruth.

In one interpretation of Ruth’s response to Naomi’s request, Ruth supposedly responds twice:

“All you say I will do” (כל אשים תרבתה רוחא: (14) is written. From this we know that Naomi commanded Ruth twice. The first time Ruth says ‘All you say I will do’ (ככל אשים תרבתה רוחא: (14). For the second command, she says “all you tell me, I will do.” [Ruth’s second response] hangs outside, showing that Ruth answered Naomi twice, the first time she does not say אשים תרבתה רוחא: and the second time she does say אשים תרבתה רוחא: because it hangs on the outside (הלאו תרבתה רוחא:).

The midrashic collection *Ozar Hamidrashim* (Treasury of Midrash) notes that the discrepancy literally “hangs on the outside” (הלאו תרבתה רוחא: (Ozar Hamidrashim 502). The word אשים תרבתה רוחא: in 3.5 is to be read out when the scroll is chanted, but only its vowels appear in the Masoretic text. The context of this midrash is a number of instances of חמרא קע אד עמי: (Example) means literally that the correct meaning of the missing word hangs outside the tradition of saying the expression (חרבה is outside the written Masoretic text). In modern English one would say: The meaning is based on the tradition of reading (חרה). But the author of this midrash says that there was a reason for the missing written word in each of the cases cited (Gitad J. Gevaryahu, personal communication). The absence of the word אשים תרבתה רוחא: teaches that we are to read this sentence twice, once without אשים תרבתה רוחא: and once with אשים תרבתה רוחא: to teach that Naomi’s charge to Ruth was repeated twice, once with that word and once without. The midrash does not explain why the charge had to be stated twice, though, and that is open to speculation. So we do not know why this midrashist thought it so important that Naomi had to repeat her request twice. It could be

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11 The discrepancy noted here is between the הבטחתֶּךָ (read) and “written”): only the former includes the word אשים תרבתה רוחא: “to me,” but only the vowels appear, without the consonants.

12 חמרא קע אד עמי: means that the word, if written at all, is to be “hung outside” the rest of the text, in the margin or between the lines. Examples of such interpolated words abound in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other manuscripts, though in such cases the situation is normally the opposite: the word was supposed to be there, only someone noticed it was missing (Robert Goldenberg, personal communication).
Inferred that Ruth was not paying attention, or that Naomi thought she needed to stress her command by repeating it. Either way, it seems to depict a slightly distracted or disobedient Ruth.

These are the only two mildly negative images of Ruth. Though “once a Moabitess, always a Moabitess” might have held true, the midrashic Ruth largely overcame her origins to be a model of modesty and propriety. There is only a subtle hint that she might be less than totally obedient. The rabbinic agenda was to make Ruth an exemplary progenetrix of David, as well as a role model for the perfect woman in rabbinic eyes.

Orpah

All midrashic comments on Orpah begin with her name. Orpah (along with Ruth) is called a daughter of Eglon, King of Moab. R. Bibi said in the name of R. Reuben that they were daughters of Eglon, based on the story in Jud. 3.19, when Eglon rises from the toilet only to be stabbed.

“And Ehud came to him...and said ‘I have a message from God unto thee.’ And he arose out of his seat” (Jud. 3.20). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: ‘Thou didst arise from thy throne in honour of Me. By thy life, I shall raise up from thee a descendant sitting upon the throne of the Lord.’ (Ruth Rabbah 2.9; 31).

In this midrash, God decided to raise up a descendant (David) to sit on the throne of God because Eglon rose from his “throne” in honor of God. In far-fetched interpretations like these, the rabbis’ tongues seem to be lodged quite firmly in their cheeks.

Because Orpah did not choose to follow Naomi, she is not portrayed favorably in rabbinic midrash. The rabbis go to extreme lengths to make an example of Orpah, in order to highlight the more positive example of Ruth, who made the better choice in following Naomi. Orpah’s name is taken to mean: שמותה אורפה, her name Orpah. “she turned her back on her mother-in-law” (Ruth Rabbah 2.9; 31), because Hebrew שונים, from which her name is believed to originate, means nape of the neck. Elsewhere her name is related to the עמל את אמרה, the “beheaded heifer” which atones for an anonymous murder: שימה הליאןصنבלת אמרה (Ruth Zutta. 1.4). Nothing is known about Orpah besides the fact that she turned back, but the midrashists weave fantastic tales about her adventures after leaving Naomi.

R. Berekiah said in the name of R. Isaac:

Forty paces did Orpah go with her mother-in-law, and [for this reason retribution] was suspended for her descendant [Goliath] for forty days, as it is said (1 Sam. 17.16): “And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days.” R. Judan said in the name of R. Isaac said: Four miles did Orpah proceed with her mother-in-law, and as a reward four mighty men descended from her, as it is said (2 Sam 21.22): “These four were born to the giant” [יחט ה, now read as עפרה] (Ruth Rabbah 2.20.38).

This interpretation derives from a play on the Hebrew for Orpah עפרה, read as הרפה, the giant.
Rabba said:

As a reward for the four tears which Orpah shed upon her mother-in-law, she merited that four mighty warriors would issue from her. [She shed four tears because she and Ruth wept twice, and a tear from each eye would have been shed each time] (B.T. Sotah 42b)

In the Babylonian Talmud, there are several examples of this kind of word play. Rab and Samuel differed:

[One said her name was חרב but she was called חרבת because all had intercourse with her from the rear (חרבת). [Samuel said it was] because all ground her like bruised corn (חרפת) (B.T. Sotah 42b).

R. Isaac said:

“Ranks of Philistines” (מְמַגְּרֶהוֹת פְּלִיסְטִים) but מְמַגְּרֶהוֹת פְּלִיסְטִים is written, the whole of that night when Orpah separated from her mother, a hundred heathens raped her (Ruth Rabban 2.20: 39).

This is based on a verse from 1 Samuel. “The champion, whose name was Goliath, the Philistine of Gath, stepped forward from the ranks”: Aaron the Philistine, stepped forward from the ranks (1 Sam. 17.23). The interpretation is based on a difference between the written text and tradition of reading aloud (קרד אלא חזרב). The customary reading, is מְמַגְּרֶהוֹת פְּלִיסְטִים, a word suggesting sexual relations, though the customary reading, is מְמַגְּרֶהוֹת פְּלִיסְטִים, meaning “ranks.”

In the Babylonian Talmud, R. Johanan says that Goliath was the “son of a hundred fathers and one mother,” and R. Joseph continues that “all men pressed his mother like a winepress (דָּפֶן) and all had intercourse with his mother (B.T. Sotah 42b).

R. Isaac differentiated Orpa’s actions from Ruth’s, saying:

The Holy One blessed be He ordained the sons of the one who kissed to come and fall by the hand of the sons of the one who clave (B.T. Sotah 42b).

Pseudo-Philo also contrasted the two. In his description of the David-Goliath encounter, he imagines David addressing Goliath beforehand and telling him that the two women from whom the two of them were born were sisters. He tells Goliath his mother (ancestor) was Orpah, who chose the gods of the Philistines and went after them, while Ruth chose God’s ways. David tells Goliath “Because you have risen up today and have come to destroy Israel, behold I who am born from your own blood have come to avenge my people” (Pseudo Philo 61.6-7). Orpah as the imagined mother of Goliath is a sharp contrast with Ruth as grandmother of David; perhaps this was one of Pseudo-Philo’s purposes.
Boaz

The midrashists weave their discussions around Elimelech and then Boaz, who eventually becomes the primary figure of interest. Like Elimelech, Boaz is seen as the great man of his generation. He is depicted possessing great piety and purity, conforming to the rabbinic idea of a devout and righteous individual. The story becomes decidedly male, and Boaz usurps the place of main character and protagonist, becoming a hero for all generations. The midrash deals primarily with Boaz’s character.

An issue dealt with only obliquely by the rabbis is why Boaz is depicted in a positive way in the narrative for allowing Ruth the “privilege” of gleaning in his field, when he apparently knows she is his relation and would be expected to offer her far more. One interpretation (15th century Rav Arama) suggests that Boaz was testing Ruth, knowing she was a foreigner and wanting to be sure of her integrity (Zlotowitz, 92). This theme of distrust of foreigners has been found, not surprisingly, in other midrashim of the Middle Ages. This interpretation also makes Boaz clever and even slightly duplicitous.

When Naomi discovers it was Boaz who let Ruth glean in his field, she tells Ruth he is a kinsman. Rav Arama (15th century) believes Naomi had wondered for some time how this man, who was noted for his kindness and generosity, could have ignored them since their arrival. Now she understands he has not failed in his kindness to them (Zlotowitz, 104). This is a sort of apologia for Boaz, expressing the idea that Boaz intended to do his duty all along, but was just being cautious, rather than thoughtless.

The midrashists go to some lengths to prove Boaz’s good character. They interpret “He was in a cheerful mood” (דַּרְאָשׁ בָּרֵא) (3.7), in several ways:

1. Because he recited the grace after meals.
2. Another interpretation: he was in a cheerful mood because he ate different kinds of sweet things after his meal as they accustom the tongue to the Torah. Another interpretation: he was in a cheerful mood because he occupied himself with the words of the Torah, as it is said (Ps. 119, 72) “The Torah of your mouth is good to me.” Another interpretation: he was in a cheerful mood because he sought a wife, as it is said (Prov. 18.22), “He who finds a wife has found happiness” (Ruth Rabbah 5.15; cf. B.T. Sanhedrin 19b).

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In Midrash Tanhuma, the study of Torah is brought back into the discussion a few lines later. Ruth tells Boaz that she has come to fulfill the Torah. Lev. 25.25, כִּי יְהֹוָה הַקְּדֵשׁ מַלְאךָ הוּא מִים מֶלֶךְ לְעַמּוֹ, “when your relative becomes poor…a redeemer shall come” (Midrash Tanhuma Behar 3).

R. Judah II ha-Nasi was troubled by the fact that Boaz was lying at the end of the heap of grain even though he was a leading figure in his generation. R. Phinehas b. Hama explained:

7 Ruth Rabbah treats many of these verses in a metaphorical or symbolic way. For example, in 2:10 Ruth tells on her face in gratitude for Boaz’s kindness, and asks him why he has “taken notice” of her. The verb used here can also be used to know someone casually; hence, the rabbis state that this phrase is a prophecy that Boaz would make Ruth his wife (Ruth Rabbah 5.2, 59).
Boaz was a great man in his generation, yet you say [he was lying] by the heap of grain. He answered him: since that generation was steeped in immorality, and they used to pay harlots from the threshing-floors, as it is said [Hos. 9.1]: "Rejoice not, O Israel, unto exultation, like the peoples...Thou hast loved a harlot’s hire upon every threshing-floor." And righteous men do not act so (Ruth Rabbah 5.15).

In other words, Boaz had to lie there to prevent the threshing floor from being used for immoral purposes. These explanations serve not only to shed a positive light on Boaz, but they also reflect the rabbis' thinking. In their minds, any laudable biblical character had to live in accordance with the Torah, the way they did. Since they said grace after meals, and studied Torah, they could not imagine Boaz, or any other male protagonist in Bible, not doing the same (Neusner, 97). They are also establishing Boaz as a role model.

Chapter 3 of the Scroll posed the greatest difficulty to rabbis who wanted to depict Boaz as well as Ruth as examples of purity, goodness, and obedience to God. They had to explain actions than run counter to this image. They do not believe the text insinuates there may have been sexual relations, but they do wonder how Boaz found the strength to resist. R. Juda'h and R. Hunya said:

All that night his Evil Inclination contended with him, saying, 'You are unmarried and seek a wife, and she is unmarraied and seeks a husband. Arise and have intercourse with her, and she will be your wife.' And he took an oath to his Evil Inclination, saying, 'As the Lord liveth, I will not touch her.' And to the woman he said, 'Lie down until morning...If he will act as a redeemer, good, let him redeem' (3.13). R. Hunya said, it is written (Prov. 24.5), 'A wise man is strong, יָשָׁבוּת מְאֹד נְמוּ נָה ' (but reading) Boaz, יָשָׁב, with different vowels, in place of יָשָׁבוּת, 'strong']. 'A wise man is Boaz, and a man of knowledge increases strength,' for he overcame his desire with an oath (Ruth Rabbah 6.4: cf. Vayikra Rabbah 23.11 as found in Sifre Zuta).1

1Only for this chapter does Zlotowitz, co-editor of Megillat Ruth, offer prefatory remarks. He points out that the reader of this chapter must understand "the purity and innocence with which the Sages understood the episode as being fully, for the sake of Heaven" (Zlotowitz, 107). He then offers an interpretation of his own, in which Naomi has been dreaming and hoping throughout the harvest that Boaz would make a move to "redeem" Ruth. When the harvest ends, Naomi realizes there is little chance of another opportunity presenting itself. She realizes desperate measures are needed (Zlotowitz, 107). In this scenario, an element of desperation is added to the text in order to justify both Naomi's and Ruth's actions. It was, in the end, all in the service of God. Naomi also realized that Boaz was too passive to ever make a move without encouragement. Though this is a typical rabbinic apologia, it remains logically consistent with the plot.

1A passage in B.T. Sanhedrin praises men's resistance to women's temptation, using as a prooftext Proverbs 31. Baskin sees irony in the invocation of one of the most positive statements of female qualities found in the Hebrew Bible as a prooftext for the praise of men who resisted women's seductiveness, for male triumph over sexual desire (Baskin 2002, 111).
According to Ruth Zuta, Boaz died on his wedding night, after Obed was conceived. (Ruth Zuta 4:13), further supporting the rabbis' notion that the only truly important figure in the story of Ruth is David.

SPECIAL CONCERNS: CONVERSION, GENEALOGY, MESSIAH

CONVERSION

It seems apparent from these texts that the rabbis who wrote and compiled Ruth Rabhah were attempting to deal primarily with a particular issue: Ruth, a woman of exemplary character but a foreigner, became the ancestor of the Davidic line. The midrashists' primary concern was patrilineage, which meant that Ruth's "conversion" had to be halachically proper (based on B.T. Yebamot 76b-77a). With this motive in mind, the midrashists embellish the dialogue between Naomi and Ruth in 1:15-17. R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Judah b. Hamina:

"And Ruth said ‘Do not entreat urge me to leave you’ (1.16). What is ‘Do not entreat’? She said to her ‘Do not sin against me’—by turning your misfortunes away from me.

(Ruth Rabhah 2.22)."

Three times it is written here ‘Turn back,’ corresponding to the three times that a would-be proselyte is repulsed; but if he persists after that, he is accepted (Ruth Rabhah 2:16: 36)."

In Ruth Rabhah, statements by Naomi to which Ruth is purported to be responding are interpolated, during Ruth's famous utterance in 1.16-17. The opening phrase,-roll mēm-ay yōhām-āh, usually translated "Do not entreat urge me to leave you" is here translated as "Do not sin against me" (from the root לוה, which can also mean "trouble").

In this way rabbinitic theology is expressed through their exegesis (Neusner, 82-3). In the talmudic version, according to R. Eleazar:

[Naomi] tells [Ruth]: "We are forbidden to travel beyond the Sabbath boundaries (שָׁבָת)." Ruth says: “Wherever you go I will go.” [Naomi] tells [Ruth]: "Private meetings between men and women (נערות) are forbidden to you." Ruth says: “Wherever you lodge, I will lodge.” [Naomi] tells [Ruth]: “We are commanded to observe 613 commandments [606

According to Caspi and Havelock, the origin of this notion is found in Lekhāq lan, Josephus, supplement, 48-9 (Caspi Havelock, 86).
plus the seven Noahide Laws incumbent on all humanity]. Ruth says: “Your people will be my people.” [Naomi says]: “Idol worship is forbidden to us” (B.T. Yeḥamot 47b).

In *Ruth Zuta* there are some unique interpretations of the scene between Ruth and Naomi. The writer notes that Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return twice—once she says “Return,” then “Go.”

From this you learn that you refuse the proselyte twice. Rab Hiyya said: Do not believe the proselyte for 24 generations because he holds on to his evil inclination; but the moment he takes on himself the yoke of [HaMakom] God out of love and fear, and converts for the sake of Heaven, the Holy One blessed be He does not turn him back. For it is said, ‘God loves the sojourner and gives him food and clothing’ (Deut. 10:18, תָּם נַחֲלָה לְעוֹלָם וְלֹא שָׁמֵל). Further, God gave 18 warnings [תִּזְקֵיר: also the name for hymns read on Shavuot] about the sojourner, and opposite those, he warned against idol worship (*Ruth Zuta* 1.12: 30-31).

The word דָּו in the Bible usually means “sojourner” (BDB, 158), while in rabbinic Hebrew, it more commonly means “proselyte” (Jastrow, 263). In this way the rabbis read the meaning they want to find into various biblical passages.

Two women attached themselves to the tribe of Judah—Tamar and Ruth. Tamar shouted that she would not leave empty from that house; Ruth wept each time Naomi told her to go back. So in the end, Ruth clung to her mother-in-law.

And Ruth said: “I cannot return to my family and to the idol worship of my father’s house (*Ruth Zuta* 1.12).

When Ruth concludes her plea, Naomi does not reply. The fact that Naomi stopped speaking to Ruth after she saw how determined she was (1.18) is cited in the Babylonian Talmud as a paradigm of how to treat a proselyte, whom one should not excessively push away (B.T. Yeḥamot 47b).

The scene between Ruth and Naomi ends with the two women walking together: “The two went on until they reached Bethlehem” הלְכָה שָׁאַרְתָּה וְדִבְרֵיהֶם בְּבֵית לֶחֶם (1.19). The rabbis saw this as a sign of the preciousness of proselytes to God. R. Judah b. Simon commented:

Come and see how precious in the eyes of the Omnipresent are converts. Once she decided to become converted. Scripture ranks her equally with Naomi (*Ruth Rabbah* 3.5: 47; cf. *Yalkut Shimoni Ruth* 601).

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7 According to the *ʾamoraita* the name Ruth adds up to 666, proving to the rabbis that even Ruth’s name indicates her acceptance of all 613 commandments (Leibel Metzer, “Ruth,” in *The Five Scrolls*, as quoted by Bromer, 1994).
This view is based on the fact that the text says the two women went together (וַיֵּאוֹת), interpreted here as “equals.” The acceptance of Ruth the proselyte is the key issue in the genealogy discussion.

**Genealogy**

The genealogy at the conclusion of the Scroll is discussed at some length, with the goal of making David’s descent from a Moabitite woman acceptable. The meaning of the phrase “A son is born to Naomi” (4.17) is discussed at length in the Talmud and midrash. R. Hanina explains that it means “Ruth bore him but Naomi brought him up, so he was called after Naomi’s name” (B.T. Sanhedrin 19b). Other rabbis offer biblical examples that are similar to this verse. R. Johanan quotes “these are the sons of Bithia the daughter of Pharaoh” (1 Chronicles 4.18), explaining that Jochebed bore and Bithia reared him; therefore he was called after her, which he sees as a parallel to Naomi raising Ruth’s son (Yalkut Shimoni to 1 Samuel, 129). R. Hezazer quotes from Psalm 77.16, “By your arm you redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph.” דאש בורעת מעמד מניי תוקף והם נאמה. He notes that it was Jacob, not Joseph, who fathered them. But since Joseph sustained them, they are called by his name. Other examples are offered by R. Samuel b. Nahmani and Rab Judah (B.T. Sanhedrin 19b).

There is a similar discussion in Sechel Tov:

As we find in Rachel, who says “I will be built up through her.” (Gen. 30.3), and she named the sons of Bilhah (Gen. 30.6, 8), as Leah named the sons of Zilpah (Gen. 30.11, 13), and so Naomi and her neighbors named Obed son of her daughter-in-law (4.17) and this phrase is repeated [in 4.16 Naomi became the child’s nurse, in 4.17 the women name him], to show that through Naomi’s mouth they named him Obed (Sechel Tov Genesis 16.15).

In Gen. 30.3, Bilhah gives birth and Rachel raises the child and nurses him at her breast, similarly to the son on Joseph’s knees (50.23). So with Naomi, she took the boy and nursed him at her breast (4.16):

The sons will be called by my name, in remarkable language [לְשׁוֹן רְבִיתָה], that is to say, by what I do for her. I will attain merit and be remembered [נַפַּל [&ֲלֵיהּ בְּכָל תּוֹדָה], as Sarah was remembered through Hagar (Sechel Tov Gen. 30.3).

More commentary on this section is found in Yalkut Shimoni:

Rabbi Hanina said: From where [why] “the neighbor women named him, saying ‘A son is born to Naomi.’” (4.17) Did Naomi give birth? No, Ruth gave birth. Rather, Ruth gave birth but Naomi raised him, so he was called by her name (Yalkut Shimoni 1 Sam., 129).
The formula "theses are the generations." appears at least seven times in Genesis (2.4, 6.9, 10.1, 11.10, 11.27, 36.1, 37.7) and once in Numbers (3.1), in addition to here in Ruth. No woman is named in the list at the end of Ruth, even though the story focuses primarily on women. In the end, Neusner believes.

God chooses, and genealogy stands aside...Abraham and David compare to one another, one standing at the commencement of Israel's history, the other at the end...there is a match at the start and finish (Neusner, 108-9).

The male perspective of the ancient rabbis is reflected in Neusner's views.

These interpretations serve to support the rabbis' claim, consistently from the fourth century up to this day, that the Scroll was created to legitimize David's ancestry. One reason this was such an important goal was David's link to the idea of the future Messiah.

MESSIAH
Understanding the centrality of the Messiah theme in Ruth Rabbah is crucial to understanding the work's context (Neusner, 115). It is central because the genealogy in 4.18-20 points to David, and in the talmudic period it became a fixed conception that the Messiah must be a "son of David"—וּלָּד היה רּוּ וֹ ד. Many legends are connected with the view that David himself is the promised Messiah. There are several examples in the Talmud. The link of David to the Messiah is found as early as Bereshit Rabbah:

The Moabitess Ruth is the great-grandmother of David, and the Ammonitess Naamah [Solomon's wife] is the mother of Rehoboam, and the Messiah is of the line of these two kings (Bereshit Rabbah 51.8-11).

Elsewhere in the same Midrash collection, Tamar is described as endowed with the gift of prophecy, which enables her to know that "she was appointed to be the ancestress of David and of the Messiah." The paradox of the Messiah coming from an excluded people (the Moabites) had to be resolved by the rabbis in their midrashic retelling (Neusner, 6).

[2] The rabbinal belief that Ruth was destined to become the mother of the Davidic dynasty is found in earlier midrashic sources. In Deuteronomy, Moses is commanded to fight both the Midianites and Moabites, but war is not waged against Moab until David's time. God told the Israelites to wait before waging war against Moab, because God had lost something valuable among them, and did not want Israel to avenge itself until God found what he lost (meaning Ruth). The Deuteronomic prohibition against intermarriage with Moab (Deut. 23.4) is explained by the fact that Ruth was destined to become the foremother of David (Ginzberg, vol. III, 406 and vol. VI, 142, n. 845, quoting Yelamdenu in Bava Kamma 875). In another, later Midrash, Abraham's kindness towards Lot supposedly was due to Abraham's prophetic understanding that Lot was destined to become the ancestor of David, through Ruth the Moabitess (Zohar I, 84a and 79a, as quoted in Ginzberg, vol. V, 240, n. 171).

[3] In an extensive passage in B. B. Sanhedrin, several rabbis expound on the idea "the Son of David will not come until..." R. Hama said "until a fish is sought for an invalid and cannot be procured:" R. Hama b. Hama said "until even the poorest kingdom ceases to have power over Israel:" Ze'irin in R. Hama's name "until there are no conceited men in Israel" (B. B. Sanhedrin 98a). Each rabbi offers a textual proof, and the discussion continues at length.

[4] Beliefs in the world to come and the Jewish Messianic ideal may have both begun in the period of the Second Commonwealth, marked by its yearning for the restoration of the nation and the Temple. David became the quintessential romantic figure of the Messianic idea, his reign being considered the ideal era (Casp and Cohen, 87). The leader was supposed to stand for and embody the people.
In Christian belief, their own Messiah, Jesus, descended from David:

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham...So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations (Matt. 1.1-1.17).

Therefore when Christians read the Messiah idea into Ruth, they are referring to Jesus. Jerome obtained from his Hebrew teachers the most current interpretation of the Bible in his day, thus admitting rabbinic exegesis into his Latin “Vulgate” translation and exposition. In turn, his translation and commentaries became a repository of Hebrew traditions (Spiegel, “Introduction” in Ginzberg, xxii).

JOSEPHUS

INTRODUCTION

Flavius Josephus (37-c.100 C.E.) was a Jewish general, historian, and biblical exegete. He approached Jewish texts from a different angle and with a different agenda than the rabbis. He wrote his 20-book Jewish Antiquities under the patronage of the Flavians, after defecting to Rome. The first ten volumes of this work parallel biblical history. Josephus wanted to retell biblical narratives by making the texts more relevant to his time, much as the rabbis did. Jewish Antiquities drew heavily from the Septuagint, extra-biblical traditions, and the writings of Greek and Roman historians (Whiston, Introduction, x), as well as rabbinic literature.

Josephus represents one of the earliest extant stages in midrashic tradition, and for that reason his writings cannot be ignored in a discussion of midrash. Josephus was “well versed not only in the Bible but also in the body of oral law, as later codified in the Talmud...he is well read in a variety of authors and has direct access to the commentaries of Vespasian and of Titus” (Feldman 1987, Introduction, 65). In his paraphrase of biblical narratives, Josephus is an important early witness to the biblical text. His version of the text can be compared to the various versions of the Hebrew and Septuagint as well as to Dead Sea fragments. (Feldman 1987, Preface, 13).

Josephus became very well known and influential well beyond his own time and place, class and ethnicity. His influence on early Christianity is important. His text was read and reread by the church fathers (Brenner 2003, 105-6), whose reading of Josephus’ midrashic retellings became a source of Christian knowledge of Jewish traditions (Feldman 1987, Introduction, 62). Later on, with the reformation, his text became authoritative again, “equivalent to the Bible itself as a source of inspiration” (Brenner 2003, 105). His approach and attitudes, therefore, offer a window into the thinking of his era and cultural milieu. They must also be considered when trying to understand later Christian interpretations of the Scroll, as reflected for example in the librettos I will be discussing.

Typical of that era were condescending attitudes towards women, found both in Jewish circles and the larger Greco-Roman world. Passages in Josephus’s work clearly indicate that he considered women to be in a category apart from men, even if they are not always inferior. Since his stated goal was to demonstrate the superiority of Judaism, Josephus needed to make his portrayal of biblical women attractive, even exemplary, for Greco-Roman readers. His portrayals of the matriarchs, for example, show Hellenistic idealization (Bailey, 155).

Josephus betrayed a Hellenistic prejudice about women’s proper social roles and personality traits, yet he also attached too much importance to their existence even when this was justified by the biblical narrative. Ultimately the picture is mixed and inconsistent, and in many
ways Josephus’ *Antiquities* is no better and no worse than other sources of his time and place (Brenner 2003, 104). Josephus’ enhancement of some biblical women’s portraits did not apparently change his own misogynistic attitudes towards most women. This would not have been a contradiction for Josephus, since he considered the matriarchs to be aristocrats, not commoners, as understood in his contemporary society. And he held very different views towards these two different classes of women (Bailey, 168, 176).

Josephus frequently did expand the role of women from that of the original biblical story, but the motive was just as likely to have been the writing of a better tale than appreciation of women (Brenner 2003, 95). In an expansion, the female figure may be enhanced or, on the contrary, may be further weakened in some way. As Brenner points out, “theoretically and hypothetically, an expansion might serve the same purpose, or result in the same belittling, as a minimization” (Brenner 2003, 94). Josephus also tended to exaggerate women’s beauty or youth, accepting wisdom from women only when they were old (Brenner 2003, 100).

**A NOTE ON TRANSLATION**

Translation of Josephus’s works becomes a complex problem because of Josephus’s “use of a Greek version of Scripture, and the corrections made by Christian copyists in the interest of conformity to the biblical text known to them, and partly because of the apparent revisions made by Josephus’s Greek assistants” (Ralph Marcus in Thackeray, Preface, ix). The most respected 20th century English translation of Josephus is considered to be that of Henry St. John Thackeray in 1934. There is also a more recent translation of books 1-4 by Feldman (Brill Academic Publishers, 1999). The most popular English translation prior to Thackeray’s was that of William Whiston (1736), which was the most widely known and used before Thackeray. There is also a Hebrew translation by Shalit. The translators themselves—much like Josephus—are informed by their own perceptions, and the small differences they introduce reveal their own approaches to the story in general, and to the issue of women in particular (Brenner 2003, 97). Comparisons between Thackeray and Whiston highlight the power of a translation to subtly alter the original meaning of a text. I will be pointing out differences when relevant, throughout this analysis. I am working solely with English translations, not the original Greek.

**GAP FILLING**

**ACTION TIME**

Chapter 1 From the start, male bias is evident in Josephus’s re-telling:

Elimelech was not able to support his family, so he took with him Naomi his wife, the children born to him by her, and removed his habitation into Moab; there he took for his sons wives of the Moabites (italics all mine) (*Antiquities*, 5.9.318, Whiston).

This account differs from the biblical story in several details:

A man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab (1.1). Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women (1.3-4). Elimelech’s death in the Scroll precedes the death of his sons, so he could not take sons for his wives. Josephus’ version elevates Elimelech’s role and status, in addition to validating the marriage of his sons to Moabite women, which is not so clearly validated in the Scroll.

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1 In spite of my efforts, this book was not available to me so I could not check Feldman’s Introduction and Notes. In any case, *Ruth* is found in Book V, and Feldman’s translation to date is only of Books I-IV.
Chapter 2 When Boaz first meets Ruth, Josephus adds a phrase: “Boaz hospitably received them” (5.9.323, Whiston). Josephus apparently could not conceive a man in Boaz’s position not immediately greeting his female relation. When Ruth appears in the field, Boaz asks who she is, and the overseer answers. The original text does not explain how the overseer came by the information about Ruth that he imparts to Boaz. Josephus fills in the gap with:

The servant had a little before inquired about all her circumstances (5.9.320, Whiston).

In Thackeray’s translation.

The steward learnt all her story from herself (5.9.320, Thackeray).

The second version imagines a dialogue between Ruth and the steward, which humanizes Ruth. This is not the sort of gap that troubled the rabbis, but it might have been noticeable and possibly unacceptable to the Roman reader.

At the end of chapter 2, Ruth returns home to Naomi with extra food she has gleaned (2.18). Josephus adds:

Naomi on her side had reserved for her portions of some food with which attentive neighbors had provided her (5.9.326, Thackeray).

Thackeray points out in a footnote that this phrase is an “amplification” from the original biblical story. Josephus’s addition explains how the two women could have survived only on the meager rations Ruth might glean in the fields. This version also takes away from Boaz’s generosity.

Chapter 3 The action in chapter 3 opens at the end of the harvest season, which the rabbis believed lasted three months. Josephus, however, describes it as “not many days” (5.9.328, Whiston). Either he was not knowledgeable about agriculture, or he felt the story would be more dramatic in a more compact time frame. His time frame would have been more in keeping with Greek Hellenized dramatic conventions.

In the Scroll, Naomi knows that Boaz was sleeping on the threshing floor. The original text does not explain how she knew, because the assumption was that the reader would know the custom. Josephus adds that she “was informed” of this. Either Josephus himself did not understand, or he knew his intended readers would not understand, and therefore would not grasp how Naomi could have known without being told. But whatever his motivation, the addition of this phrase opens new gaps: who told Naomi, and why? It is implied that Naomi had formed friendships with neighbors who would have kept her informed.

In the Scroll, Ruth rises at dawn because Boaz thought “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor” (3.14), which is ambivalent about whose decision it was for Ruth to rise and depart, and whether a conversation took place (ch. 2, pp. 29-30). Josephus amends this ambivalence by unequivocally stating:

...in the morning, before the servants began to set about their work, he awaked her, and bid her...go to her mother-in-law before anybody there should see that she had lain down by him, because it was prudent to avoid any reproach that might arise, especially when there had been nothing done that was ill (5.9.330; Whiston).

Thackeray’s translation spells it out even more clearly:

It was wise to guard against scandal of that kind, and the more so when nothing had passed (5.9.330; Thackeray).
Obviously Josephus wanted to ensure that his readers not draw any wrong conclusions about the night on the threshing room floor.

Chapter 4  
At the beginning of chapter 4 in the Scroll, Boaz sits at the gate and then “gathers ten elders of the town” (4.2). In Josephus, Boaz is described as “gathering the senate together” (5.9.332. Thackeray). Thackeray points out that the word means “senate or council of elders,” which has a parallel in the Targum, where Boaz came before the “court of Sanhedrin” (Targum Ruth 4.1). Josephus also has Boaz summoning both the kinsman and Ruth. These are changes from the original story, where the kinsman just happened to come along, and where Ruth is absent from the scene. Josephus is thereby amplifying Ruth’s role, and downplaying the role of “Providence” in the supposedly random appearance of the kinsman in the biblical version. This is in contrast to the rabbis, who saw the hand of God in the kinsman’s appearance (this chapter, p. 56).

Ruth and Boaz are described by Josephus as having a son within a year’s time. Naomi herself, according to Josephus, names the child “by the advice of the women” (5.9.336. Whiston), an alteration from the original text in which the women name the child. In the Scroll, the women first tell Naomi “He will be a restorer of your life to you, and he will sustain your old age,” (4.15) after which Naomi takes and nurses the child; and only then do the women name the child Obed (4.16-17). The reversal of order in these different versions of events indicates a difference in focus:

This infant was nursed by Naomi, who on the counsel of the women called him Obed, which means servant in Hebrew, because he was to be brought up to be the stay of her old age (5.9.336. Thackeray).

Either Josephus wanted to elevate Naomi’s role, or he did not understand the significance of a group of women naming a child. But the remark reflects his general attitude that the purpose of marriage is to produce children who will tend their parents in their old age (Antiquities IV. 261).

CAUSE-MOTIVE

The numerous “why” questions that preoccupied the midrashists—why a famine, why go to Moab, why not contact Boaz on arrival in Bethlehem—are not dealt with by Josephus. An interesting attribution of motive is found in Josephus’ treatment of the kinsman in chapter 4. In the Scroll, the kinsman refuses his right of redemption because he is afraid of impairing his own estate (4.6). According to Josephus, the kinsman’s reason for refusing Boaz’s offer is that he already has a wife and children (5.9.334), which is Josephus’ understanding of the biblical expression.

CHARACTER APPEARANCE

Josephus expends very little energy amplifying the biblical characters’ personalities or appearance. After the death of Elimelech and the sons, the biblical story, as well as Josephus’s retelling, shifts to Naomi, whom Josephus describes with some feeling as “not able to bear her lonesome condition” (5.9.320, Whiston). This is an early example of Exum’s “romantic gap-filling” (ch. 2, p. 46). Naomi’s sad condition is also greatly amplified in most librettos (e.g., Franck, p. 136; Schumann, p. 153; Rumshinsky, p. 170).
Neither Ruth's nor Orpah's names are mentioned in Josephus' description of their interaction with Naomi. Only when Orpah departs are both women named. The conclusion of the chapter, in Whiston's translation, reads as follows:

...she took Ruth along with her, as not to be persuaded to stay behind her, but would take her fortune with her, whatsoever it should prove (5.9.322, Whiston).

The same passage translated by Thackeray reads:

Naomi took her with her, to be her partner in all that should befall.

The simple addition of the word 'partner' alters the sense of the entire phrase, by focusing on the relationship between the two women. Josephus' retelling adds a dimension of mutual feeling between the two women that is not found in the Scroll.

Naomi orders Ruth (3. 3-4) to follow her plan: no motive is given in the Scroll. Josephus writes:

Naomi schemed to bring Ruth to his side, deeming that he would be gracious to them after consortin g with the child (5.9.328, Thackeray).²

This conjures up an image of a crafty and slightly self-serving Naomi. Ruth obeys Naomi's commands, because Josephus writes, she thought it her duty not to contradict any command of her mother-in-law. Obedience to a mother-in-law was probably perceived as an important quality in Josephus's social milieu, so in this way he enhanced the figure of Ruth.

Josephus offers only a brief genealogy—Obed, Jesse, David, "who was king, and left his dominions to his sons for one-and-twenty generations" (5.9.336). Josephus explains his purpose in relating the story of Ruth:

To demonstrate the power of God who, without difficulty, can raise those that are of ordinary parentage to dignity and splendor, to which he advanced David, though he were born of such mean parents (5.9.337, Whiston).

Thackeray's translation of the last phrase is more felicitous:

...how easy it is for Him to promote even ordinary folk to rank so illustrious as that to which He raised David, sprung from such ancestors (Thackeray, 311).

Josephus clearly views the point of the Scroll to be the birth of David and its almost miraculous nature. He seems to be suggesting a comparison with Jesus, without saying so overtly.

Josephus's account differs in some important ways from the biblical narrative and later rabbinic versions. First, Moab and Moabite are each mentioned only once. Ruth's being a Moabite is apparently not an issue for Josephus or his intended readers; or he wanted to intentionally downplay it, in order not to depict an intolerant side of Judaism. Josephus' stated

² The use of the word "child" is striking. Whiston translates the word as "girl" here, and instead of "consort with" he uses "discourse with." The biblical text refers to Ruth as a נבונה, "young girl" or social inferior, but not really "child." Possibly Josephus used a Greek equivalent to the Hebrew that was not accurately translated. Brenner asks: "Is a daughter automatically a child?" This is imperceptible downgrading, especially since it might be argued that 'child' is a term of endearment. But is treating an adult female, even a young adult, as a minor necessarily complimentary? For Josephus, even Ruth is a child (5.324), which is worse even than the put-down 'daughter' which Boaz uses to address her (Ruth 3.10, 11), and makes the complex game of power, gender and class differentials between them extremely clear" (Brenner 2003, 99,101).
goal, after all, was to present the Jewish people and religion in a positive light to the Greco-Roman world. In addition, he was trying to refute the virulent anti-Jewish feelings of his day, found in such writers as Quintilian, Tacitus, and Juvenal (Feldman 1987, Introduction, 21). At issue is more Ruth’s class than her ethnic origin, reflecting the Greco-Roman world Josephus inhabited. In addition, the ancient animosity between Israel and Moab would probably have been unfamiliar or irrelevant to his readers.

CONCLUSION

The rabbis in their midrashic re-tellings, and to some degree Josephus, embellish the characters and their motivations in order to make them more noble, more modest, more totally instruments of God’s will. Autonomy, friendship, and devotion—human qualities all found in the original book—are almost air-brushed out of the picture. Confirming their belief in the Bible as a cryptic document, the midrashists find hidden meaning in characters’ names and in the smallest gestures or utterances. They implicitly teach lessons about proper behavior through examples of Ruth’s modesty and Orpah’s betrayal, and the results of these, thereby using the Scroll as a relevant document for instruction. The rabbis’ midrashic re-tellings serve the agenda of glorifying God, who sanctioned the Scroll and chose Ruth as the foremother of David, from whom the messiah would come: מַעְלֶהָ בֶן בַּד דָּוִד.
EXCURSUS: READING THE TROPE SIGNS (תְּנִוקָת) IN RUTH AS INTERPRETIVE KEYS

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In my Jewish tradition, public recitation of biblical texts is generally done as a chant. The Scroll is chanted annually in synagogue on the holiday of Shavuot. The notion of chanting, or cantillating, a text, probably originated when people of antiquity realized how this intensified the emotional and dramatic impact of words. Composers have always used music to heighten the theatricality of a powerful text (Jacobson, 9), and cantillation of biblical texts is a very early example of this use of music.

The music of Jewish cantillation is unmetrical and consists not so much of melodies, as of modes in which an octave runs through a diatonic scale (Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 3, 15). Based on Talmudic references (B.T. Megillah 32a), it is believed that sacred texts were chanted in ancient Israel. Scripture is cantillated in systems resembling the Jewish one in every Asiatic tradition, from Vedic recitation in India to Buddhist recitation in Japan (Avenary, 1978, quoted in Jacobson, 368). Chanting rather than reading sacred texts highlights the important distinction between secular and sacred (Jacobson, 11).

The Hebrew word for biblical trope (cantillation) is יָנִוקָת (plural יָנִוקָתִים), which can mean both “taste” and “meaning.” This points to the stress on oral over written meaning. Medieval commentator Abraham Ibn-Ezra claimed that “any comment that is not on a comment of the accents you will not want it and you will not listen to it” (as quoted by Meschonnic in Hirsch and Aschkenasy, 228).

Jacobson gives four primary functions of cantillation:

- It is an aesthetic enhancement of the text;
- It serves as a mnemonic device, helping the reader memorize the text;
- As a stage device, it aids the reader in projecting the voice so all the worshippers can hear the text;
- It is a stylization of the natural inflections of expressive speech, in that it emphasizes some syllables and some words more than others by means of heightened volume, raised pitch, or longer duration of certain notes.

Numerous books and articles have dealt in great detail with text interpretation based on trope. An in-depth analysis would include the use of trope to indicate how each verse should be phrased, and would point to particular functions of specific trope signs. I am treating this subject only briefly here because, although I believe it is an essential part of any reading of the Hebrew Bible, it is not really a form of musical midrash, only of expression. But as a type of musical interpretation, it connects the original text to the chapters that follow, on musical

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1. The passage reads as follows: Rabbi Shefatiah further said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: If one reads the Scripture without a melody or learns the Mishnah without a tune, of him the Scripture says (Ezekiel 20:25), “Moreover, I gave them laws that were not good” (Jacobson, 368).

interpretations of *Ruth*. In addition, the 1986 opera by Aloni utilizes trope modes extensively throughout (ch. 6, p. 198).

The trope signs were added to the biblical text by the Masoretes in the 10th century C.E., and were that group's own interpretation of how the un-punctuated Hebrew text should be phrased and understood. Yet this one group's interpretation has continued to have influence beyond that of any other's because of the dispersion of these trope marks in all Hebrew Bibles printed since the Middle Ages.

CHANTING *RUTH*

The particular melodic system for chanting *Ruth* is the same as the one used for *Song of Songs* and *Ecclesiastes*. These three scrolls are chanted on the three Pilgrimage Festivals - Shavuot, Passover, and Sukkoth. Using the same melodies for all three makes a liturgical connection between them. The earliest reference to chanting these three scrolls in public is in the post-talmudic tract *Soferim* (14.3.4) (Jacobson, 732).

I will point out only a few instances of the less common signs as they appear in the Scroll. These are the signs I will discuss:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;pazer&quot;</td>
<td>long, ornate; from Hebrew &quot;disperse&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;T'lisha g'dola&quot;</td>
<td>ornate; from Hebrew &quot;major pull&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Gershayin&quot;</td>
<td>a &quot;double gersh&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Zakef gadol&quot;</td>
<td>high pitch; from Hebrew &quot;major raising&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Aza gersh&quot;</td>
<td>high pitch; Hebrew &quot;going on&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Kadma v'azla&quot;</td>
<td>same high pitch; kadma is &quot;preceder&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Zarka segol&quot;</td>
<td>different mode, lower pitch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pazer:** In 1.2, the name Elimelech appears for the first time (and the only time in the entire Hebrew Bible) with the mark of *pazer* (פזר), the only place in the Scroll this mark is found. It is a relatively uncommon and elaborately chanted trope, signifying the importance the Masoretes wanted the listener to ascribe to Elimelech.

**T'lisha g'dola:** This sign (תלישה גדולה) is found in very few places in the Scroll. Its first appearance is in 1.16, over the word יִלּוּ "for wherever you go." This is like a signal to the reader to pay attention to what follows.

**Gershayin:** The first appearance of this sign (גרשאָיִין) is in 1.18, over the word אִיוֹדָּה, when Naomi "saw that she was determined." This highlights Naomi's act of passive seeing rather than the more unusual verb סְתָּמָה which ascribes determination to Ruth in a verb form found uniquely here in the feminine. Possibly the Masoretes thought the verb was unusual enough not to need further accentuation, while they wanted to keep the spotlight on Naomi at this point in the story.

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Elsewhere in the Bible, it is found only in 1 Kings 12.18 and 2 Chronicles 10.18, in both places it means "made speed." The only place it is translated similarly to the Scroll is in 2 Chronicles 13.7 where it means "they strengthened themselves."
This sign, אֲאַטָּל, is first found in 2.2 over the word נָהָה, where Ruth hopes to find favor behind someone in the field. The word can also mean "after." Having the voice rise in a melisma on this particular word can be interpreted as an indication of Ruth's hope.

Boaz's speech to Ruth in 2.8-9 contains more ornate trope combinations than other parts of the narrative. The Masoretes seem to have been trying to attribute a certain formality to his speech in this way. In 2.9 there is a בָּשַׁלֶּשׁ הָלַשׁ, "your eyes on the field." There is no verb attached to this noun; it is understood to mean "keep your eyes on the field." The insertion of a complex trope symbol compensates for the missing verb and also stresses the importance of Ruth's watching the field carefully. Both her livelihood and her safety depend on this watchfulness.

Ruth's and Boaz's speeches are distinguished in 2.10-14 by different trope signs. The melodies of Ruth's speech are far simpler, even in her longer phrases, while Boaz's continue to be more ornate. There are frequent uses of בָּשַׁלֶּשׁ הָלַשׁ which has a more ornate tune associated with it.

There is a striking change in the trope patterns in chapter 4. The signs נָהָה נָהָה are found here for the first time in the Scroll, in 4.1 and 4.4, both of which refer to legal proceedings. The Masoretes tried to create a "musical language" here that differed from the rest of the book.

SUMMARY

Jewish exegetes read biblical texts with the diacritical marks: they are a part of the punctuation but are also interpretation. Though trope was initially an oral tradition, notation systems were developed some time between the 6th and 8th century C.E. (Jacobson, 373). Aharon Ben-Asher is believed to have written the first complete codex of the Masoretic Bible in 930 C.E., and the Leningrad Codex of 1009 is purportedly based on Ben Asher (Jacobson, 378). Once editions with these marks were available, no Jewish exegete could ignore them in interpretation. Hidden meanings or stresses reveal themselves to the reader who is also reading the trope signs. Though I have not engaged in a detailed study of trope in the Scroll, I felt this area of inquiry could not be altogether ignored in the study of a biblical book.
CHAPTER FOUR
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ORATORIO AND OPERA FORMS

Music takes up where speech leaves off, it makes us discover in ourselves depths we had not suspected (Camille Saint-Saëns).

Of the 12 works being treated in this thesis, I classify four classified as oratorios, based on their form:
- Damrosch's *Ruth and Naomi: A Scriptural Idyll* (German-American, 1875);
- Cowen's *Ruth, A Dramatic Oratorio* (British, 1887);
- Franck's *Ruth: Elegy Biblique* (French, 1844 revised 1872);
- Schumann's *Ruth* (German, 1908).

Goldschmidt's *Ruth, A Sacred Pastoral* (German-British, 1868) seems intended to be performed as an oratorio, though it is not defined as such. The cantata genre is closely related to oratorio, its primary difference being its brevity. Cantatas being discussed in this thesis are:
- Gaul's *Ruth, A Sacred Cantata* (British, 1880);
- Mellors' *The Song of Ruth, cantata* (British, 1950);
- Beecham's *Ruth—Cantata* (British, 1957);

Four works labelled as operas are:
- Fino's *Naomi e Ruth, Poema Bibliico* (Italian, 1908);
- Rumshinsky's *Ruth, A Biblical Opera* (American, 1949);
- Berkeley's *Ruth: An Opera in Three Scenes* (British, 1956);

In this chapter I will define the oratorio, cantata, and opera forms. I will then present a brief background of their history and importance in Germany, England, France, and the U.S., the countries of origin of the composers that are the subject of this thesis.

ORATORIO

The definition of oratorio depends more on libretto and performance mode than on music. An oratorio is an extended musical setting of a sacred text composed of dramatic, narrative and contemplative elements. The root of the word is the Latin orare, "pray," and the Italian oratorio, "prayer hall" or oratory. An oratorio historically could be presented either in public concert halls in a secular context or in churches in a sacred context, which would also include prayers and biblical readings. Apart from the religious content, oratorio differs from opera in the greater role of narrative, in its concert manner of performance, and its greater emphasis on chorus. In oratorio the choruses tend to be more numerous and longer than those in opera, and often more

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1 As quoted in Barzin, 258

2 Historically, the attitude towards vocal music began to change during the Counter-Reformation, specifically in the Council of Trent, a deliberative council of the Roman Church, which met in Trento, Italy, between 1545 (in Kivy, see: 1545) and 1563 (Kivy 2002, 161). They discussed, among other things, the role and proper form of music in the Catholic service. The main issue related to vocal music was the intelligibility of the words: the clergy wanted the texts to be of primary importance, not the music. Music had become increasingly polyphonic (where several melodies are sung or played simultaneously) throughout the Renaissance, and sung texts were lost in the intertwining strands of melody. The Council considered banning polyphonic music, but in the end reached a compromise whereby polyphony would be simplified (Kivy 2002, 161-162). This change is significant inasmuch as it led to the steadily increasing importance of the libretto over the next few centuries of oratorio development.
contrapuntally complex. But the musical forms and styles of the oratorio approximate those of opera in any given period (Smither in New Grove, vol. 18, 503).

The cantata is a vocal genre for solo singers, chorus and instrumentalists based on a lyric or dramatic poetic narrative. It generally consists of several movements including recitatives, arias and ensemble numbers. Cantatas can be intimate but are usually large scale works with choruses, soloists and orchestra (Sony music and All Music Guide online glossaries). It was the most ubiquitous and important form outside opera and oratorio in the Baroque period (17th-18th century). Up to the late 17th century it was mostly a secular form, but the church cantata including choruses was a major feature of Lutheran music in early 18th century Germany. The term "cantata" has been applied haphazardly to a wide variety of works whose only commonality is that they are set for chorus and orchestra (Mellers and Beecham are examples) (Boyd in New Grove, vol. 5, 84). This definition is not entirely accurate, since there are also solo cantatas.

Oratorios are based on sacred texts: biblical oratorios are based on either the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament (the latter was a more popular source in 19th century Germany, the former in Britain and America). George Frederic Handel (1685-1759) is generally believed to have created the form of the English oratorio (Sadie, in The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music [online]). His oratorios, therefore, provided the primary criteria for establishing the character of the genre, since Handel’s works served as models for later oratorio composers in England, Germany, and elsewhere. Most 19th century oratorios, especially after 1830, reflect Handel’s influence, and after his death his oratorios “dominated the genre” (Smither, 250, 181).

Handel’s oratorios were of two types, represented by the Messiah and Samson. The first, the devotional genre, has epic-lyric librettos compiled from the Bible, does not include dramatic personages, and is composed entirely of biblical quotations, mostly contemplative. The second, the dramatic type, includes dramatic-lyric librettos newly written in verse and also includes dramatic personages. The purely biblical text remained more popular in 19th-century England, possibly because of the religious view of the genre and the impression of an oratorio performance as a kind of religious service (Smither, 65, 302). The dramatic type of oratorio was popularized through Mendelssohn’s powerful example.

Mendelssohn’s influence on several composers discussed in this thesis cannot be overestimated. In the second half of the 19th century, his music was “revered in England to the point of adulation” (Longyear, 108). Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy’s (1809-1847) early conducting positions included one in Germany, where he concentrated on Handel’s oratorios. Mendelssohn’s oratorios, which have remained very popular, were inspired by Bach and Handel (Sadie, in The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music [online]).

Mendelssohn popularized the dramatic oratorio genre in his Elijah of 1846, one of the most successful and well-known oratorios of the later 19th century. This work powerfully influenced musical style in oratorio without changing or modifying the prevailing concept of the genre (Smither, 289). Mendelssohn wrote to his librettist about the importance of the dramatic element in his oratorio:

The personages should act and speak as if they were living beings—for Heaven’s sake let them not be a musical picture, but a real world, such as you find in every chapter of the Old Testament (Mendelssohn to his librettist Schubring, quoted in Smither, 167).

The librettist Schubring had the idea of ending Elijah with New Testament passages: he wanted Elijah to “help transform the old into the new covenant—that gives him his great historical
importance” (Schubring to Mendelssohn, in Smither, 173). The tendency to mix Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts in oratorio is seldom found in oratorios being discussed here: two examples are Goldschmidt (chorus sings Matt. 5:4, ch. 6, p. 109) and Berkeley (Luke 23:46 in Ruth’s prayer, ch. 6, p. 195). But the inclusion of New Testament text in an oratorio based on Ruth is rare.

Prior to the development of the “dramatic” oratorio, a 19th-century oratorio libretto would not usually have designated scenes, as an opera would (Smither designates “an episode in the action of the libretto” as a scene). The common practice in 19th century oratorios was to extract phrases from widely separated parts of the Bible and stitch them together as a libretto. An oratorio would be a series of lyrical numbers, strung together with no clear dramatic connection. In other words, the sequence of events is not continuously developing, as it would in true drama (Smither, 68-9, 302). This kind of organization will be discussed further for each work (full outlines are on pp. 235ff.). I offer two examples here: in Goldschmidt’s 1868 work, there is a sequence of 36 numbered scenes. Interspersed between the biblical scenes are numerous choruses and soloists singing psalms, which halt the dramatic development. In Damrosch’s 1875 work, there are 16 enumerated scenes, some of which are orchestral interludes and choruses. Chapters and verses from the Scroll are divided indiscriminately into numbered scenes, but not organized into acts. This practice was satirized in an unsigned article, “The Way We Write Our Oratorios. By One of the Unperformed” which appeared in the Musical World in 1887:

You took your subject—any subject, provided it was a name mentioned in the bible;...you took your Cruden’s Concordance (saved you the expense of a librettist, don’t you know) and looked up all the references...and you padded it out with copious extracts from the psalms (as quoted in Smither, 302-3).

This actually sounds like a description of Goldschmidt’s Ruth, but Goldschmidt explains his motivation and the care with which he chose biblical texts for his oratorio (Appendix I, p. 259).

The dramatic oratorio became more popular later in the century. Typical of this later period was Cowen’s Ruth. Such works differ from most of Handel’s dramatic oratorios as well as from earlier Victorian works that include personages, in the virtual absence of narrative, along with the addition of “stage” directions, printed in the libretto for the benefit of the audience. It was considered unnecessary to have the narrative recounted aloud because the audience was presumed to have prior knowledge of the biblical story (Smither, 306).

The main difference between Hebrew Bible and New Testament settings is that most Hebrew Bible librettos in the 19th century were newly written text based on, but not compiled from, the Bible. This was probably because the Hebrew Bible’s greater distance from the church made freedom from the biblical text more acceptable. Also, the Hebrew Bible oratorio did not function as a vehicle for congregation worship, as the New Testament oratorio often did, for example in works based on the life of Jesus (Smither lists numerous examples, among them works by Mendelssohn and Liszt; Smither, 95, 99).

GERMANY

Three of the eight oratorio or cantata composers in this thesis are German-born (Damrosch, Goldschmidt, Schumann). The largest number of oratorios written between 1800-1915 was written in Germany: according to Smither, there were 301, versus 216 in England, 72 in America and 37 in France (Smither, 531). Though Leopold Damrosch emigrated to America,
his musical training and background were solidly in the German tradition. Otto Goldschmidt received his musical training in Germany but later emigrated to England. Georg Schumann lived all his life in Germany.

Several factors explain the development of oratorio in Germany in the 19th century, including aspects of political, social and intellectual life. Particularly important factors are the trends of romanticism and historicism: attitudes towards religion, including increased secularization; and the growing amateur choral movement (Smither, 8). The increasing interest in Handel’s oratorios in the first half of the century led to the popularity of oratorios based on the Hebrew Bible (Smither in New Grove vol. 13, 673).

The music and librettos of 19th century German oratorios reflect both traditional and new ideas. The traditional aspects were the use of the chorale (e.g. in Goldschmidt, pp. 109-110) and emphasis on the chorus (Smither in New Grove vol. 13, 674). The newer, romantic trend manifested itself in the attempts at special harmonic, orchestral, textural, and other effects designed to express extreme emotional intensity (Smither, 15). Secularization trends began in the first half of the 19th century, the same time as oratorios began to be performed in concert halls rather than churches. Writing on “The Future of Oratorio” in 1849, C. L. Hilgenfeld noted:

...what concerns oratorio in particular is that it long ago made its way out of the church into the concert hall...The original specifically church character no longer exists in the conception of oratorios (Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, 1849, as quoted in Smither, 20).

Though Enlightenment thought of the 18th century was also a movement towards secularization, it belonged to the intellectual elite, while in the 19th century the same kind of secularization could be seen in a broader segment of the population. Yet Smither believes, based on the theological and literary climate and the symbols of church music that could be found in many oratorios, that religious reactions to oratorio performances might have been common, in spite of the generally more secular attitudes of the time (Smither, 21. 25). He qualifies this statement by admitting that further research in reception history must be made before such an assumption can be more than speculation. Research is now being done to further understanding of possible audience responses to a work in the 19th century. Such research is beyond the scope of this thesis.

New trends in German education in the 19th century put a high priority on choral singing, considering it a good influence on character development (this was not unique to Germany). As a result, amateur choral societies sprang up throughout the country, and appeared in huge numbers in oratorio performances. The German choral-society movement reflected basic social, intellectual and political changes, most importantly a rapidly growing middle class culture that espoused democratic ideals. German choral festivals were influenced by the English festival tradition, which dates back to the early 18th century. Reports of these festivals were published in Germany. The cultivation of large amateur choral societies and music festivals created an oratorio market, for these choruses wanted monumental works to sing. New oratorios were composed for that market, oratorio being one of the few large genres intended for and performed by amateur choruses. The most popular Hebrew Bible subjects for these new oratorios were Moses, Saul and David, and Abraham and Isaac (Smither, 30-31, 42, 63, 100).

BRITAIN

British oratorios and cantatas have the largest representation in this thesis, spanning both the 19th and 20th centuries (Cowen, Gaul, Mellers, and Beecham). It is impossible to exaggerate
the importance of the oratorio in 19th century Britain. The Victorians associated oratorio with their nation's history and the Handelian tradition, with religion, morality, self-improvement, and respectability. Oratorio came to symbolize the pride of the nation and empire (Smither, 249). In 19th-century Britain the cantata was second in importance only to the oratorio, and many were written (Gaul is one example) for Britain's large choral festivals (Boyd in New Grove, vol. 5, 8, 41).

In the mid-Victorian period, British musicians felt a need to compete with Germany. They wanted to create a climate that would nurture great composers and also seek greatness among the English composers of the day. This awakening resulted in what is sometimes known as the English musical renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This renaissance included the establishment of a creative English "school," comparable with those of other nations. This "school" included several of the finest oratorio composers of the period, including Cowen. By the 1880s, British oratorio composers began to adopt traits of the German romantic oratorio: a chromatic harmonic language, extensive use of leitmotifs (these elements derived from Wagner's music dramas), a continuous scene-structure rather than discreet numbers, and a flexible form (Smither, 255, 257). These will be discussed in my analysis of individual works.

Though secularization was experienced in Britain as well as Germany and all other industrialized nations of Europe, mid-Victorian England nonetheless was more religious than other nations. Vast numbers in Britain continued to attend church throughout most of the 19th century, despite increasing secularization and religious doubt. Many in the upper and middle classes who attended oratorio performances considered them religious occasions (Smither, 261). In fact, in addition to concert performances, oratorios were often performed in a sacred context in English churches, including biblical readings and prayers before and after the performance and during intervals between sections (Smither in New Grove, vol. 13, 675).

The amateur chorus was mainly a phenomenon of the 19th century in Britain as in Germany. But the movement was far larger and more widespread in Britain, both because of educational reform and the very popular sight-singing movement. a virtual mania that began in the 1840s. The reasons for promoting music education among the poor were much the same as in other countries in the 19th century: promotion of religion, and moral improvement. Vocal music with religious texts was commonly considered an instrument for the betterment of workers. In addition, musical activities in the evenings would keep workers out of the beer shops, where they might be exposed to discussions of revolutionary social and political ideas (Smither, 269-270).

An enthusiastic proponent of a French method of sight-singing devised by Guillaume Wilhelm, began training teachers in the use of this method in London in 1841. His name was John Hullah (1841-1884) and he had been trained at the Royal Academy of Music. By the end of that year, 400 teachers were enrolled and at least 50,000 children of the working classes in London were receiving instruction in sight-singing at school. The sight-singing movement, which trained such large numbers of people to sight-sing, had an enormous impact on English cultural life. This was not true only in relation to choral performance, but also for the general cultural level of the people. Within 20 years, tens of thousands from the lower and middle classes had learned to read music, as children continued to learn sight-singing in school. This provided eager and unprecedented numbers of choral singers throughout Britain, making possible choruses

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1 In spite of this general acceptance of oratorio performances as religious occasions, some church leaders felt that oratorio was too profane to be performed in churches and that admission could not be charged. The Dean of Worcester Cathedral went so far as to ban oratorios from the cathedral at the famous Three Choirs Festival in 1875 (Smither, 266).
of gargantuan size. Large numbers of choral societies were established, and membership in such a society became a status symbol and a mark of Victorian respectability by 1860. Largely because of this trend, the production of new oratorios in Britain reached its peak in the 1880s, when over 50 new oratorios were composed, more than double the average per decade in the previous 30 years (Smither, 271, 274, 288). Two representative works of this decade to be discussed in this thesis are those of Cowen and Gaul.

Over half of 19th century English oratorios are based on Hebrew Bible subjects, part of the Handelian legacy and contrasting with the preponderance of New Testament subjects in German oratorios. The majority of librettos based on the Hebrew Bible were composed of biblical quotations, usually with modified wording (such as Damrosch). But some librettos combined newly written verse with biblical passages (Cowen), while others were completely new (Gaul).

U.S.A.

I will touch only briefly on trends in American oratorio, since the American composers represented in my thesis (only one of whom wrote an oratorio) were all emigrants and were strongly influenced by their early European training (Damrosch, Rumshinsky, and Aloni).

America experienced several large surges of population growth in the 19th century. The largest percentage, roughly 36%, was in the 1850s and 1860s, when fully one-eighth of the population was foreign-born. Germans accounted for 1.3 million and the British almost 600,000. The Germans and English brought their tradition of amateur choral singing with them. The establishment of the New York Oratorio Society (still active today) in 1875 was crucial for the history of oratorio in New York. Damrosch, who had been active as a conductor in his native Germany in the 1850s and 1860s, was its founder and principal conductor (Smither, 389, 406).

Europe was the model for choral festivals and choral repertory in America, in spite of the differences between their cultures. The repertory of oratorios performed in 19th-century America was strongly influenced by England's. Handel's Messiah and Mendelssohn's Elijah were the most frequently performed works (Smither in New Grove, vol. 13, 675). Damrosch, one of the few American oratorio composers of the period, organized a huge musical festival in New York in 1881, inspired by London's Handel Festivals in the Crystal Palace (The first of a series of these festivals in 1857 included 2,000 choral singers: Smither, 253). The festival lasted a week and included a chorus of 1,200, the nucleus of which was his own Oratorio Society's 400 members (Smither, 421).

FRANCE

Though César Franck is the only French composer represented in this thesis (Belgian by birth, he is generally considered a French composer), he is a major composer. A brief overview of oratorio development in France will create context for his oratorio Ruth, Élogique Biblique (1844, revised 1872). Other works by Franck based on the Hebrew Bible include La Tour de Babel (1865) and Rebecca (1881) (Smither in New Grove, vol. 13, 674).

Oratorio in France is distinguished from that of other nations by a Roman Catholic mystical and quasi-liturgical current that runs through much of it. French Romantic oratorios were written to be performed in public concert halls, never in churches (Smither in New Grove, vol. 13, 674). France did not experience the same amateur choral and festival movements as

4 Upon Damrosch's death in 1885, the baton was passed to his son Walter, who resigned in 1898 and passed the baton to his brother Frank, who continued in this position until 1912 (Smither, 406).
Germany, England and the U.S. For that reason, there was never the same high demand for new oratorios (Smither, 523). There was a checkered relationship between church and state in 19th century France. Despite anti-clericalism in many quarters between 1830 and 1870, this period also witnessed an increase in the return of religious orders and congregations. Not coincidentally, this period also saw a revival of French oratorio.

From 1815 to 1843, no oratorio by a French composer is known to have been performed (Smither, 517-519). From 1843 to 1870, fifteen French oratorios are known to have been composed and performed, including Franck's *Ruth* in 1845. Later in the century anti-clericalism returned, yet the Church still had its supporters. This is reflected in the steady increase in the publication of religious vocal music and the proliferating performances of sacred music. A reporter in Paris in 1875 stated that “the vogue is decidedly for oratorio” (“Nouvelles Diverses,” *Menestrel* 41, no. 10, 7 February 1875: 78; as quoted in Smither, 528). It is probably no accident that Franck decided to revise and enlarge his 1844 *Ruth* oratorio in 1872.

The decision to revise *Ruth* may have also been due to changing musical tendencies. Solo vocal writing in French music moved from a “salon style to an increasingly operatic one” (Smither, 544), which is evident in Franck’s *Ruth* oratorio.

**OPERA**

There are four operas in this thesis, all dating from the 20th century (Fino, Rumshinsky, Berkeley, and Aloni). Because they are based on a biblical story, none of these fits the mold of what is usually thought of as opera—Puccini, Verdi, Wagner. In addition, only two of these fit into a mainstream tradition. Fino wrote in the *verismo* period of Italian opera at the turn of the 20th century and the equal importance he gives to solos and chorus, plus the absence of any *bel canto* tendencies (Roger Parker in *New Grove*, vol. 26, 447), place this opera in that category. Berkeley wrote chamber operas for the same group in which Benjamin Britten was active, and which popularized this form in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Rumshinsky, however, wrote music for the Yiddish theatre most of his life; the melodic inspiration for that genre drew upon the traditions of Jewish folk and synagogue song, and these were his primary sources for the grand opera he wrote at the end of his life (ch. 6, p. 165). Aloni was primarily a composer of liturgical works for the synagogue and his music is in a more popular vein. Though he called his work an opera, in style it is closer to musical theatre (ch. 6, p. 198).

Most narrowly conceived, opera is a drama in which the actors sing throughout; or, sing some or all of their parts. By this definition, these are all operas. Opera combines music, drama, and spectacle. The importance of Italian musicians and poets, who created and developed the form, is seen in the word *opera*, which in Italian means “work” (Parker in *New Grove*, vol. 18, 416).

Throughout the 19th century, music became the more dominant element in opera, and the status of the librettist declined sharply. This changed in the 20th century with a greater desire for realism in opera. At this time, the singing voices of different characters became differentiated in a manner similar to vocal differences in a stage play (Parker, vol. 18, 440, 444).

The key question for an interpreter of opera is not “what does the text say?”, but rather “How is the text realized in the music, how does it embed itself in the opera’s musical fabric?” (Paul Robinson, 341). In opera, two languages, the spoken and the musical, are employed by two authors, the librettist and the musician (Clément, 18). There is also a third element: the theatrical.

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1 Since the published version of the Franck work is the 1872 version, there is no way to compare his earlier with his later version.
The medium of opera is well suited for conveying and developing character. All the aesthetic media work together: music, poetry, drama, dance, and the visual arts, complement and reinforce one another (Axe, 307).

Four distinctive aspects of opera undermine any purely textual approach, according to Robinson. These four characteristics that interfere with our ability to decipher the words are:

1) Opera is usually in a foreign language.
2) Opera is sung, and much that is sung by an operatic voice cannot be understood.
3) Opera contains a lot of ensemble singing, with several voices singing at once, making the text still less intelligible.
4) Opera singing competes with a full symphony orchestra, further hindering our ability to decipher words (Paul Robinson, 328-9).

The primacy of voice in opera leads to the difficulty of comprehension and a constant tension between musical excitement and dramatic action (Kramer 1984, 132). The voice is the center for the listener's attention, drawing attention away from words, plot, character, even the music of the orchestra. In technical terms, the voice is the individual contrapuntal line of a polyphonic composition (Abbate, 10). Simply stated, this means that the voice can sing only one note at a time while the orchestra or chorus accompanying the voice can produce many notes simultaneously.

In some ways there is almost a purposeful effacement of text by voice, because a major goal of operatic singing is the disintegration of language by melisma [when one syllable of a word is sung to more than one note, melodically], tessitura [referring to the range of the music: when words are sung in a high tessitura, intelligibility is lost], and sustained tones (Kramer, 132). High notes in opera occur at the most dramatic moments, as do ensembles. Therefore opera becomes most inarticulate at those points when the most important things are being said, because it is governed by a musical, not a textual rationale. Yet ultimately, this loss of narrative explicitness is compensated in emotional resonance. The meaning of words in opera is a function of their musical embodiment; so they are a part of the listener's experience even when they are not consciously so (Paul Robinson, 338, 344). Some passages in Rumshinsky's opera illustrate this idea (ch. 6, pp. 169, 174).

Many of Robinson's observations are inaccurate, because he ignores the fact that in the past, full librettos were printed and distributed to the public at opera performances, making possible familiarity with the text being sung. In addition, most large opera houses have utilized surtitles for several years, by which means the public can read a translation of the text simultaneously with hearing it sung onstage.

The Hebrew Bible has always been much more popular than the New Testament as a subject of operas, probably due to the dramatic nature of many narratives, and possibly because the chorus could be "spiced up in the exotic costume of ancient civilizations" (Axe, 309). The "exotic" or "oriental" aspect is stressed in several works discussed here through the extensive use of oriental modes and other exoticisms (e.g., Schumann, pp. 154, 159, 161; Rumshinsky, p. 168; Mellors, p. 181; Beecham, p. 188; Aloni, p. 198).

These are Robinson's words, and reflect an Anglo-centric view. Opera is generally performed in its original language, which may or may not be foreign in the country where it is performed. Also, in the 19th and early 20th century, it was a wide-spread practice to translate opera texts into the language spoken in the country where the opera was being performed.
Yet opera has specific conventions in terms of character motive which tend to predominate over the original biblical stories. With rare exceptions, the essential plot in opera remains love and betrayal of love. Biblical events often provide only a backdrop and spectacle for these themes. Sometimes the biblical characters are so altered that the opera, in addition to filling in the gaps to make the characters more real, also creates new characters, possibly more familiar and congenial and less remote ones (Axe, 309, 315, 332). This is true for operas based on Ruth, which add a love interest between Ruth and Boaz and exaggerate character traits barely hinted at in the biblical text. These are all forms of gap-filling (ch. 2, p. 46).

The libretto is written before the music, and opera expresses character through the sung words. An opera cannot be read from its libretto, because the meaning of opera is essentially musical. It has generally been assumed that the majority of opera librettos are not worthy of consideration as literature. Yet some modern scholars take issue with that attitude. As adaptations of pre-existing literary works, librettos pose questions of interest to literary scholars: intertextuality, transposition of genre, and reception history. The issue of reader response can also be explored, in reference to the librettist who is adapting the original text from a particular viewpoint. As texts for musical realization, librettos bring up issues in the relation between the two mediums and their respective traditions (Groos, Introduction, 1.10).

In the case of Ruth librettos, those represented here are very diverse in content and quality. Their primary significance is that they inspired the composers to create their oratorios, cantatas, or operas. At the same time, the texts assigned to the characters are a midrash as much as the music, and for that reason they are an integral part of the analysis of the musical works. There are several categories of libretto, based on the degree to which they are based on the Scroll or on other biblical texts (I discuss the classification of librettos in Preface to ch. 6, p. 101).

In the next chapter, I offer definitions and explanations of several important musical terms that must be understood as they apply to my analysis in chapter 6.
The essence of music is revelation. Music stands halfway between thought and phenomenon, between spirit and matter, a sort of nebulous mediator. (Heinrich Heine)

All the oratorios and operas in this thesis started with a libretto, in each case was one writer’s response to the original biblical story of Ruth. Some librettos are a retelling; others include the text of the Scroll but weave into other biblical texts; and some are simply the Scroll text (Preface to ch. 6, p. 101). Music can be considered midrash because it retells the story in a different language. Music has the power to not only read between the lines and fill in the gaps, but to create an inner world, the world of the heart and mind. It also has unique power as an “agent of ideology....To understand how it works, we have to not just hear it but also ‘read’ it” (Cook, 132). While librettos fill in various gaps from the original story, the music continually, but wordlessly, fills in the gaps of how people are feeling and reacting. This is done by a variety of musical techniques which I will explain in this chapter and apply to my analysis in the next.

The world of music is conceived by some as a symbol system; and includes elements not found in nature, such as keys and scales (Jeneter Robinson, 25). Music can also convey meaning by imitation of sounds, while musical structures can be used as a sign. Other elements, like intervals and tones, are found in nature but not in the same systematic and orderly sense as in music. Music can be defined most simply as a system of relationships between sounds. There are many varieties of music, as there are of language. The universality of music depends on basic characteristics of the human mind (and auditory system).

MUSICAL AND CULTURE

Musical representation has significant and interpretively rich ties to both musical and cultural processes. It is one of the basic ways through which culture can enter music and music enters culture, as a form of communication (Kramer 2001, 68). Composers take into account more than just aesthetic appropriateness when selecting an operatic [or oratorio] subject. They are aware of the cultural implications of their choice, as well as the popularity or familiarity of the story they choose.

In spite of its accessibility, a given music is not a universal language. The emotional effects of music are not entirely dependent on musical devices; context is also crucial (Storr, 73). Meaning exists in a particular socio-cultural context; and that context must be understood in order to understand any piece of music (Meyer, Preface, ix). To offer one example, death is usually depicted by slow tempos and low ranges in Western music, while African music would portray death musically by frenzy. This reflects a difference in attitudes towards death, which is why beliefs and attitudes of a culture must be understood before its music can be properly appreciated and understood (Meyer, 258).

Music varies between cultures, and epochs within cultures. Particular harmonies or rhythms may have resonated differently for an audience of the late 19th century than they would for one of the late 20th century; and this must be kept in mind in any discussion of a musical work. One example of a change of association in different epochs is the use of the harp, which

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1 Quoted in Barzun, 306
2 There are two basic approaches to music analysis. In the formalist approach, the meaning of music lies in the perception and understanding of the musical relationships presented in the work. In this approach, meaning in music is mainly intellectual. In the expressionist approach, these relationships are seen as able to excite feelings and emotions in the listener (Meyer, 3). My approach here is mostly the expressionist.
was associated with religious subjects in Europe in the Middle Ages, but which acquired a new
association of tender vagueness with its different use in French 19th-century music (Meyer, 62-3,
76f). Harp appears prominently in Schumann, with very different effects (ch. 6, pp. 156-9, 161-3).
Harmonies that were shocking to Beethoven’s audience are no longer heard as dissonant.
There was a gradual shift in balance between triadic and dissonant harmonies beginning in the
late 19th century which threatened the underlying tonal structure. The capacity of tonal harmony
to shape and direct musical phrases was compromised by the increasing presence of chromatic
and dissonant elements, leading to the rise of modernism (Jim Samson in New Grove, vol. 21,
601). Listeners’ response to music did not necessarily keep pace with these changes. In my
discussion of musical settings of the Scroll, I am always aware of the difference in response
between the listener of today and the listener contemporary to each work.

THEORIES OF MUSIC AND EMOTION

From Plato on, philosophers and critics have affirmed their belief in music’s ability to
 evoke “emotional” responses in listeners. The “theory of affects,” popular in the 18th century,
described music’s ability to capture and convey “affects” like love, rage, or jealousy. Music had
meaning because it represented a reality outside music (Cook, 76).

The term “emotional” is too vague to actually be measured (Meyer, 7), but music is
directly linked with physiological arousal which can be measured by scientific instruments
(Storr, 149; Langer, 181). Music is known to affect pulse rate and respiration, to facilitate or
disturb concentration, to excite or calm (which led to the development of Music Therapy); and
these effects can be observed in unmusical as well as musical people (Langer, 180). There is
known to be a closer relation between hearing, than seeing, and emotional arousal. This is why
movies always have background music. Sonic patterns are richer in emotive properties than
abstract visual patterns usually are. At a purely emotional level, there is something deeper, more
immediate and intense about hearing than seeing. Music can touch the unphrased depths of our
being, evoking emotions, moods, even passions we have not known before (Storr, 26, 118). No
“Hallelujah” printed on a page of text can equal the power of the Hallelujah chorus from Handel’s
Messiah, a shining example of music’s power to enhance and even transform text.

There is a close connection between the sounds of music and those of human expression.
For example, melancholy speech tends to be soft and subdued, as does melancholy music. A
cheerful speaking voice is high and loud, as are cheerful melodies. An anguished melody will
leap in dissonant intervals and proceed in irregular rhythms, like an anguished speaking voice
(Kivy 2002, 31-39). Yet even the most passionate speech is surpassed by its musical
representation. To a listener with some basic knowledge and exposure, music is direct and
profound in its presentation of emotional moods, through devices such as cadences, transitions,
terminations and modulations (Kerman, 13). It is through such devices that the story of the
Scroll finds new life in music.

There is general consensus that music is an expressive and accessible form of art, but
there are various theories about music’s accessibility. The forms of human feeling are more
congruent with musical than with verbal forms of expression (Langer, 198-9). Music reproduces
the most intimate feelings more directly and specifically than is possible through any other
medium of human communication (Sessions, in Barzun, 591).

7 Plato was so convinced that music arouses emotions, that he demanded, for his ideal state, a strict censorship of
modes and tunes, to prevent his citizens from being tempted by weak or voluptuous tunes to indulge in demoralizing
emotions (Republic, bk. iii, quoted in Langer, 180).
Vocal music imparts extra meaning to words by creating mood, emotion and tonal color. Such music elicits an immediate emotional response (Axe, 307, 313). But does the emotion actually exist in the music? By what power does it elicit emotion in the listener? There are several levels to the idea of emotion in music. Emotion can be perceived by the listener as present in the music itself; it can also be attributed to the characters in a dramatic work expressing their emotion, which may not necessarily be the same as the listener’s but which that listener attributes to the character; emotion can also be observed in the listener’s response. The assignment of meanings in music is “shifting, kaleidoscopic...probably below the threshold of consciousness” (Langer, 206). These have been much discussed by philosophers of music, and are crucial for understanding my discussion of music’s powerful role in several Ruth works.

Emotion in music was linked to religious feeling in 19th century Germany through the dissemination of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s “religion of feelings,” which was widely accepted in Protestant German theology of the early 19th century. Mendelssohn, influenced by Schleiermacher, suggested there was a close affinity between aesthetic and divine contemplation. For Schleiermacher, music’s task was to stimulate feeling and intensify emotion in the service of religious faith. Love of God was expressed by emotion and feeling (Smith, 151). These beliefs certainly influenced many composers of religious works in Germany and England throughout the 19th century.

Music is not merely a composer’s self-expression but rather a formulation and representation of certain emotions and moods. Just as words can describe events, places, and people we have never witnessed, so music can present emotions, moods, and passions we have never experienced (Langer, 188-9). And music accomplishes this by means of particular techniques, which I will briefly explain below.

TERMINOLOGY

Musical characterization depends on certain technical devices, including harmony, rhythm, and orchestral texture. Harmony, melody, and rhythm together order sounds so that they interact and form relationships; for example, certain sounds can send shivers up the spine (Storr, 184), others can bring tears to the eyes. Even after every facet of a particularly moving aria has been technically analyzed—for example, Aminadav Aloni’s setting of “Don’t ask me to leave you” (ch. 6, p. 200)—I cannot satisfactorily explain why, in my experience, audience members are always moved to tears by the piece.

I am offering technical definitions of several crucial terms in order to explain their importance in the context of treating music as a kind of midrash. I will be referring to these terms in my analysis of individual works. The terms are:

- Harmony: this includes key signatures, modes (including orientalism), chromaticism, consonance dissonance
- Rhythm
- Orchestration

I am speaking primarily of vocal music. The earliest Western musical instruments were melodic imitators of the human voice, and it was centuries before music became unrelated to the voice and verbal association. In human history, “music” for most people meant sung music (Kivy, 2002, 49). Even today, music for instruments alone forms a small part of the music people listen to. Public music before the mid-18th century was virtually always vocal music connected to the expression of words, religious or operatic. These were the only musical forms that were considered truly public music (Storr, 66).

11 In Langer’s words, “Sheer self-expression requires no artistic form” (Langer, 184).
Harmony in its simplest definition means the combining of notes simultaneously to produce chords. Harmony involves modes, chord progression, consonance, and dissonance. The concept of harmony relates to these combined notes and chords as well as a system of structural principles that governs their combination (Carl Dahlhaus in New Grove, vol. 10, 858). Harmony understood as structure is one element that can establish the mood and feeling of a musical piece (other important elements are tempo and the dynamic range). In Western European tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries, there is a general consensus on which harmonies represent particular emotions. For example, the interval of the major third commonly expresses joy, while the minor third is more associated with grief (Storr, quoting Deryck Cooke, 73). Any dominant seventh chord stands for lack of resolution.

I will be consistently referring to the key signature when discussing musical selections; for example, an aria may be in F major or f minor. This information is significant because it contributes to the mood of the piece from the start. Modulations and key changes are shifts from the tonal center. Such harmonic excursions are analogous to deviations from the straight narrative line in a novel. Emotional intensity arises from a delay in harmonic resolution, used as an expressive effect (Meyer, 53). I refer to this kind of delay as a shift in key or a modulation.

Modes are a concept involving scale and melody type. A particular mode designates a class of melodies, and since the 20th century, also certain norms or compositional models (Harold Powers in New Grove, vol. 16, 775). In the major mode in Western European music, the tonic tone is the tone of ultimate rest towards which all other tones move. All other tones, whether diatonic or chromatic, tend toward either the tonic or the third and fifth of the tonic scale (Meyer, 214).

The minor mode is quasi-chromatic and changeable, while other modes are diatonic and stable. By its very nature, the minor mode is more ambiguous and unstable than other modes with a more limited repertory of tones. The minor mode has a larger repertory of tones because it is quasi-chromatic. Meyer believes the minor mode tends to gravitate toward its relative major, pointing to the basic harmonic normality of the major mode. The minor mode is also commonly associated with intense feeling, sadness and suffering. This is partly because states of contentment are considered normal, or ideal, human emotional states and therefore are associated with more normative musical modes, i.e., the major. In addition, the connection between the minor mode and sadness is a result of the deviant and unstable character of the mode (Meyer, 224-8).

In the late 19th century, some composers experimented with scalar novelties and exotic modes. They used modality to evoke religious feeling, folk melodies, or exotic locales. For example, Saint-Saëns in his opera Samson and Delilah (1877) conjured “exotic” scales (often in minor mode with a minor sixth and raised seventh) to evoke the biblical time and place. Verdi also injected elements of modal exoticism in Aida (1871) for a similar reason (to evoke the Egyptian locale). This kind of exploration became a distinct trend at the turn of the 20th century. Debussy often mixed modality (particularly the Dorian mode) with chromaticism to conjure up an antique world (Harold Powers Frans Wiering in New Grove, vol. 16, 823-4). The use of exotic modes is quite predominant in several Ruth settings (particularly Beecham and Aloni; pp. 188, 198).
Chromaticism comes from the Greek word for “colored.” It is based on the interval of the minor second and can be understood either as a coloration of diatonicism, or as a system of its own. This system is defined by the division of the octave in twelve semitones or equidistant steps, as contrasted to the seven-note diatonic scale. A rising chromatic scale often depicts tension and lack of resolution, while the descending chromatic melody is associated with affliction, suffering, mourning and death (Clément, 56). Chromatic passages delay or block the arrival of the expected, normal diatonic tones, thereby performing an expressive function. Because of its well-accepted exceptional character, chromaticism has been used for centuries to express extreme emotion. Its ambiguity, as described above, leads to a general tonal instability.

Sung music shows the most striking evidence of the link between chromaticism and emotion. As early as the Renaissance, chromatic treatment has frequently been attached to such highly emotional events such as crying, lamenting, or mourning (Meyer, 218-219). True chromaticism first flowered in the late 16th century, especially in Italian madrigals, where it led to expressive and affective text-setting. These madrigals had great influence on later composers (George Dyson, William Drabkin in New Grove, vol. 5, 816).

Chromaticism flourished in the 19th century, with Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde (1859) the seminal work in the development of a totally chromatic language. Wagner used chromaticism to express mood and emotion in the text (Dyson Drabkin, 816). I will be pointing out the use of chromaticism in a few isolated instances in 19th century Scroll settings. Chromaticism is used far more extensively in 20th century Rod works, particularly in those of Georg Schumann and Lennox Berkeley.

Chromatic passages, when combined with constantly shifting harmonic patterns (as in Schumann’s work), may evoke feelings of tension or surprise in the listener (Jenifer Robinson, 19). Chromaticism, whole-tone scales, and augmented or diminished triads, all involve intervalic equidistance, creating a sense of uniformity and ambiguity. It is not an accident that these weakly shaped series are often used to express intense emotion, anxiety, and apprehension. The ambiguity arises from the uncertainty about when the melodic process will be broken or the series concluded, weakening the listener’s sense of control (Meyer, 164, 169, 176).

Consonance and dissonance. A consonance forms a stable entity, contrasted with a dissonance which forms a less stable entity. This is due not only to the way sounds combine, but also to the learned responses of listeners and the context within which any interval appears. In other words, the “tonal tension” we experience with dissonance depends on our familiarity with the language of Western tonal harmony (Claude Palisca in New Grove, vol. 6, 325). Dissonance is frequently used to depict aroused emotional states. It is the nature of human thinking to organize stimuli to the mind by the senses in the simplest possible way. The affective power of dissonance comes from its being a deviant, and delaying the arrival of an expected norm (Meyer, 229-231).

Composers have exploited dissonance for centuries to express painful emotions. In its earlier usage, when it was still considered somewhat exceptional, or an an offense against technical musical rules, the expressive value of the dissonance resulted partly from the way it stood out from its context. Dissonance can be found in 19th century music selectively, in relation to consonance, and it has a powerful effect precisely because of its unexpectedness. As dissonance became more established as a formula and an acceptable part of music vocabulary throughout the 20th century, it became more understandable and generally less shocking (Dahluhaus 1982, 95). There was a steadily rising “dissonance threshold” throughout the 19th century as well, especially in Germany, and in the disciples of Franck (Longyear, 291). In the
20th century works I analyze, dissonance becomes more and more part of the fabric of the whole work, so its use only stands out in a few cases.

Rhythm is the pattern of movement in time, of temporal flow. The type of rhythm depends on accent and duration of tones or sounds. Rhythm can also establish mood and feeling, as can tempo: a fast tempo evokes excitement and anticipation, while a slower tempo evokes a peaceful mood or sadness. Rhythm both organizes, and is itself organized by, all the elements that create and shape music (Storr, 33). It is part of the pitch and textural aspects of music. The field of musical time encompasses *time signature*, such as 4 4 or 6 8 time, and tempo markings, such as *allegro* or *andante*. Taken together, these create a certain atmosphere. To offer a simple example, a piece in 6 8 time is often a “pastorale,” while 4 4 time marked *andante* suggests a stately, ceremonial piece.

*Orchestration* or *instrumentation* is the art of combining sounds of a complex of instruments to form a blend and balance or lack of it. Orchestration has also come to mean the craft of writing idiomatically for instruments (Kenneth Kreitner in *New Grove*, vol. 12, 405). Instruments alone or in different combinations in a full orchestra create different timbres, or tone qualities. Orchestral timbre is sometimes called “color” and can be compared to the use by a visual artist of one color more than another.12

The absence or presence of certain instruments can denote the importance or even the class of certain characters. The string section (violins, violas, cellos, double basses) has a radically different sound than the brass and woodwind section (trumpets, trombones, bassoons, tubas, English horn, flutes, oboes, clarinets). Wind instruments can at times almost become an actor in a drama. Through their specific tone colors, certain instruments can “reveal, reinforce, or clarify a dramatic element, such as a particular mood, attitude, situation, character or action” (Noske, 120-124). To offer only a few examples of the use of solo instruments, the English horn plays a duet with Naomi in Franck’s oratorio (p. 136), creating a deeply poignant moment. The clarinet opens Schumann’s work playing Ruth’s leitmotif (p. 152), which will be played throughout the work on clarinet as well as oboe and English horn. All of these point to Ruth’s “oriental,” i.e. Mombite, origins, as well as a pastoral element.

These three together—harmony, rhythm, orchestral color and texture—can create a certain atmosphere to given scenes or to an entire work. There is no literary equivalent to this kind of mood-setting. Though rhythm exists in literature and drama, it is not organized in the same way as in music, nor does it have the same impact when not coupled with the other musical elements.

*Voice type* refers to the range of a singer’s voice, which is closely linked to the style and emotional content of a character’s music. The lowest woman’s voice is contralto, followed by alto, mezzo-soprano, and soprano. For men it is bass, baritone, tenor. The timbre, or quality, of a voice is closely linked to that voice’s range. There are norms governing the choice of voice type for a given role. A small vocal range usually indicates youth (Noske, 123). A bass or alto voice has a mellow, rich sound, and is usually the voice type chosen for an older character, while a tenor or soprano would usually be the choice for a younger person. Prior to the 19th century, in Bach’s works, for example, conventions in oratorio were strict. The alto stood for “faith,” the

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12 Due to the absence of full instrumental scores of all but one work, or available recordings of all but three of the works being analyzed, I will be unable in many cases to discuss this aspect of the musical settings.
soprano for “love” (vox animae) and the bass was traditionally the voice of Christ (vox Christi), while the tenor was the narrator and his voice was connected to “hope.”

These conventions were no longer applied in either oratorio or opera in the 19th century. In Romantic tradition, a tenor voice stands for a more romantic, virile, and involved character, while the bass voice represents wisdom and authority. The soprano is the love interest of the tenor, typically, while the mezzo is either a villain, seductress, or older woman. Rarely do composers deviate from this norm, as will be seen in my analysis of Ruth settings. Ruth is invariably a soprano, Naomi an alto, and Boaz a bass or baritone. The exceptions are notable for deviating from these expectations. The extent of each singer’s range that is utilized in the score can vary considerably, however. Expectations depend on the listener’s awareness of a singer’s potential range. A tone that is “high” for one voice would be expected to descend, and the reverse is true for a “low” voice ascending beyond its normal range (Meyer, 139). In other words, an alto Naomi singing in the soprano range would be more dramatic than a soprano Ruth singing the same notes.

The voice can be classified as an instrument, but because it is used to project words, it exceeds the expressive potential of other instruments. Singing imparts to words a heightened expression that they lack when merely spoken, or even declaimed in a dramatic manner without musical pitch. Earlier forms of singing such as incantation played a vital role in many early forms of religious ritual and early theatre (Owen Jander in New Grove, vol. 23, 428) before becoming so predominant in oratorio and opera.

A recitative can represent an interior monologue, much like a monologue in a play. The recitative form has greater potential to explore a particular feeling than the aria, because the listener is not distracted from the meaning of the music and words by the technical aspects of execution, which are more obvious in an aria.

An ensemble is any scene or musical number in which more than one character is singing at once. Musically, this translates into a duet, trio, quartet, quintet, or larger. Ensembles have no true equivalent in the biblical narrative, since two or more characters cannot speak at the same time. Leonard Bernstein once pointed out that in opera, unlike spoken drama, “everybody can talk at the same time” (quoted in Kitty 2002, 174). Through the simultaneous expression of divergent emotions, the ensemble can telescope dramatic events, increasing the dramatic momentum and vividly setting off contrasting characters (Elisabeth Cook in New Grove, vol. 8, 256).

In a duet, the two characters sometimes sing only in succession, not together. Many duets between Ruth and Boaz do not feature the two voices singing simultaneously, because this represents a kind of physical and emotional closeness that the composer did not want to suggest.

The chorus could be called the largest ensemble. The choruses in oratorio are more numerous and longer than those in opera and have a smaller role in moving the action forward. Choruses are used variably as Greek chorus, commenting on the action, as narrator; or as involved characters in the story.

In the next chapter, I will explore how the various musical techniques described here can be applied to musical settings of Ruth to understand how the librettists and composers created their own musical midrash on the biblical book.
The extensive amount of dialogue in *Ruth* makes it very adaptable to dramatic and musical treatment. A complete list of all musical settings of *Ruth* that I have located can be found in Appendix II (p. 272).

The choice of a biblical text for an oratorio or opera setting has cultural significance. Musical settings of biblical texts can provide insight into the composer’s interpretation and present a window into the history of interpretation as represented at the time of a particular composition. The librettist and composer may use several approaches to a biblical text: altering particular passages; juxtaposing several different biblical passages; using non-biblical texts as commentary on the biblical text; specifically highlighting individual words or phrases by various musical techniques. All of these approaches are seen in *Ruth* oratorios and operas.

The biblical texts used most by 19th-century librettists who adapted the Scroll for musical treatment are the Psalms. Goldschmidt and Cowen both quote from 14 different psalms. Certain psalms seem to be favored over others: Psalms 34, 36, 37, 68, 121, 126, and 147 (as numbered in the KJV) are found in two or three of the oratorios. Some of these psalms have particular resonance for Christian listeners. Psalm 37 is a familiar psalm of reassurance and comfort; v. 11 is echoed in Matthew 5.5, the well-known section of the sermon on the mount called the beatitudes (“Blessed are the meek”). Psalm 121 is well known and loved, as are some lines from Psalm 126, found in familiar hymns. Other texts appearing more than once, both in the 19th and 20th century works, are Proverbs 31 and *Song of Songs*. Both are favored as lyrics for a love duet between Ruth and Boaz, possibly to give it a “biblical” feeling.

The libretto fall into four classifications (in English unless otherwise noted):
1. Text exclusively from the Scroll: Beecham (KJV), Aloni (his own translation, plus Hebrew)
2. Text that includes the Scroll plus other biblical texts: Goldschmidt, Damrosch, Cowen
3. Newly-written text (though some texts from the Scroll still may appear, such as “Entreat me not to leave you” 1.16-17): Gaul, Franck (French), Fino (Italian), Rumshinsky (Hebrew), Berkeley
4. Combination of Scroll, biblical, and newly-written text: Schumann, Meliers

Several librettos imitate the language and rhythm of biblical writing (KJV) to blend the biblical with the non-biblical sections of the libretto.

No matter what the source of the libretto, certain Scroll verses appear in some form in virtually every setting. Ruth’s words “Do not urge me to leave you” (1.16-17), are always included, even if they are paraphrased; and Naomi’s words “Call me not Naomi” (1.20-21), are absent only from Damrosch and Cowen, and set only as a short *arioso* by Goldschmidt and as a recitative by Aloni.

The custom in 19th-century British oratorios was to print the entire libretto after the title page. This was not done in any other works, however, where the only access to the libretto is in the music score. The one exception is Fino, where the libretto was published separately.

Biblical texts have historically been considered “religious” because they have been adopted as foundational texts for faith communities. This may be less true today, but was certainly the case in the 19th and 20th centuries. The composer’s music recreates the text in a new form. In this form, the composer has set forth for performance and evaluation a personal interpretation of a biblical text (Porter, 26), though it is not exclusively personal because the composer participates in shared conventions and practices. But music is not a direct communication of the composer’s feelings to the audience; it is a communication of how the
composer makes sense of, and gives structure to, his her feelings and transforms them from personal emotion to art (Storr, 100). The music can also reflect the composer's particular feelings about the text being set to music, which can be both intellectual and emotional responses to the text.

The composer who sets biblical texts begins with the assumption that the audience will probably be familiar with these texts, and will have internalized them through various acts of interpretation. The music has to grapple with the accumulated force of meaning that has become lodged in the text, contending with the listener's prior reading. On the other hand, the musical setting of a familiar story can also build upon the listener's prior understanding in a positive way. The story of Ruth is generally more known, even loved, than many other biblical narratives. Whether a particular listener comes to a musical setting hoping to hear Ruth and Naomi's friendship expressed in beautiful harmonies, or the threshing floor scene between Ruth and Boaz depicted with passionate chromatic intervals, these various oratorios and operas will fulfill at least some expectations listeners bring to them.

GAP FILLING IN THE LIBRETTOs

Most of the gap-filling done musically is Exam's “romantic gap-filling” (chap. 2, p. 45), i.e., assigning emotions not explicitly found in the biblical characters. These categories were previously discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

Time

Only Rumshinsky and his librettist show interest in filling the gaps of what happened prior to the first chapter. He fills in the years before the story starts by setting a wedding scene between Ruth and Machlon, Orpah and Chilion. Other scores contain arias and duets that fill some of the time that is unaccounted for in the Scroll. For example, most scores contain duets of varying lengths between Ruth and Naomi, filling in the time they spent together before the plot's resolution.

Cause: Motive

The midrashists' interest in finding cause for the initial famine and the sons' deaths is not found in the librettos. But attributing the motive of affection and even love to explain the actions of all three main characters is predominant in all the works. This is seen in Ruth’s avowals of love for Naomi in several works, and the extensive love duets between Ruth and Boaz.

Personal Relations Character and Appearance

Personal relations are of great dramatic interest to the librettists and composers, as reflected in the number of ensembles between characters. What actually transpired on the threshing floor is not a mystery in the musical settings, for virtually all of them include a love duet, some very extensive. There is no implication of consummation in the librettos, but no doubt is left that Ruth and Boaz are in love.

Rumshinsky’s libretto also explains how Ruth was accepted despite her Moabitish ancestry. This was an issue for the rabbis, and Rumshinsky’s concern appears to reflect his early Jewish education. In his opera, an angel proclaims to Boaz in a dream that Moabites are acceptable, only Moabitish is not. This phrase is lifted right out of the Talmud (B.T. Yebamot 47b).

God's apparent absence from the Scroll is mitigated by the invocation of God’s name by the characters. Most librettos increase the number of these invocations (Table E, p. 221), giving the impression that God is more present than the biblical story seems to indicate. In addition, the insertion of numerous psalms in most of the oratorios is a constant reminder of God’s presence and God’s role in the story as it is re-told. This is filling a narrative gap that may not really exist.
but has been perceived by many readers to be in need of filling. In addition, there are certain audience expectations from the genre of sacred oratorio, one of which is praise of God.

Most works discussed here end with praises of God, whether or not the librettos use only biblical texts (Table 1, p. 220): this is found in Goldschmidt, Damrosch, Gaul, Cowen, Schumann, Mellers, and Berkeley. These additions do not so much increase God's role in the story as follow the dictates of the genre of biblically-based music. God's role in Ruth's conception (4.13) does not appear in any libretto, even when the surrounding verses have been included. This does not seem to be an accidental omission, and reveals a possible discomfort with this biblical notion of God's personal involvement in Ruth's pregnancy. Christians might not have wanted to depict this level of God's involvement in a woman's pregnancy in any woman other than Mary.

Large parts of the Scroll's chapters 3 and 4 are often cut or altered. But in those works that leave in much of chapter 4, the reference to Perez and Tamar in 4.12 (Gen. 38) is deleted: this is the case in Goldschmidt, Damrosch, Gaul, Cowen, Franck, and Aloni. Whether this was done just to simplify the libretto, or because of a need to erase Tamar's involvement in the story, can only be guessed. It can be reasonably interpreted as an act of cleansing (ch. 2, p. 42).

There are two "silence" gaps in the Scroll that are filled creatively in many works. Silence is also a response, but librettists felt the need to alter this in some cases. The first case occurs after Ruth's pledge of loyalty (1.16-17), when Naomi's response is silence. This gap is filled in several works by having Naomi console and or embrace Ruth (Cowen, Franck, Fino, Schumann), speak of her surprise (Rumshinsky), or join Ruth in a duet (Berkeley); or, having the chorus comment on their relationship (Mellers). All of these address the need to have Naomi respond in some way, which she does not do in the Scroll.

The other notable silence is that of the Bethlehemites, after Naomi pours her heart out to them ("Call me not Naomi," 1.20-21). In several librettos the chorus comforts Naomi (Goldschmidt, Gaul, Cowen, Franck), or comments on her sadness (Fino). An addition found in Schumann and Berkeley is the presence of an angry and accusatory chorus of Bethlehemites greeting Naomi with hostility and suspicion. This midrashic alteration addresses the gap of how these people would have really greeted Naomi after all these years, returning with a Moabite daughter-in-law after having left her neighbors behind when she fled the famine. These are creative attempts to fill the void of silence. In biblical terms, having Naomi utter the last word in that scene establishes her importance. But to the librettists, as to most modern readers, a total lack of response seems the least convincing reaction of the crowd.

GAP FILLING IN THE MUSIC

The first gap the music fills for the listener, before even considering the librettos, is that of character and age. Both character and age are suggested by voice type and the range utilized within that voice type (ch.5, p. 99). In operas, the visual element is important as well, but there is a record of only one staged performance of an opera treated in this thesis (Berkeley). In any case, this is not a fixed element, since every performance would involve different singers with different appearances.

The only two exceptions to the casting of Ruth as a light soprano (signifying her relative youth and innocence) are in Aloni and Berkeley, where the part is sung by a mezzo. Aloni's musical style is more popular, almost jazz, so the voice types are not as clearly differentiated. The part is set for a dramatic soprano in Rumshinsky, implying greater maturity than a light soprano voice would. Naomi's part is normally set for either alto, mezzo, or contralto, except in
Aloni and Berkeley, where she is a soprano. Again, because of the popular style of Aloni’s music, this is less significant in his work, since the range for all voices there is less extensive. Berkeley did not explain the reasons for his unusual casting; possibly he simply wanted to challenge the normative assumptions about the ages of Ruth, Orphah, and Naomi.

The alto and mezzo ranges, as well as the contralto (a much deeper voice), all generally imply relative maturity and are therefore assigned to Naomi. The only composers who set Naomi as a contralto are Cowen and Gaul, both writing oratorios in 1880’s Britain. Orphah has a part in seven works I am discussing. Of these, she is cast as a soprano in three (Cowen, Rumshinsky, Berkeley), an alto in two (Damrosch, Beecham), and a contralto in two (Gaul, Franck).

Boaz is a bass in four settings, a baritone in five, and a tenor in three. Baritone is a higher and more flexible voice than bass; bass invariably stands for maturity and authority, while baritone can also have a romantic timbre. Boaz is a bass in Damrosch, Gaul, Goldschmidt, and Schumann—in no settings later than 1910. He is cast as a baritone by Franck, Fino, Aloni, Beecham, and Mellers. In other words, in the 19th century only the non-British saw him as a potentially more romantic figure, while in the 1950’s the British cast him this way. More strikingly, Boaz is cast as a tenor, representing youthfulness and vigor, though not necessarily authority, as early as 1887 by Cowen, and then not again until much later, by Berkeley and Rumshinsky. There is not much correlation between these voice types and the element of love interest in individual works; in other words, even if Boaz is a bass and therefore an older and socially superior man, he might still express passion for Ruth.

Certain musical features are frequently encountered in these Ruth works. Some of these have been defined in chapter 5, but I would like to offer a brief overview here. I will often be referring to the following musical elements:

- dissonance;
- wide interval leaps;
- sudden shifts in rhythm and harmony;
- rhythmic complexity;
- leitmotifs;
- exoticism.

**Dissonance** is decisive for any intense musical expression. A fundamental law of the expressive language of the tonal system is: the more painful the emotion, the greater the degree of dissonance. Jagged rhythms and harsh dissonance “undeniably represent a factor of unrest” (Dahlhaus 1982, 94). Tonal resolutions in late Romantic music are often delayed or nonexistent. This lack of resolution also represents unrest.

**Wide leaps** for expressive purposes are characteristic of Romantic melody; this includes sixths, sevenths, and others, both diminished and augmented (Longyear, 284). Wide leaps are one of Wagner’s favorite expressive devices, which influenced Richard Strauss, whose music features even wider leaps. Wagner’s music had wide influence in his time, and Strauss was a colleague of Georg Schumann. Schumann’s music contains the most extensive use of this expressive device, though it is found throughout all the works discussed here.

**Sudden shifts** from one key to another, used for dramatic effect, were increasingly tolerated in the later 19th century. Key signatures in general were treated with greater freedom than in the earlier Classic period (Longyear, 298). Mahler frequently used sudden changes of tonal plane for dramatic effect. In his words, he wanted a shift to D major in one place to sound “as if it had fallen from heaven” (Longyear, 262). I will be mentioning several similar examples in my discussion.
Rhythmic complications are a leading characteristic of late- and post-Romantic music (Longyear, 290), and are another means of depicting unrest or other emotions.

The leitmotif is used by several composers discussed in this thesis as a means of unifying their works. In some instances the more correct term might be "reminiscence" motive, which reinforces the impression of an earlier situation (Longyear, 168). A leitmotif can, in the words of composer Camille Saint-Saens, "make clear the secret thoughts of his characters beneath and beyond the words they speak" (Portraits et Souvenirs, 1903, as quoted in Barzun). Leitmotifs are recurring motifs used as symbols, as musical reminders, and for musical unification.

Several of these Ruth works employ varying techniques to show "exoticism." Technically this term stands for a search for new effects from the imagined and constructed music of other cultures, mostly of non-western traditions. This imagined music belongs to other lands and people, usually those considered less spoiled by civilization (Longyear, 212). In the case of Ruth, the reference is to the Near East and by extension, the Bible. This is done musically with the use of modal scales, particularly the augmented second and other particular harmonic structures; ornamentation; instrumentation, for example use of flutes or other woodwinds playing this ornamentation.

EXPLANATION OF CHAPTER PARTS

Two works in this thesis, Fino and Schumann, were written in the first decade of the 20th century, yet I am classifying Fino as a 19th century composer and Schumann as a 20th century one. Some music historians regard the "musical revolution" of around 1910 to mark the end of the "romantic age," rather than 1900, which referred to itself as "modern." It depends if the music-historical boundaries are drawn based on major political and social history (even if this had little effect on the music of the time), or according to major events in music history, seeing the impact of socio-political events as irrelevant (Dahlhaus 1980, 15). Both Fino and Schumann straddle the border between late-Romantic and post-Romantic style, but Schumann falls slightly more in the latter camp, as analysis of his music will show. Based on musical features, Schumann is classified in this thesis as a 20th century composer.

Chapter 6 includes brief introductions to the composers and musical analysis of selections from the works, which will include plot summaries and discussion of the librettos. I have chosen to discuss those parts of the work that best illustrate character traits and personal relationships, as well as those parts of the text that were discussed in greatest depth in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. Further details on the composers and works, and more libretto excerpts, can be found in Appendix I (p. 258).

MUSICAL SELECTIONS DISCUSSED

A list of the musical figures included in this chapter can be found on p. 280. Other musical selections to be discussed, without illustration, are the following:

**Part I**

**Goldschmidt**

Chorus: "Is this Naomi?" (1.19)
Naomi: "Call me not Naomi" (1.20-21)
Ruth and Boaz: "Why have I found grace" (2.12)
Ruth and Naomi: "They that sow in tears" (2.20, Ps. 126)

**Damrosch**

Naomi: "Hail hail" (Luke 1, 28-32)
Gaul
Naomi: “Call me not Naomi” (1.20-21)
Ruth and Naomi: “With joyous heart” (replaces 2.18-23)

Coven
Ruth: “My Father, thou are the guide”

Franck
Boaz: “Tous les vœux” (“All my pious wishes”)

Fino
Naomi and Ruth: “O Nuora” (“Oh daughter-in-law”)
Naomi: “I per it bene” (“I direct thy days”) (3.1-4)

Part II
Schumann
Naomi: “Call me not Naomi” (1.20-21)
Ruth and Naomi: “Tell me my daughter” (2.19-20)
Ruth and Boaz: “I am Ruth...” “May the Lord now bless thee” (3.10)

Rumshinsky
Naomi: “Odecha Adonai” (“God who has raised me up”)
Naomi and Ruth: “Lo ayaffi” (“I didn’t tire”) (based on 2.18)
Boaz: “Be-lev kavarti” (“I buried in my heart”)
Ruth: “Ve’erastani Boaz” (“I wed you, Boaz”)

Mellers
Ruth: “Why have I found grace” (2.10)
Boaz: “Of thy gentleness” (based on 3.10)
Boaz: “And of his seed”

Beecham
Naomi: “Go, return” (1.8-9)
Orpah and Ruth: “Surely we will return” (1.10)
Ruth: “Why have I found grace” (2.10)

Berkeley
Naomi: “Once more I see”
Naomi: “Almighty Father” (after 1.11)
Ruth and Boaz: “Ah let not anger...” “How fair”
Naomi: “Fear not” (based on 3.1)
Ruth: “To thee beloved God”
Boaz: “Ah Ruth, thou comest”

Aloni
Naomi: “Don’t call me Naomi” (1.20-21)
Boaz and Ruth: “Who are you?” “Will you spread...”
CHAPTER SIX
THE ORATORIOS AND OPERAS
Part I. 19th Century
Otto Goldschmidt, *Ruth, A Sacred Pastoral* (in English; words from the Bible KJV)
London, Lamborn Cock, Addison & Co., 1868
Ruth--soprano; Naomi--mezzo; Boaz--bass (no Orpah)
Narrator-- tenor; Chorus, as indicated by the composer, “should consist of more sopranos and basses than tenors and altos” (from the score, “Index” page).

Otto (Moritz David) Goldschmidt (b. Hamburg 1829, d. London 1907) was a pianist, conductor and composer. He studied with Mendelssohn, among others, and his music was strongly influenced by that composer’s melodic style and harmonic language. According to *New Grove*, the oratorio *Ruth* is considered Goldschmidt’s most well-known composition. He wrote it for his wife, the soprano Jenny Lind, and it “makes effective use of her famous high F# (f""")” (Gaynor Jones in *New Grove*, vol. 10, p. 107). It was performed several times in the 19th century, in England and Germany. In standard oratorio fashion, the narration segments of the Scroll are sung by a Narrator, while the dialogue is sung by the characters. However, verses in which the narrator interrupts a dialogue are omitted, to retain the flow of the dialogues.

Chapter 1  Part I: The opening recitative is the text of 1.1-6, eliminating only Ruth’s and Orpah’s names from v. 4. Following this recitative, the chorus sings Ps. 147.7, 8 and Ps. 111.5.

*These both contain references to famine and food.*

In the first extended duet (1.8-17) between Ruth and Naomi [Figs. 1&2], Naomi’s further admonitions to her daughters-in-law (1.12-13) are omitted.

Figure 1: Goldschmidt, “Turn again,” no. 4, p. 26, 3rd staff, m.3

Ruth and Naomi’s first duet (Fig. 1) opens with Naomi’s solo recitative “Turn again” (1.11). The leitmotif, a series of rising 8th note *arpeggios* increasing in speed and volume, and a rising line of falling thirds, appears here for the first time. This leitmotif of the Ruth-Naomi

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1 Note on format of this chapter: my comments on librettos and music are all italicized; those on the music are in bold face.

2 This statement is not supported by any indication in the score; it is possible that Lind interpolated a very high note in performance and that this was mentioned in a subsequent review, from which Jones acquired his (not cited) information.
relationship is repeated before Ruth’s opening notes. Ruth’s first words are “Intreat me not” (p. 27, 2nd staff, m.7), sung twice on rising minor thirds. This leads to the lengthy aria setting of “Whither thou goest.”

This aria is in a faster tempo, marked Allegro con moto in 4/4 time. Naomi interrupts the aria (p. 30, top) with “Behold thy sister Orpah” (1.15, placed here after 1.16, so that Naomi is responding to Ruth’s words). The accompaniment switches abruptly to triplets. Modulations between major and minor recur frequently (from F-fm-C in the first 4 measures; p. 30), and at the climax of this section, the triplets become 16th notes. Then a variant of the leitmotif returns in the accompaniment to bring a recapitulation of the opening “Intreat me not” phrase, here marked agitato and repeated on increasingly higher pitches (p. 30, 4th staff). Ruth interrupts Naomi with this phrase, as Naomi had previously interrupted Ruth. The final repetition of the words “to leave thee” are sung on the dominant of F (C7; p. 31, 2nd staff, m.2); when it is resolved, the 16th notes stop and lead to the conclusion, to be played piu tranquillo. The section ends with both voices on the dominant C7, from which Ruth reprises “Whither thou goest.”

The rhythmic and tonal shifts throughout this scene create a sense of anxiety and uncertainty. When the two voices sing together (p. 30, 4th staff), Ruth singing “Intreat me not” against Naomi’s “Return thou,” the shift to 16th notes heightens the excitement and conflicting desires of the two women. The quality and tone of Ruth’s music is sweeter than Naomi’s, because of its smoother rhythms, brighter keys and higher pitches, musically portraying the difference in their characters.

Immediately following Ruth’s aria, the chorus sings Ps. 34.15 and Ps. 112.4.

These verses contain references to God who watches out for the righteous.

After the narrator has announced the arrival in Bethlehem of Naomi and Ruth, the chorus, described here as “People,” ask “Is this Naomi?” (1.19). After Naomi’s response (1.21), they repeat her words: “Is this Naomi, who went out full and whom the Lord brought home again empty?”

The majority of Naomi’s solos include a mixed-gender or women’s chorus. The chorus of “Is this Naomi?” (1.19; p. 45, top) is in a-minor, to be sung allegro. In this fugato, the basses begin, joined by the tenors, then by the women’s voices.

The fugal form in the chorus heightens the sense of confusion and mixed emotions experienced by the people on seeing Naomi.
The tempo increases from allegro moderato to allegro molto vivace up to Naomi’s entrance, which is introduced by the leitmotif in the accompaniment heard earlier in the duet with Ruth, but here reprised con fuoco (fiery) (p. 46, top).

The quote of the leitmotif is a musical prompt to the audience to remember the earlier exchange between Ruth and Naomi. The tempo increase serves to intensify emotion still further.

The words “Call me not Naomi” (1.20: p. 46, 2nd staff) are sung as a recitative rather than an aria, starting animato and slowing to andantino. The words “call me Mara” are sung on chromatically descending notes, with the longest held note on the first syllable of “Mara.” A short arioso (9 measures), “I went out full” (1.21: p. 46, 4th staff) follows. The melody is very similar to the one heard in “Have I yet any sons” (p. 27, top). It starts in F but the D flat in the accompaniment is part of b-flat minor, built on the 4th degree of the major. The arioso is interrupted by another choral fugato. In this recapitulation, the chorus repeats the words Naomi has just sung. Some of their music is syncopated and there is a shortened distance, within the fugato, between the entrances of the different voices.

The long note on the first syllable of the word “Mara” is almost a leading tone, and together with the minor within major harmony, creates a sighing effect. Utilizing a previously-heard melody for Naomi’s words recalls the theme of emptiness suggested earlier. The chorus’s repetition of Naomi’s words contains a sense of questioning, confusion and urgency. The use of syncopated rhythms and staggered entrances of the different voices can suggest any of these moods.

Naomi then has another short solo, “The Lord hath testified against me” (1.21: p. 48, top). At the close of the scene, the “women” sing “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4).

As in the previous choral interjections, these words, in addition to comforting Naomi, also reflect on the action.

Chapter 2 Though this is an oratorio (unstaged), Goldschmidt nonetheless marked this part “In the Harvest Field.” to create a sense of place. After 2.2, the chorus interjects Ps. 121.5-6. “The Lord is thy keeper.”

This seems intended to be a reassurance that Ruth is watched by God.

When Boaz enters, in addition to exchanging the short greeting with the reapers, “The Lord bless thee” (2.4), Boaz continues singing, in this case Ps. 65.9, 12. 15. The chorus responds with more verses from the same psalm, and then Boaz concludes with an aria setting of Ps. 107.8.

All the psalm verses chosen praise God in reference to nature, appropriately for a harvest scene.

Following this exchange of psalm quotes is a Chorale with text and melody based on a late 17th-century German hymn, “O dass ich tausend Zungen hätt” (Goldschmidt, in Preface to the score). Next is a dialogue between Boaz and the Chief Reaper (2.5-6).

Both the narrator’s words and the reference to Ruth as a Moabite are eliminated. Perhaps Goldschmidt didn’t want to highlight her origins here.
Boaz and Ruth continue with their dialogue, then sing a duet based on 2.12 (2.14-18 are eliminated).

The duet between Ruth and Boaz opens at 2.12 (p. 91, 3rd staff):

Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, a stranger? (Ruth)

It hath been fully shewed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thy husband...and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. (Boaz)

Ruth begins in B-flat major, in 12/8 time, the same as Boaz's later pastorale (Fig. 3). Boaz's words "It hath been fully shewed me" (p. 92, top) begin as a recitative, then speed up into a *tempo agitato* before the orchestra recapitulates the theme of "Whither thou Goest" (1.16-17). Boaz's highest note in this section is an e' flat, sung twice. It is on "people, which thou knewest not."

The interval skips in this short section may indicate a high level of emotion. The introduction of a musical reference to Ruth's earlier words to Naomi musically underlines what Boaz is saying. The relatively high pitch and volume of the music for Boaz's final words suggest how important he finds this aspect of Ruth's actions.

The act concludes with another Chorale, a harvest hymn "(O Gott von dem wir alles haben)" from the same source as the earlier Chorale.

Part II This part is entitled "In the House of Naomi" and opens with a dialogue between Ruth and Naomi (2.19-21).

The sequence of their words is changed: Ruth continues from 2.19 directly to 2.21, and then Naomi returns to 2.20 and goes directly to 2.22. This was probably done for the sake of simplicity. One interesting alteration is that of "men" to "maidens" in 2.21: in the Scroll, Ruth tells Naomi that Boaz told her to stay close to his men, while he actually said maidens. This was used by many midrashists to prove Ruth was a loose woman: once a Moabitic, always a Moabitic. Perhaps Goldschmidt was trying to clean up her image with this alteration.

After their dialogue, Ruth and Naomi sing a lengthy duet with text from 2.20 and Ps. 126.6 and Ps. 30.5. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (p. 105, top), signalling their mood of hope and also making reference to the harvest.

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

The duet begins in b minor and 2/4 time. The words "shall reap in joy" are sung in the related key of D major (2nd staff, final measure), and then the music moves into A major (3rd staff, m.2). The voices follow one another on the first half of the phrase in a *fugato*, rather than singing together in harmony, which they do on "shall reap in joy."

The idea of "joy" is musically represented by D major, one of the brightest keys. This is the chord Mahler referred to sounding "as if it had fallen from heaven" (Preface to this chapter, p. 104). When the pitch and key are raised another fifth to A major, this suggests even greater brightness and joy. The dotted rhythm adds further energy to the duet (Cooke 1959, 100). Singing in a *fugato* rather than in harmony could be indicative of each character
expressing the same thoughts in individual ways. It also implies a strong connection, as one voice follows the other with the same or similar melodic forms.

There is a new melody for the words “Blessed be he” (p. 107, top).
Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead (2.20).

This flowing tune is in 6/8 time, the voices singing homophonically. This differentiates it from the earlier part of the duet, and its opening measures sound more like a religious hymn. A recapitulation of the 2/4 section opens with “Weeping may endure” (p. 109, top). On the word “endure,” Ruth’s voice rises an octave from f’ to f’’, then on “joy,” it rises from g’ to g’’ twice (p. 109, 4th staff, m.4, p. 110, 1st staff, m.3). After this recapitulation, the duet concludes with a repetition of the 6/8 melody (p. 111.top).

In the 6/8 section, Ruth and Naomi are musically depicted as equally devout and completely in tune with one another. The word “joy,” depicted earlier in the duet by the bright D major chord, is painted here with an ascending octave leap.

Chapter 3 In Naomi’s instructions to Ruth, a few verses are omitted. She does not mention that Boaz is a relative, nor does she instruct Ruth to not make herself known to Boaz until he has done eating and drinking, or to note where he is lying and to uncover his feet. Either Goldschmidt was whitewashing the story, or he assumed the plot was so well known that he could leave out crucial verses.

The next scene, entitled “At the Threshing-Floor,” is the shortest scene in the oratorio. After the chorus sings Ps.128.2, Boaz sings a short aria set to Ps. 4.9, “I will lay me down in peace.”

Figure 3: Goldschmidt, “I will lay me down,” no. 25, p. 125

\[ \text{Boaz} \]

\[ \text{Piano} \]

\[ \text{Forte} \]

I will lay me down in peace and take my rest; for it is thou, Lord, only, that makest me dwell in safety.

This simple pastorale (Goldschmidt calls it a “cantilena”) is in B-flat major and 12/8 time. The lower voices of the accompaniment open with a drone on an open fifth, B flat-F.

The combined musical elements—12/8 time and drone accompaniment—create a typical pastoral sound. Goldschmidt may have added this solo to present Boaz as a figure of safety and peace, or to show him in the context of a pastoral, rural setting.

After this solo, the chorus sings “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5.8).
The encounter between Ruth and Boaz is not portrayed; it is only described by Ruth in the next scene. The first-person account of their encounter is an effective dramatic device, not found in any other libretto discussed here.

The next scene, "In the House of Naomi," opens with Naomi asking Ruth "Who art thou" (3.16) in recitative (p. 132, top). Ruth replies at length, recounting what happened (3.7-17). A few phrases are omitted, possibly because of the awkwardness of the first-person account. Thus Ruth does not recount that "she went stealthily and uncovered his feet," or that Boaz praised her act, or how he measured out barley for her to take home (3.7.10, 15).

This exciting re-telling is more effective than presenting it in the Scroll's original narrative form would have been.

Chapter 4 The next scene is entitled "At the Gate of Bethlehem" and opens with the Chorus singing Ps. 82.1.3 and 68.5.

These texts refer to God as a Judge who defends the poor, does justice to the needy, and defends the cause of the widows. They seem to foreshadow Boaz's role as an equally just judge.

The chapter proceeds through 4.1-11 (only 4.7-8 are cut); the chorus sings 4.11 in a "cantilena," but does not proceed to 4.12, the reference to the house of Perez (this reference is omitted in over half of the librettos; Preface to this chapter, p. 103).

Perhaps Goldschimidt did not want to remind his audience of the connection to Tamar and Judah.

When Ruth is described as bearing a son, the biblical role of God in her conception is eliminated (as it is in all the works I discuss). Also eliminated are 4.16-17a, the role of Naomi holding the child and that of the women naming him. The final words from the Scroll in this oratorio are "father of David." Following this, the concluding chorus sings Isa.12.1, 2 and Jer. 23.5, 6.

These concluding verses praise God and refer to David's lineage.

Summary

In this libretto, Goldschimidt intertwines other biblical texts (primarily Psalms) with the Scroll, and uses them similarly to the way the rabbis did, almost as proof texts. The additional texts greatly increase and affirm God's role in the story.

An unusual feature of this libretto is the re-telling of the events in chapter 3 by Ruth, rather than having the scene played out. It is an almost cinematic flashback effect.

Musically, Goldschimidt effectively weaves a single leitmotif, first heard at the opening of Ruth and Naomi's first duet, throughout the score. This ties all the subsequent action back to their relationship. Rhythmic and tonal shifts, especially between minor and major keys within a single musical number, are used throughout to highlight—and heighten—moments of emotional excitement. Incidental syncopated rhythms appear, especially in choral numbers, for the same purpose.

Duets frequently alternate between legato imitations, in which the characters do not actually sing together, and homophonic singing. The contrast between these two styles of duet suggests the degree of closeness between those characters at a given point in the plot. Characters
are also differentiated musically by different tempos and styles. For example, pastoral elements appear more in Boaz's music than elsewhere, establishing his context.

Though the large number of choral Psalm settings make this a basically religious oratorio, there is nonetheless great interest musically in the depiction of characters, their relationships and their changing moods. The music also creates a pastoral setting as background for the human drama.

**Leopold Damrosch, Ruth and Naomi, A Scriptural Idyll** (in English)
Boston: G.D. Russell and Co., 1875; Words taken from the Bible (KJV)
Ruth--soprano; Naomi--alto; Orpah--alto; Boaz--bass
Narrator—tenor; Chorus

Leopold Damrosch (b. Germany 1832, d. New York 1885) came from a well-known German-American family of musicians. He was a violinist, conductor and composer. His *Ruth and Naomi* is scored with an accompaniment for organ or piano, not orchestra, so it was intended for church performance more than as a concert work (H. Krehbiel in *New Grove*, vol. 6, 876).

**Chapter 1**

**Part 1**
The Narrator (tenor) tells the opening verses of the story (1.1-8). There are two minor changes: Naomi is named in 1.1, whereas in the Scroll she is only called "his wife;" and the names of the sons are omitted. The text is all from the Scroll except for the addition of "My dear daughters" before 1.8.

*As in other oratorios, the narrator is usually omitted from within dialogues; for example, 1.8-9 is sung by Naomi and 1.10 by Ruth and Orpah, without a narrator.*

The extended opening scene is a trio between Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah (1.8-17; p. 20). The scene opens with Naomi singing "My dear daughters" [sic].

[Figure 4: Damrosch, "My Dear Daughters," no. 3, p. 20]

Naomi begins in a low register of the voice. The key is b minor, with occasionally a lowered 2nd degree, suggesting the related Phrygian mode. The opening words are sung unaccompanied, and "Go, return" is repeated several times, on increasingly higher pitches with sparse accompaniment. On the words "The Lord deal kindly" (1.8; p. 20, 5th staff), a flowing
melody with fuller accompaniment begins. The highest note reached is e', on the last repetition of “the Lord” (p. 21, 2nd staff).

The short aria ends on the word “Return” sung unaccompanied, forte, and with fermata (sustained) indications over the final two notes (p. 21, 3rd staff, m.8). This word is followed by a measure and a half of rests marked with fermata. The dominant F# ending would be expected to resolve in the relative b minor, but instead it moves into B major and a faster tempo.

The Phrygian mode, suggested in Naomi's opening phrase, is often related musically to sadness. The repetition of the same phrase in higher keys is a dramatic device, especially since the e' at the end of the series will sound higher in a contralto voice because of its particularly dark timbre. The long silence after Naomi’s words (expressed by rests in the music) could signify hesitation, a sense of loss, and possibly tension, which is resolved in the next section. The unexpected resolution into a major key at this point has the effect of a ray of sun breaking through Naomi's gloom. The move from a minor to a major key signifies a mood shift, which could represent the assertiveness of Ruth and Orpah’s response to Naomi’s sadness, as heard in their duet.

Ruth and Orpah continue with a duet, “Surely we will return with thee” (1.10).

Figure 5: Damrosch, “Surely we will return,” p. 21, no. 3, 4th staff

This duet is marked allegro con moto, un poco agitato. The two voices harmonize in perfect thirds throughout. The duet ends with several sudden key shifts, followed by a sustained measure of silence (p. 22, 1st staff, m.4-6). Naomi then sings a few unaccompanied measures.

The homophonic voices of Ruth and Orpah are a musical indication of being of one mind, united in their feelings for Naomi. The measure of silence at a transition point in the duet is a dramatic pause, like a narrative gap, which can be interpreted many ways. It seems to be a moment suspended in time when all the characters are thinking what they should do next.

Only the beginning and ending of 1.11-13 are retained. Ruth’s aria “Entreat me not” (1.16-17; Fig. 7) begins immediately after 1.14; 1.15 is cut.
The big orchestral buildup to this aria is marked *Allegro molto con fuoco*. The aria starts on $f''$, with a skip to $b''$ flat on “leave.” The highest note reached is a $b''$ flat, on “I” (p. 24, 3rd staff, m.2) and again at the conclusion of the aria, on “thee” (p. 26, 4th staff, m.1).

The orchestral introduction signals the dramatic importance of this aria. The high range and many wide interval leaps in the voice depict agitation, as do the dense harmonies.

A mood change is signaled by the *piu tranquillo* notation at the words “Thy people” (p. 24, 4th staff, m.2), where the melody (in A flat major) is hymn-like. There is dramatic use of C-flat major, the flat 3rd degree of A-flat major, on “And thy God” (p. 24, 5th staff, m.2). On the recapitulation of “Entreat me not” (p. 25, top), the vocal line is the same but after a few measures the orchestral part changes; it is marked *ff molto fuoco* and consists of short staccato chords. Over this halting accompaniment, the aria has several long sustained notes: “thou” is held for a full three measures (p. 25, 3rd staff), “die” (4th staff), and “buried” (5th staff) each for two measures.

Several enharmonic pitch relationships are found in this recapitulation, in the voice part. The end of the phrase “I will be buried” (p. 25, 4th staff, m.5-6) changes from G# (“I”) to A flat (“will”); “The Lord do so to me” (p. 25, 6th staff, m.5-6) changes from C flat (“Lord”) to B (“do”); “If ought but death part thee and me” (p. 26, 2nd staff, m.2-3) changes its final F# (“thee and”) to G flat (“me”) while it is sustained for three full measures. The conclusion (p. 26, 2nd staff, m.5) is a third repetition of “Entreat me not,” ending on $b''$ flat (on “thee”).

On the recapitulation of the opening section, the staccato chords could be heard as resoluteness, as fate, or possibly as a rapid panting. The contrast of this thumping rhythm with Ruth’s sustained notes musically depicts conflict, as found in Ruth’s excited psychological state. The enharmonic changes in the recapitulation are often startling, musically representing (at least in notation) shifting or unexpected emotions. There is also an aspect of transformation, musically speaking, because of the (subtle) change in intonation. Enharmonic change affects the sound as well (F# generally has a higher intonation than G flat). In two of the above cases, enharmonic change goes from sharp to flat, possibly connected with the textual meanings of “burying” and “death.” In the third, the change from C flat to B occurs notably on the word “Lord,” representing hope and possibly also surrender. The effect is of Ruth attempting to calm herself.

The setting of this aria in a high range of the soprano voice is intended to have a dramatic effect on the listener—both Naomi and the audience.
Following this aria, 1.18-21 is cut.

This is one of only two oratorios (the other is Coven) to leave out Naomi’s words “Call me not Naomi” (1.20-21), indicative of Damrosch’s greater interest in Ruth’s story.

Chapter 2

Boaz sings “Hearest thou not my daughter” (2.8-9).

Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them. Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?

The words “Go not…” are sung to a simple melody marked andante affettuoso. A new section, marked dolce, begins on “Let thine eyes be on the field” (p. 38, 4th staff, m.2). The accompaniment is more animated; the key modulates restlessly through several measures. There is a change to 8th notes under “Have I not charged the young men that they not touch thee” (p. 38, 5th staff, m.3). Boaz’s voice rises to c#, high for a bass (p. 39, 1st staff, m.2), leaps down a full tenth to A (same measure), back up a seventh to g (next measure) before ending on f# in b minor (next measure). This passage begins forte but quickly diminishes to piano (p. 39, 1st staff, m.4).

The constant key modulations combined with the wide leaps of Boaz’s voice create a sense of agitation. The dramatic intervals, followed by the sudden diminution of volume, may suggest emotions being suppressed, or a greater subtlety in speech.

Ruth responds to Boaz with the words “Why have I found grace in thine eyes” (2.10). Then Boaz continues with “It has been fully showed me” (2.11).

The chorus concludes with Ps.147. 7,8, verses that notably include references to harvest and land.

Part 2

Chapter 3

Naomi sings a recitative and aria to the opening verses (p. 55), 3.1-4, omitting the details about the redeeming kinsman, as well as the instructions to Ruth to not make herself known, and to uncover Boaz’s feet; 3.5, where Ruth says she will do as she was told, is also omitted.

These verses are crucial to the story, but it must have been assumed that the audience of that time knew the plot details already.
Boaz’s response to Ruth (3.10-13; p. 63) is very abridged. After he tells Ruth to stay with him, Ruth and the chorus sing the opening verses of Psalm 23 (=14): “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.” The remainder of the chapter is deleted.

Again, it can be surmised that the audience already knew the story, or that the composer felt the material form inappropriate for such an ambivalent scene.

**Chapter 4**  The Narrator picks up the thread of narrative from 4.1, skipping 4.2-8.

*The purpose of the deletion was either to avoid confusion over the legal inheritance issues, or because it was assumed the audience already knew the details.*

As in other librettos, 4.12, the reference to Perez, Tamar and Judah, is deleted. The last line included from the Scroll is 4.13, which however deletes the reference to God’s role in the birth, also common to all librettos.

After the announcement that Ruth bore a son, Naomi sings an aria (p. 78, 5th staff, m.4), with text from Luke 1. 28-32, the announcement of Jesus’ birth to Mary:

> Hail, hail, the Lord is with me! Out of my house the Redeemer shall come. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father, David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Amen.

*The purpose is clearly to link David’s birth to that of Jesus.*

This aria, marked *adagio religioso*, starts in E-flat major in a steady 6/8 beat, and is to be sung “in prophetic ecstasy.” On the words “the Redeemer shall come:” there is a transition to C-flat major and an increase in the tempo (p. 79, 2nd staff). A few measures later, there is an enharmonic change from C-flat to B, on “He shall be great” (p. 79, 2nd staff, m.6). There are four descending octave leaps in the voice: g'-g (“Highest”), a'-a (“Lord shall”) (p. 79, 4th staff, m.3-6); e'-e (“ever”), d'-d (“shall be”) (p. 80, 2nd staff, m.4, 3rd staff, m.1-2).

Over Naomi’s low sustained notes, the orchestra plays high repeated chords *pianissimo*, while other parts of the orchestra double Naomi’s notes (p. 79, 3rd staff). The aria ends on the word “Amen” sung three times, the third *fortissimo* on f"., relatively high for an alto voice (p. 80, 5th staff, m.3). The note is sustained for three measures on “A-men,” marked *ritardando* and over a strong F7 chord in the accompaniment under the voice. This leads to a resolution to B-flat major for the *fortissimo* chorus that follows immediately.

*The repeated soft high chords over Naomi’s voice seem to be used here to create a “heavenly” effect. The four descending octave leaps, each starting on a higher note than the last, give the impression of a herald. The high sustained notes at the conclusion intensify the confirmative aspect of “Amen.”*

The closing Chorus sings Ps. 95, 6-7: “Oh come! Let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker. The Lord reigneth; he is clothed with majesty.”

**Summary**

The libretto text is entirely biblical, an example of adapting a biblical text for church use. It uses psalms in a similar way to Goldschmidt, to comment on the narrative, but only in a few places. Chapter 3 was apparently even more troubling for Damrosch; instead of having it related after the events, he eliminated it altogether. One of the few New Testament references to be
found in *Ruth* oratorios appears in this work, when Naomi sings text from Luke to announce the birth of the child. This is clearly a way of almost conflating the story with that of the later birth of Christ.

In the only true duet of the work, between Ruth and Orpah, the voices are in perfect homophony. The music frequently shifts back and forth from minor to major very effectively. Damrosch also uses complete silence in some places for dramatic effect. Other devices found here to express emotional moments are: utilization of very high ranges of the soprano voice; many large interval leaps; sequences of surprising enharmonic changes and key modulations. The same devices are used for all the characters, so generic emotions are more vividly portrayed in the music than are individual characters.

**Alfred Gaul, *Ruth, a Sacred Cantata, opus 34***

Words by Edward Oxenford. London: Novello & Co., Ltd.; 1880 (for further editions, p. 272)

Written and composed expressly for the Festival Choir of the Birmingham Sunday School Union

Ruth—soprano; Naomi—contralto; Orpah—contralto; Boaz—bass

**Narrator—chorus**

Alfred Gaul (1837-1913) was an English organist, conductor and composer. His *Ruth* uses a libretto by Edward Oxenford, not the biblical text. The narrative sections use some text from the Scroll, but the dialogues and choruses are newly written, in the style of his day.

**Chapter 1**

Part 1: “Sorrow”

This part opens with these words, which replace 1.1 but give far less information:

A grievous famine smote the land.
And chastened Judah’s children sore:
It was the Lord’s divine command
That earth her fruits should yield no more.

Naomi then sings 1.8 as a recitative, followed by an aria which opens:

O gracious Lord, cast down Thine eyes
Upon Thy servant here...
And when my life on earth is o’er,
Have mercy, Lord, on me.
And let me dwell for evermore
In Paradise with Thee!

*These verses establish Naomi immediately as a passive and God-fearing woman.*

Following this aria, a choral recitative relates 1.9, followed at once by a trio between Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi.
Farewell! The hour has come for parting!
Farewell! Love's link must break at last!
Heed not the truant teardrops starting;
They do but greet the mirror'd past!

These opening lines are sung to a simple hymn-like melody in 3/4 time, with an accompaniment of *arpeggio* triplets beneath the melody. Orpah repeats what Naomi has just sung for several measures before being joined by Naomi in very conventional harmonies. Orpah's words are:

"Farewell!" The word is all unspoken!
"Farewell!" it cannot yet be said!
For O our hearts will then be broken,
And peace for ever from us fled!

Ruth's words are:
Alas! And must we from thee sever?
Alas! Our souls are wrung with pain.
O say not it must be for ever,
But soon our lives will join again!

Naomi sings in response:
Alas! My soul is fill'd with sorrow,
Alas! To part is bitter pain;
In comfort from this promise borrow,
In Heaven we shall meet again!

*These words ascribe feelings and deep attachment between the three women barely hinted at in the Scroll.*
The three women sing to the same rhythm and a homophonic texture is dominant throughout the trio. This is a traditional musical depiction of united hearts and minds. Yet at the same time, there a suggestion of a fugato to make clear that there are three women involved. Though they sing simultaneously, their texts are different up to the end.

Ruth’s “Entreat me not” (1.16-17) follows immediately after the Trio.

Figure 9: Gaul. “Entreat me not.” no. 4. p. 18

This is one of the few pieces to retain most of the original biblical text (KJV). The aria is marked con espressivo [sic]. There is a pleading motif of a rising and falling whole step in the orchestra that Ruth repeats on higher pitches in the opening recitative. The higher note builds a dissonance in relation to the chord of the accompaniment. The aria includes two ascending octave leaps, on “for whither” (p. 18, 3rd staff, m.4) and “my people” (p. 19, 1st staff, m.2).

The second part of the aria, starting with “Where thou diest” (p. 19, 4th staff), changes character; there is a faster accompaniment made up of repeated 8th notes in the treble part of the orchestra and Ruth sings in a much lower range. The opening melody returns after this section (p. 20, 2nd staff, m.3), and the little pleading two-note motif played by the orchestra in the opening measures of the aria is sung at the end by Ruth. She sings it in the same key as in the opening, but on the final repeat the motif resolves suddenly to B-flat major (p. 20, 5th staff, m.4).

The plangent two-note motif, with its subtle dissonance, creates a sense of pleading, intensified later by the interval leaps in the voice. These often signal a high degree of emotion. The second part, with its rising bass-patterns, musically portrays a more resolute Ruth, and the sudden switch to a major key at the end denotes hope.

Immediately following the aria is the chorus of Bethlehemites who recognize Naomi (1.19); they are more accusatory here than in the Scroll:

Speak! Art thou that Naomi, daughter,
Who left us when famine was here?
When streams were despoil’d of their water,  
And Earth was all barren and sere?...
Say, why art thou sorrowful-hearted  
Now home thou art welcome’d at last?

Naomi’s words in 1.20, “Call me not Naomi,” are set as:

Call me not Naomi,  
For grief and woe are mine;  
The Lord hath dealt full bitterly  
It was His will divine!  
I went out full from Bethlehem.  
All empty come I now:  
Yet to the High God’s just decree  
My head I humbly bow.

The final two lines, altered from the original text, soften Naomi’s anger against God and make her a much more passive character. This could be modelled after Job, who also received God’s punishment without complaining (Job 1.22, 2.10), and or simply serve as a female role model for the Victorian era.

The words are sung as a quasi-recitative (p. 23, no. 5), in the unusual key of b-flat minor, accompanied only by chords. The closing phrase hangs suspended on the dominant F7.

This key, with five flats, is often connected with bitterness and loss, as is any minor key with many flats. The recitative, by ending on the dominant, seems unable to find a resting place. The unresolved musical phrase mirrors Naomi’s sense of loss.

The chorus responds to Naomi with words of comfort, contrasting with their earlier words.

Weep no more, the Lord will aid thee.  
He ne’er faileth in distress;  
Bygone woes have only made thee  
Fitter for new happiness!

Chapter 2  
Part 2: “Joy”

This part opens with a lengthy chorus of reapers, followed by Ruth’s aria, “Let me hie,” an expanded version of 2.2:

Let me hie unto the field  
Kindly hearts I there may find…

After Naomi tells Ruth to go to the field (2.2), Boaz sings an aria, “Go not from hence” (2.8) (p. 37, no. 8), a simple, almost folk-like tune:

Go not from hence, my daughter,  
But glean between the sheaves;  
The field is mine, and all is thine  
That ev’ry reaper leaves.  
Abide here by my maidens.  
And join their mid-day rest;  
No tongue shall say thy gleanings nay.
Or aught thy search molest...

Ruth responds with “Why have I found grace in thine eyes” (2.10) followed by an aria, “Past all knowledge” (p. 40, no. 9):

Past all knowledge is the kindness
Thou dost show, my lord, to me:
I am lowly, and thy favour
All unmerited must be...

The closing verses sung by the chorus are:
Then went she up to the city.
And her heart was fill’d with joy.
Emotions such as sadness and joy, never mentioned in the Scroll, are attributed to the characters throughout this retelling.

Ruth and Naomi sing a duet “With joyous heart I greet thee home,” which replaces 2.18-23 (p. 46, no. 10).

With joyous heart I greet thee home
O daughter, for thine hour is come:
No more thy weary lot shall be
To dwell, and weep, and wail with me. (Naomi)

With joyous heart thy cheek I press
O mother, full of tenderness;
But, tho’ we part, I still shall be
A daughter evermore to thee. (Ruth)
They continue to say farewell to each other, and Naomi closes with:

Go, cleave to him who is thy lord.
His heart with gracious love is stored:
Go, daughter, go; thine hour is come
To leave me for a fairer home (based loosely on 3.1)

The accompaniment of this very upbeat duet is full of dotted rhythms. Ruth and Naomi each sing the theme as a solo, and then they join in singing it in perfect conventional harmony, they sing the same text at the same moment.

The rhythm of this duet creates an excited and happy mood. Dotted rhythm in a major key can “produce the impression of courage and confidence” (Cooke 1959, 100). In psychological terms, one could conclude from the homophonic nature of the music that their hearts are united.

Chapter 3 is replaced with “A Chorale: Nightfall,” a prayer:

Look down, O Lord, from realms above.
Look down, we pray;
All dangers of the night remove
From out our way...
As seen in previous examples, oratorio settings tend to either alter, drastically cut, or replace the action in chapter 3 of the Scroll.

Chapter 4  Following the Choral is “Intermezzo: Daybreak” (orchestral), followed by a Wedding Chorus, a “Slow dance,” then an aria for Boaz, “Glory be to Thee, O Lord.”

Figure 10: Gaul, “Glory be to thee,” no. 13, p. 71

Glory be to Thee, O Lord,
And praises never ceasing;
O may Thy glory, day by day,
For ever be increasing...
Grant that from Thy holy ways
My feet may wander never,
But that to Thee my soul may cleave
For ever and for ever.

Boaz, along with the other main characters, is depicted as a God-fearing and obedient person with no other obvious personality traits.

This aria has a stately and hymn-like quality, with very conventional harmonies. On the reprise of the opening melody, the accompaniment is more agitated, including cadences of 16\textsuperscript{th} notes (p. 72, 2\textsuperscript{nd} staff, m.3). The melody, heard in the vocal line, remains the same while the underlying accompaniment is sped up and altered rhythmically.

A change in the quality of the accompaniment may signal an underlying, unexpressed emotion, or a change of mood. The character is still “singing the same tune,” but the accompaniment underneath that tune tells another story. Boaz’s reference to cleaving to God is sung to a background of firm and resolute music, which underlines his words.

The oratorio ends with the Chorus praising the Lord:

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice,
For blessings round us fall;
Your voices raise
In songs of praise
Unto the Lord of all.
Summary

In this adaptation, chapters 3 and 4 (from the Scroll) are supplanted by a wedding chorus and numerous closing hymns of praise. In fact, this work includes very little text from the Scroll; it is hard to recognize the original story from the poetic libretto that has replaced it. Based on Gaul's popularity, it would appear that this kind of libretto was popular with the public of his time. It is a challenge in the present era to be moved by such lyrics, no matter how affecting the music may be. The characters are portrayed as more passive and more God-fearing than in the Scroll, again in keeping with the conventions of Victorian England.

The most moving music is found in Ruth's and Naomi's solos. The opening trio is very conventional and homophonic, a traditional way of depicting hearts united. Yet Orpah is a contralto uniquely in this work; in addition, only here does Orpah sing with Naomi before Ruth begins singing. Gaul (or the librettist, Oxford) might be making a statement about Orpah's age or the closeness of her relationship with Naomi. Naomi's solo music has many flats (also the case in Fino: this chapter, p. 151), musically illustrating her sadness. Many of the pieces have a hymn-like quality, by which Gaul attempted to create a religious feeling in spite of the basically secular text.

Frederic Cowen, Ruth, a dramatic oratorio


Ruth—soprano; Naomi—alto; Orpah—soprano; Boaz—tenor;
Elder—baritone; Reaper—baritone;
Chorus: Hebrews, Moabites, Reapers, Gleaners, Elders.

Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen (b. Jamaica 1852, d. London 1935) was taken to England at the age of four, and showed precocious musical talent. Cowen knew and studied with many of the great composers of his time, in Germany, Austria and England (Jeremy Dibble in New Grove, vol. 6, 630).

The bulk of the music in this work is choral. Cowen does not include a Narrator, as most oratorios of the period do. The libretto is newly-written but mostly composed of biblical texts, primarily Psalms (all KJV).

Chapter 1  Part I. Scene 1:

This opens with a "Hebrew Caravan" passing through Moab en route to Israel. They sing Psalm 90.1 and Isaiah 33.20-21:

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations...from everlasting to everlasting Thou are God. Our eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation...

Naomi asks where they are going: when they tell her, she responds with the first aria in this work: its text is Ps. 103.13 and 84.2.
Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.
My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord.
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

 Appropriately for a Psalm setting, there is a hymn-like quality to the tune and the 9/8 time signature. In the second part, “My soul longeth” (p. 15, m.2), the melody modulates chromatically as the voice steadily rises from b to d” a tenth higher on “cry out,” which is held for almost three full measures. The closing word of this section before the reprise, “God,” is sustained for over two measures (p. 16, m.3). The final variation of the original melody includes two ascending leaps for the voice: a seventh (p. 17, m.4) and an augmented seventh (3rd staff, m.2).

Chromatic modulation combined with the rising pitch of Naomi’s voice in the middle part of this aria reflect agitation and the intensity of Naomi’s feelings. Sustained notes heighten the drama of the text and intensify the emotional content, while also focussing attention on a particular word—in this case, “God.” Cowen has turned the Psalm setting into a means of personal expression, in spite of its hymn-like quality.

After her aria, Naomi describes what God has done for his people:

He hath sent them meat to the full (Ps. 78.27)
This refers to the days of Israelite wandering (the reference to meat could also be to Num. 11.31-34, the incident of the quails sent by God), equating their present situation with earlier history.

Orpah and the neighbors all plead with Naomi not to leave:

Leave us not, we pray thee...we will remember thy love more than wine (reference to Song of Songs 1.4). All the upright love thee.

Ruth continues pleading, in an aria (no. 3):
Be of good comfort, arise, He calleth thee and will bring thee by a way thou knowest not. The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants (Isa. 42.16, Ps. 34.22).

The effect of these words addressed to Naomi is to elevate her into a much loved and even revered figure, not only by her daughters-in-law but by the whole community she is leaving behind.

When Naomi is about to depart, the neighbors address her one more time:

Blessed shalt thou be in the city, blessed shalt thou be in the field...when thou comest in and when thou goest out (Deut. 28.3, 6).

Scene II: On the road to Israel.

The Hebrews, on the road together with Naomi, Ruth and Orpah, sing:

God shall help us when the morning appeareth...Thou hast been our defence and refuge in the day of trouble (Ps. 59.16).

Orpah sings:

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15. 22). I will go to them that are at rest.

Naomi responds:

There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling (Ps. 91.10).

After Naomi sings “Behold, thy sister-in-law...” (1.15), Ruth sings “Intreat (sic) me not” (1.16-17).

Figure 12: Cowen, Intreat me Not, p. 58, no. 5, 2nd staff

The orchestral part has rapid notes rising climactically before Ruth’s opening line, a declamatory recitative sung forte. At “Thy people shall be my people” (p. 58, 4th staff, m.5), the orchestra begins to double the voice. Throughout the section, the music modulates constantly, never settling into one home key.

A new section starts at “Where thou diest” (p. 58, letter H), where a new musical figure is introduced and repeated successively lower, then building and rising to a climactic sustained g”, held for three beats, on the word “death” (p. 59, 2nd staff, m.2). The word is repeated a second time on a lower pitch, d’, sustained the same number of beats. There is a sustaining symbol over
the closing chord and the 8th-note rest that follows it. The aria does not end on a dramatic high note.

The orchestra doubling Ruth’s voice in the opening section might have the effect of underlining and confirming Ruth’s words. Musically, the constant modulation could reflect the uncertainty of Ruth’s future; the lack of a home key could signify her lack of a home. Naomi’s response to Ruth’s plea in the Scroll is silence (1.18), represented here by the sustained rest. The quiet ending to an aria that began turbulent implies that Ruth has calmed down after saying what she needed to say.

Naomi responds “According to thy words so be it. Thus shalt thou do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully, and with a perfect heart.” 1.18-22 are cut, eliminating Naomi’s “Call me not Naomi” which is featured in most musical works. In its place, the chorus of Hebrews sings “Arise, let us go again to our own people...” and concludes with “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Ps.126.5).

This verse was also featured, there in a duet, in the Goldschmidt. It seems the perfect verse to express the fate of Ruth and Naomi, their story starting with tears and ending in joy, all taking place during the harvest.

Chapter 2  Scene III. The Harvest Field

The scene opens with the reapers and gleaners singing Joel 2.22, “Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice; for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit.”

These are appropriate verses for the pastoral setting.

Some Scroll text is deleted, for example, 2.1-3 and 2.16-18. One sentence is cut from 2.9: Boaz’s referring to his commanding the workers not to touch Ruth. Ruth and Boaz sing 2.12-13 simultaneously, as a short duet.

Naomi meets Ruth outside the gate and they exchange words (1.19-22), with the chorus of reapers and gleaners in the background; the chorus closes the scene.

Chapter 3  Pt II Scene I: Thanksgiving at Harvest-Time

There is no encounter between Ruth and Naomi before the harvest floor scene: 3.1-8 have been cut.

Either the assumption was that the listeners knew the story, or the librettist gave Ruth a more active role, as not simply following Naomi’s instructions.

After an orchestral introduction, Boaz sings “How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God!” (Ps. 36.7).

This psalm deals with God’s role in creating the fruits of the earth and good harvests, highlighting not only God’s role in the story but also Boaz’s awareness of that role.

After the reapers and gleaners sing several choruses, they leave and Ruth sings a prayer. “My Father, thou art the guide of my youth,” before approaching Boaz on the threshing floor. The newly-written text has echoes of several biblical texts (Ps. 31, Jer. 3.4, and others) (p. 155, top).
My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth. My times are in Thine hand; therefore, for Thy Name's sake, lead me. In Thee do I put my trust; let Thy loving-kindness continually preserve me.

As with Boaz's earlier prayer, this kind of text makes God a much more active character here than in the Scroll, as well as showing much greater devotion to God on the part of the libretto's characters than those found in the Scroll.

An orchestral prelude (p. 154, no. 13), played molto lento to set a religious tone, precedes Ruth's opening words. She is instructed to sing con devozione.

There are interesting modulations throughout the aria. The reprise of the first part opens on a C but temporarily in e minor rather than A-flat major as before (p.155, letter T). The phrase "For thy Name's sake, lead me" is repeated three times, with the last "lead me" sung on a pianissimo a' flat, dropping an octave on the word "me" (p.156, 3rd staff). This A flat then becomes a G# in an enharmonic shift, which later moves into a minor. Melodically, the transformation is a positive one, as the G# is a step up, on the way to the A that follows. But G# is also the leading tone to a-minor, so there is harmonic ambiguity here.

The enharmonic shift represents an unexpected and emotional transition. This and other harmonic shifts in these passages musically depict emotional agitation and confusion.

As Ruth approaches Boaz, a new musical figure appears in the orchestra, composed of fast syncopated and chromatic octaves (p.156, 4th staff). There is an enharmonic shift when Boaz says "Who art thou," from C-flat major to B major (p.157, top). This is a positive transformation, because of the move from flat to sharp. The syncopated, rhythmic accompaniment continues while Ruth and Boaz sing similar melodic curves in a square 4/4 time (p. 157, top two staves).

The new musical figure introducing this section could signify turbulence. The positive enharmonic shift seems to be almost a foretelling of what follows in the action, while the rhythmic contrast between the voices and the accompaniment signifies underlying tension and suspense.

After a short recitative, on "Then will I" Boaz sings a sustained a' flat, utilizing the dramatic potential of the tenor voice. Most of the rest of this chapter, 3.13-18, is deleted, replaced by a duet.

Figure 13: Cowen, Happy am I, no. 13, p. 159

Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed! Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee (Gen. 30.13, Ps. 116.7 and other) [Ruth].
Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Wisdom shall give to thy head an ornamental of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver unto thee (Prov. 31.29, 4.9) [Boaz].

Ruth and Boaz do not sing homophonically, but contrapuntally; their solo lines overlap and often end on the same pitch. Their melodies and words are related to, yet different from, each other's.

Ruth reprises the opening melody of the duet starting on $d'$ flat, a half-step higher than in the opening. On the next reprise of this theme, she starts an augmented second higher, on $e'$ (p. 161, 2nd staff, m.3).

The contrapuntal singing of Ruth and Boaz could indicate a physical and emotional distance between them, except for those lines that start or end on the same pitch, which indicates a subtle "coming together." When Ruth reprises the opening theme on higher pitches, this could reflect a steady increase of excitement and joy.

There are no extreme high notes for either voice in this extended duet: Boaz's highest note is $a'$ flat, while Ruth's is $g''$.

This could indicate an attempt to keep the music "non-operatic" and not inappropriately dramatic or romantic.

Chapter 4 Scene II. At the Gate

Most verses from the Scroll have been cut. The scene opens with Boaz's line "Ye are witnesses this day" (4.9) conflated with v. 10. The final Scroll verse sung is 4.11: as in other oratorios, the reference to Perez and Tamar is deleted. The rest of the scene features solos and choruses including Ruth and Naomi—present here though not in the Scroll—and Boaz, the Elders, and People.

Ruth sings "The Lord is my strength and my shield" (Ps. 28.7), following by Naomi "I have been young, and now am old" (Ps. 37.25), followed by Boaz "The meek shall inherit the earth" (the reference here is probably Matt. 5.5, though the text is originally found in Ps. 37.11).

These texts are appropriate to the librettist's presentation of the three characters: in addition to expressing gratitude to God, Naomi also refers to her age and Boaz to his meekness.

The chorus of Elders sings the Priestly Benediction. "The Lord bless you and keep you" (Num 6.25), and the Elder sings some verses from the Scroll mixed with other verses, most significantly "And a branch shall grow out of his roots" ( Isa. 11.1) and "He shall grow as the lily" ( Hos. 14.5), slightly re-written and re-arranged texts referring to the line of David coming from Jesse. The closing choruses of praise are based on Isa. 61.11 and 44.23:

Sing, O ye heavens, break forth into singing...
For the Lord hath glorified Himself in Israel.
Amen and Amen.

The final "Amens" are marked $fff$ and $ffff$.

Summary

The libretto is a literal patchwork of biblical quotes, including not only Psalms but also Pentateuch, Proverbs and others. Because of the chosen texts, the characters are portrayed as...
more God-centered than in the Scroll. Cowen deletes several scenes found in the Scroll, but also adds new ones. Most interesting is the opening scene, which takes place in Moab. Naomi and Ruth join a caravan of Hebrews passing through, which seems to suggest that Naomi might not have made the journey without this encounter. The reaction of her neighbors to her leaving establishes Naomi as a much-loved figure in her Moabite community. The presence of a caravan accompanying Ruth and Naomi on their voyage removes the intimacy of the scene usually portrayed as between only the two women, including Ruth’s famous plea to Naomi.

There are numerous additional choruses in this work: in addition to the usual reapers and neighbors, there is also a chorus of Moabites and one of Hebrews. The first two scenes open and close with chorus. This would highlight the intimacy of the subsequent two scenes in which the chorus has a smaller role.

Boaz is unusually cast as a tenor, yet he has almost no high notes or dramatic music. He refers to himself obliquely as “meek,” so this casting is more along the lines of tenors of pre-Romantic music, such as Don Ottavio in Mozart’s Don Giovanni, also a “meek” yet romantic character.

Hallmarks of Cowen’s musical style are tonal ambiguity, including constant modulation, and many enharmonic shifts. These techniques, typical for the era, have been noted in other works of the same period. Cowen goes further harmonically than his predecessors, and the well-known biblical quotes set to music of sometimes daring dissonances presents an interesting contrast between the traditional (the text) and non-traditional (parts of the music).

César Franck, *Ruth: Eglogue Biblique de A. Guillemin* (French: 1844, revised 1872) (“Eglogue” is eclogue, based on the Latin name of Virgil’s pastorals. It is a poem in which shepherds converse)  
Ruth—soprano, Naomi—mezzo, Orpah—contralto, Boaz—baritone  
A Gleaner—tenor, An Israelite—tenor

César Franck’s (1822-1890) *Ruth* (1844) was his first choral composition and first large-scale work. Its first performance, in 1846, was received poorly; Meyerbeer praised it, but Franck’s professors and the public did not. Thirty years later he wrote *Rebecca*, a “biblical idyll,” *Hulda* and several other works based on the Hebrew Bible. In 1871, success came unexpectedly with the resurrection of his oratorio *Ruth*. After he made some important modifications and improvements, the public received the performance favorably (John Warack in *New Grove* vol. 9, 177).

Franck virtually eliminates the role of the narrator, giving the work a more operatic quality. This is one of the only piano scores that includes instrumental notations, which explains my reference to these markings where appropriate. Franck’s orchestrations typically stressed oboe, English horn and bass clarinet (Longyear, 205), and these instruments predominate in *Ruth*.

Chapter 1  The opening chorus of Moabites sings (translations all mine):

She is leaving, the poor mother, the inconsolable Naomi. Is she a stranger to us? Isn’t Moab her friend? Her soul is wounded by long sadnesses, oppressed by a thousand griefs; let her at least be freed in her tears.
The focus here is immediately on Naomi, and there is no mention of her specific losses: in other words, no equivalent to 1.1-7.

Following this chorus is a trio, which opens with Naomi telling Orpah and Ruth:

Farewell, dear daughters! As I go towards Bethlehem, I entrust you to your families: don’t forget me.

In the Scroll, Naomi never says “don’t forget me,” and this phrase in the libretto makes her much more real, a woman struggling with her feelings. The librettist has changed “mother’s house” to “your families,” possibly an example of simplifying the text for the audience.

Naomi starts in a quasi-recitative in e minor, 4/4 time (p. 20, no. 3). The first chord, in the bassoons, is followed by Naomi singing an unaccompanied descending two-note motif. The next chord, played by clarinets and horns, is A flat major in the first inversion, and this is followed by Naomi singing the same motif, continuing the descending line. The final note of the minor sixth descent is G, on “Ruth” (5th measure). Naomi’s voice rises on the words “dear daughters,” taking her back to the opening note of the section, e’ flat, where she once again descends a sixth by steps. But this time she continues the descent down to c’, on “families” (4th staff, 1st measure).

Slow descending phrases built around the sixth degree of a minor scale are often used to express sadness, grief, or melancholy (Cook 1982, 222). The unaccompanied vocal phrases lend Naomi’s character additional poignancy, as she seems “abandoned” by the supporting orchestra. She seems to temporarily gain hope, shown in the rising pitches, but by the end of these few measures, the music depicts resignation.

Ruth and Orpah respond:

If you leave, o beloved, let us leave with you; and Bethlehem will be delighted to hear, through our tears, the name of our husbands.

This text gives Ruth and Orpah motivation for accompanying Naomi: they want to offer her support and tell the Bethlehemites their story. They seem certain of acceptance once their relationship to Naomi is known. Their strong attachment to her is indicated by the term “bien aimée” (beloved).

Naomi responds:

Why tie yourselves to so much suffering? Keep the hope of a sweet future.

The chorus interrupts their trio to express the narrator’s impression (like a Greek chorus): What extreme anguish, what tears, what goodbyes; look how they love each other, a holy, pious love (p. 28, top).

The use of a narrator here contrasts greatly with the biblical narrator, who simply states facts and never offers this kind of emotional commentary.

In the next trio, called “Strophes” (“Stanzas”), Naomi says (p. 33, no. 5):

My daughters, the widow’s veil could fall from your faces some day; for you, after these trials, time may yet bear fruit, and hope return. Farewell, and may God’s goodness spread over you and bring you its sweetest treasures.

This text makes Naomi warmer and more caring than the biblical Naomi. She is saying essentially the same as Naomi in 1.8-9, but her more bitter and sarcastic words of 1.11-13 do not
appear here in any form. The word "widow" is not in the Scroll but does appear in another libretto (Fino, p. 141).

This trio opens with a quasi-recitative as did the previous one. After "ni l'espoir sans retour," "hope may return," the orchestra interrupts for four measures with a lilting new theme (p. 35, 4th staff). Naomi continues her recitative until this leitmotif returns in Ruth’s and Orpah’s voices. Standing for hope, this becomes the leitmotif for "return."

Orpah and Ruth respond:

Figure 14: Franck, “Douleur amère,” (“Bitter grief”), p. 36, no. 5, 3rd staff

Douleur amère, Douleur sans espoir, N’avoit plus de mère, Ne plus la voir!
Douleur sans espoir.

Bitter grief, grief without hope, to no more have a mother, to see her no more! Bitter sadness, sadness without hope.

Unlike the biblical text, where Ruth and Orpah “broke into weeping” (1.9, 1.14), this phrase gives voice to the specific reason for their grieving: leaving Naomi forever. It thus suggests deep affection between all three women.

After Ruth and Orpah have sung one phrase each, Naomi interrupts to encourage them: they still have hearts as their witnesses (“Mais le coeur vous reste, c’est un doux témoin”).

Orpah responds to each line of Ruth’s with similar words and also in a descending melodic pattern, but with a slightly different musical figure. For example, after Ruth sings “Douleur amère” (Bitter sadness), Orpah responds “Douleur sans espoir” (Sadness without hope) in a descending fifth which differs from the pattern of Ruth’s phrase. Naomi joins them singing different text to the same melody (p. 37, top). Ruth and Orpah’s voices harmonize only in the final three measures, before the entire trio is repeated.

In this trio, the slight differences in text and melodic figures highlight the individuality of each woman. The musical pattern of give-and-take remains consistent. It has a different effect than would homophonic singing, because each phrase builds both musically and textually upon the previous one. As if lost in her own thoughts, each sings her own tune after the other. Musically this also depicts each woman reacting to and confirming the other.
Naomi is represented musically as emotionally tied to the other women, but having her own thoughts separate from theirs, even though the three are all “in tune” with each other. The effect of each singer’s lines being heard, rather than intertwining the voices, is an effective device that musically depicts the individual turmoil of each woman.

This trio is followed by Ruth’s Recitative and Aria (with interjections by Naomi) (p. 39, no. 6):

Moi, je vous suis. Non, point d’adieu. Votre patrie est ma patrie, votre peuple, mon peuple, et votre Dieu, mon Dieu.

I follow you, there is no goodbye; your country is my country, your people my people, your God my God (Recit.)

There are notable changes from the Scroll. The opening words, “I, I follow you” (“Moi, je vous suis!”) indicate a stronger, more assertive Ruth from the Ruth who pleads “Do not urge me to leave you” (1.16).

Franck’s is one of only two Ruth works treated here that does not include a fully developed aria setting of these words (the other is Fino); it opens as a declamatory quasi-recitative (p. 39, no. 6) and then moves into a very brief (10-measure) arioso (Fig. 15). The orchestra plays a short musical pattern between Ruth’s phrases in the recitative. This pattern is in G minor the first time, e-flat minor the second, b minor the last; the opening note of the pattern is d’, then b’ flat, then f’# flat. Together, these notes form an augmented triad, which is implied in the score. By lending the music a kind of hidden chromatic uniformity, it creates uncertainty in the harmonic progression. The starting note for each of Ruth’s phrases rises by half steps, so that she concludes one full step higher than she began, also an implied melodic pattern.

The absence of any fixed key of orientation, as found in this recitative, is a musical representation of uncertainty. But the subtle pitch rises in the vocal part seem to suggest an increase of Ruth’s resolve at the same time, in spite of her underlying uncertainty.
I want the same land, opening the same tomb for us, to receive the daughter and the mother at the end of our days, which will be the most beautiful.

The reference to the end of their days being the most beautiful is a completely new concept, indicative of Ruth's confidence that they will spend the rest of their lives together happily. The original "Thus and more may the Lord do to me" (1.17) is omitted, making Ruth less centered on Naomi's God.

The aria starts in an uncertain A major, only firmly in this key at the double bar (3rd staff, m.3). It is noted *pianissimo, moderato* with a strumming 16th note accompaniment which later slows down. The sense of unsettled harmony derives from the A major chord being built on the second inversion (on the fifth) rather than on the tonic.

*Unsettled harmonies depict Ruth's conflicted emotions here as earlier.*

Naomi's response is:

Viens, ma fille, et de ma vieillesse, sois le flambeau, sois le soutien.
Le Dieu qui donne la sagesse, n'abandonne jamais un cœur comme le tien.
Come, my daughter, be the torch of my old age, be its support. God who gives wisdom, should never abandon a heart like yours.

The reference to supporting Naomi in her old age is a reference to 4.15, in which the women tell Naomi that Ruth’s son will offer this support.

Naomi is completely silent at this point in the biblical version, but most musical settings attribute a response to her. Here Naomi is inviting Ruth to come with her in order to support her in her old age, while also ascribing her invitation to God’s will or command.

At Naomi’s entrance, the tempo and rhythm slow. Naomi sings in a very limited, low range.

This seems to be a musical reference to her calm and to the “old age” she refers to.

Ruth ecstatically proclaims:
Of what happiness my voice is inebriated, to the impulses of a maternal heart, in Naomi I abandon myself in the hands of the Eternal. In what sweet tears, in what transports will I follow her towards the mountains of Israel.

This text paints a joyous Ruth who seems to equate joining Naomi with joining God. The text also expresses intense feeling between the two women.

Ruth begins in the same key as Naomi has just sung, possibly a musical indication of their being “in tune” with each other.

The “Greek chorus” sings:
They leave. Moab weeps for them: you, Bethlehem, will be for them a sweet and holy dwelling place; alas, alas.

The next chorus is identified as the Bethlehemites. They recognize Naomi and welcome her (p. 48, no. 8):
Our hearts hear your hearts. Come, we are your brothers and sisters, you are not strangers.

Completely absent here is the sense of surprise or excitement expressed in 1.19.

Naomi sings the heartbreaking short aria “Ah désormais”: 

135
Ah! Désormais, quand le deuil me consume, de ce doux nom, nul ne m’appellera:
Appelez-moi du nom de l’amertume; Ne dites plus Noémi, mais Mara.
Ici jadis, je vivais dans la joie, et je reviens sans fils et sans époux:
seule avec Ruth, le Seigneur me renvoie; Veuve comme elle, ayez pitié de nous.

Ah! when henceforth grief consumes me, no one will call me by this sweet name. Call me by the name of bitterness; say no more Naomi, but Mara.
Here, in other times, I lived joyfully. Now I return without son or husband;
alone with Ruth, God sends me back, a widow like her. Have pity on us.

In contrast to the biblical Naomi, who opens with the words “Do not call me Naomi” (1.20), here the first mention is of the grief she expects to be experiencing from this time forward. Her references to living joyfully in prior times, coming back with Ruth, also a widow, and asking for pity, are all new elements. Their addition indicates a strong emotional bond between the women and also again depicts a more open and human Naomi. Completely absent from these verses is any mention of God’s role in Naomi’s misfortune, whereas in 1.20-21 Naomi refers to God four times as causing her misfortune.

Naomi sings this aria as a response to the chorus. They end in F major and Naomi immediately enters in f minor. She is accompanied by an English horn, playing with her as if in a duet, but lending a more mournful sound than a voice would. The dotted rhythm at this slow tempo, coupled with the minor key, gives a weary and dragging feeling to the emotional expression. This rhythm as been used to tone-paint in funeral music (Cooke 1959, 100).

The sudden change from major to minor that opens this aria is a startling shift to a darker mood. Phrases sung to a slow dotted rhythm alternate with triplet figures, adding to the sense of weariness and halting, irregular steps. Along with effective use of rhythmic contrasts, the beauty of this melody creates a Naomi of great poignancy.

The chorus responds to her aria (p. 55, 2nd staff):
Ah Naomi, let the good Lord answer you, he tests all the saints, he is master of the world and life is in his hands.

As earlier, the chorus again not only comments on the action, but also comforts Naomi. The focus on God's role is transferred to the mouths of the chorus from that of Naomi in the Scrolls but with a more positive slant. The reference to "all the saints" implies that they put Naomi in this category, a very interesting elevation of her status.

The chorus opens singing Naomi's final F in unison, reverting immediately back to F major from F minor, another sudden, dramatic mood shift. There is a hammering bass accompaniment of persistent triplets in the orchestra, a rhythmic ostinato (repetitive pattern). The chorus sings unison, until Naomi sings her last poignant and bitter words in this scene:

Without husband or hope, weeping for all those who are no longer, I go to the country of my birth, to be closed up as in a grave. Regrets are superfluous.

She is once interrupted by Ruth and Orpah, who sing a single measure together. "Douleur amère" (Bitter grief) (p. 58, 1st staff, m.4).

This is the only libretto I am discussing in which Orpah accompanies Ruth and Naomi all the way to Bethlehem. It makes no dramatic sense, since Orpah would then have to walk all the way back on her own. But it makes Orpah as devoted a daughter-in-law as Ruth.

Before Orpah sings "Adieu donc, ô mère chère" (Farewell then, dear mother; p. 58, 4th staff), the "return" leitmotif of the earlier trio is heard. The scene ends with Orpah's goodbye, sung in the tonic, B-flat major. Orpah's vocal line descends, accompanied only by clarinet, and diminishes from p down to pp, musically a "vanishing" effect. Though her last note is B-flat (the tonic), the accompanying chord is in the first inversion, making it musically a provisional ending.

The fact that she has the "last word" in this scene attributes much greater importance to Orpah than is found in most other works. It could also be an attempt to depict a bond between the three women so powerful that Orpah simply could not have let Ruth and Naomi take their journey without being by their side.

Chapter 2 Part 2
This scene opens with a chorus of reapers (p. 58, no. 9):

Everything the happy worker glean, it is God who gives it to him, only to God goes honor.

Although there is no interjection of specific Psalms texts as in other 19th century works discussed, the theme of gratitude to God for the harvest is present here as well. Most references to God in this libretto are made by the chorus. Though they take the part of "actors" more than in other 19th century oratorios, at the same time they continue to serve the more conventional function of praising God.

Chapter 3 Part 3
The scene opens with Boaz asking who it is sleeping at his feet (3.9) (3.1-8 are omitted). Ruth answers (p. 90, no. 12):

It is Ruth, your humble servant; Mahlon my husband is dead; let Boaz hear the cry of blood and of the grave; let him deign to spread his cloak.

To replace the original conclusion of 3.9, "for you are a redeeming kinsman," explaining
why she is asking Boaz to spread his cloak, here Ruth reminds Boaz of her husband's death and uses a phrase, "spear the cry of blood," with biblical resonance: most notably Gen. 4.10.

Before Boaz responds, the rhythm changes to repeated 8\textsuperscript{th} notes (p. 92, 5\textsuperscript{th} staff, m.1), a steady beat which could suggest "confirmation."

May God protect hope! My proud wishes have restrained the gratitude of this old man. An impious, jealous language would accuse you, yes! Ruth, you are my wife if Boaz can marry you.

The words "wife" and "marry" replace the biblical term "redeemer" (p.15). The addition of the terms "picci" (piace) and "vicillard" (old man) depict aspects of Boaz only hinted at in the Scroll.

The steady beat continues under the first part of Boaz's aria. The aria begins in the same key as Ruth's previous aria, D major. The second section, beginning with "Ruth" (p. 94, top) repeats Ruth's earlier melody (a D major pastorale) in B major.

The rhythmic steadiness of Boaz's aria lends it a solemn and serious tone. Though Ruth and Boaz do not actually sing together in this scene, the fact that Boaz opens in the key of Ruth's previous aria, and at the end Boaz is singing Ruth's song, are musical signals that they are "in tune" with each other.

The rest of the text is:

There is a closer relative. If he says no, I say yes. Waiting for day to break, sleep, saint, my daughter. And when you have slept, go tell Naomi everything.

Interesting additions here are the term "saint" Boaz uses for Ruth, an indication of Boaz's idealization of her; and his instruction to her to tell Naomi everything, recognizing the closeness of that relationship. This replaces the biblical version in which Boaz gives Ruth barley to take home to Naomi.

The next scene takes place in the thatched cottage (chaumière) of the widows. Ruth tells Naomi "Il dit oui, si Phal dit non" (Boaz says yes if Phal says no; p. 97, top).

Naomi responds in an aria:

Honor to God who loves us, he inspired my advice; honor and grace to God if Boaz followed it. Ruth is the star that shines on the decline of my days, you will always be my daughter, and I your mother, always. The farewell at the final hour is not a complete farewell; in the holy light Ruth will rejoin Naomi.

There is no equivalent to this response in the Scroll, where Naomi simply reassures Ruth that Boaz will settle the matter (3.18). These verses show a more God-centered Naomi than has been seen previously, and depict once again the enormous love and strong bond between the two women. There is a repetition of the reference to the "final hour" first heard in an earlier scene. This could be an oblique reference to Naomi's advanced age.

Chapter 4 The scene opens (no. 14) with the announcement that Phal has ceded his rights to Boaz, the "saintly old man." Ruth gives herself like Rachel and Leah to the faith of Israel (4.11). In the "Prophetic conclusion." Boaz sings:
In my heart, what intoxicating joy; earth is nothing in my eyes, the divine breath presses on me and I read in the book of heavens that the passing of time is linked to eternity. I contemplate saintly descendants from the foreigner; I see, o marvelous wonder, I see in the fire of her rays the desire of nations coming out of this same stem.

Though no personal names are mentioned—Obed, David the assumption in this "biblicized" text is that the listener will recognize the allusions, i.e. that "saints descendants from the foreigner" probably is meant to refer to Jesus descending from Ruth.

Continuing with similar vague allusions, the chorus concludes:

Give to your people, to your church, great God, give a divine torch and let its clarity lead to the dawn of eternal day.

The use of the word "church" here implies a Christian slant, yet the words are otherwise vague and universal.

Summary

This work is in a different category from those previously discussed, because its original libretto does not include biblical quotes and only in a few spots does it even attempt a biblical "sound."

There is a striking contrast between the text of the final words, both of Boaz and the closing chorus, and the scenes between Naomi and Ruth, and Orpah. The bond between the women, with the "Greek" chorus even commenting on that bond, is painted with a much more realistic brush than the later scenes. I would suggest that both Franck and his librettist were more moved by the women's story than by the biblical narrative as a whole. The "prophetic conclusion" feels like a nod to the public's expectations of a biblically-inspired oratorio.

This libretto places the opening scene in Moab, as does Cowen's. Orpah's role is enlarged; she even accompanies Ruth and Naomi all the way to Bethlehem. This is in keeping with a consistent depiction, through words and music, of a deep emotional bond between the women. They react and respond to one another; their motives are spelled out as emotion-driven; and they comment far less on God and God's role than on one another. Naomi is painted as a less bitter and more caring person than in the Scroll. References to God, including Naomi's, are all positive. God is not blamed for her misfortunes. Boaz's age is clearly suggested as advanced through the use of certain terms. His language is more formal and stilted than the women's, which makes his character stiffer. The Greek chorus functioning as narrator underlines the emotional moments in the story.

Musically, sudden dramatic key shifts appear at important moments. Characters are differentiated by key and rhythm. In several places, a melody is repeated to a new, more agitated rhythm, suggestive of increasing excitement. This power of music to express inner feelings is utilized more by Franck than earlier composers of Ruth settings.

Giando Fino, Naomi e Ruth, Poema Biblico in Tre Parti (Biblical Poem in Three Parts) (in Italian)

Versi (libretto) di Saverio Fino. G. Ricordi & C., 1908

Ruth—soprano; Naomi—mezzo; Boaz—baritone (no Orpah)

"Veiled woman"—mezzo; Chorus (men, women, and mixed)
Giocondo Fino (b. 1867, d. 1950) studied oriental languages and theology before turning to music. In addition to *Ruth*, Fino also wrote an interesting version of the story of Deborah a year earlier (1907). He wrote several operas for the theatre and some liturgical works (*Enciclopedia della Musica*, vol. 2, 1981).

Though written in 1908, stylistically this work is late Romantic, therefore it is being classified as a 19th century work. This is notably the only *Ruth* adaptation called a "Poema Biblico," a "biblical poem," giving the author license to create a sort of midrash in verse. Saverio Fino, who wrote the libretto used in the opera, was born in 1888 and may have been related to Giocondo. Much of my analysis of the Fino work centers on the libretto, including its extensive descriptive sections, some of which are reproduced here (more examples are in Appendix 1, pp. 261-3). Those parts of the libretto analyzed separately from the music will be noted by the libretto page number. Most of the commentary on the action is from the libretto, so these passages are in quote marks.

**Chapter 1** Parte Primia (First Part)

I have translated and reproduced the extensive notes found throughout the libretto and score.

In this version, the opening scene between Naomi and Ruth (there is no Orpah) takes place at the outskirts of Bethlehem, with the reapers singing in the background: this foreshadows the action of Chapter 2. In other words, 1.1-7 are deleted and therefore the audience does not know the past history of Ruth and Naomi or what brought them to Bethlehem.

"It is early dawn, the reapers are reaping the barley which waves in the fields around Bethlehem; they are singing one of their songs":

The stars are already scattered, there are rosy veils in the east; in the freshness of the tender skies let's reap the crops... (p. 5)

Naomi has the largest role in this work (titled *Naomi e Ruth*). She is the first to sing, as she appears on a hill, leaning on Ruth "the compassionate one."

"Naomi sees the houses of Bethlehem turning white and points them out to Ruth; then she pulls Ruth towards herself affectionately and kisses her hair."

Naomi sings (p. 14, reh. #13):

O nuora, io tramonto e sei tu gioia d'aurora. Io resto, o mia serenatrice guida, stanca, tu no.
Ritrova tu la fida chiesa ove i solchi Moab ara opimi, la ti ridisse amor nei baci primi un di mio figlio, e forse ancor l'amore rinverdrà per te; però che'l fiore, se precocè leggi, gemma e rifiore.

O daughter-in-law, I am the sunset and you, the joy of dawn. I will remain, o my serene guide; I am weary, you are not.
Find the boundary of rich fertile tracks in Moab where love came to you one day in the first kisses of my son, and maybe you will still find love again, the flower, if it was attached early, re-flowers and germinates again.

140
As in the Scroll, Naomi pleads with Ruth to go back to Moab, except she has let Ruth be her "guide" all the way to the outskirts of Bethlehem. Her concern that Ruth find another husband is only expressed in chap. 3 of the Scroll. This text also contrasts with Naomi's words at this point in the Scroll (1:11-13), where she sarcastically refers to her own inability to bear another son to be a husband to Ruth. The references to Ruth's love for her deceased husband are completely absent in the Scroll.

Naomi's aria starts in the unusual key of e-flat minor and in 4/4 time, but continuous modulations and some dissonance create little sense of a home key. On the word "aurora" (dawn: p. 14, 3rd staff, m.1), Naomi and the treble parts of the orchestra have an A flat against a low A natural in the bass part of the accompaniment. This dissonance is heightened by the syncopated orchestral accompaniment that begins in the next measure. The dissonance seems resolved with a G flat, but the new chord that arises is also dissonant. The word "stanc" (tired) is sung twice, both times on descending fifths, on lower pitches the second time (p. 14, 5th staff). On the words "tu no" (you are not), the last word is sung over a D major chord (p. 15, measure before reh. #14).

The setting of Naomi's opening words in e flat is significant, as there are many flats throughout the opera for Naomi, representing her sadness. The dissonances and syncopated rhythms throughout this section create an unsettled quality, musically representing Naomi's state of mind. Typical word-painting with music is the falling pitch on the repeated word "tired."

After the next section, "Ritrova tu..." (Find the boundary... p. 15, reh. #14), Naomi continues:

You will have both husband and children, for you are pious; but I have no more children to tell you they are mine, daughter-in-law...

These words express the same sentiment as 1:11, except there Naomi seems more bitter.

Ruth responds (p. 18):

My heart is a widow of your son, and if you lament him, I will cry with you in your grief.

In the Scroll, the women never refer to themselves as widows. In fact, even the narrator does not identify them with the usual term אשת בני. In this libretto the term is not used directly to identify the women, but Ruth calling her heart a "widow" of Naomi's son lends them both pathos. The term was also found in Franck (p. 131).

After more dialogue, Ruth, "with a cry of affection," sings:

I will follow the path marked by you, your people will be my people, and I will pray to your god on my knees and I will share your grave (p. 6).

Based on 1:16-17, this version makes some interesting alterations. First of all, this is not a plea to Naomi, but a statement of intent. Changing "your god will be my god" to a promise to pray to Naomi's god on her knees indicates the librettist's lack of understanding of Jewish prayer customs.

After Ruth's words, the women embrace. "The sun has risen. The reapers leave the fields and go down to the well, passing near the two women. Some stop to look at them; some, suspiciously, recognize Naomi. The Bethlehemites feel the goodness of heavenly joy, but th
women remember with jealousy the name of Naomi, which means lovely, and they have the curiosity and stings of bees (p. 6)."

The description of jealousy among the Bethlehemite women is an interesting innovation, creating greater interest in Naomi and the potential for dramatic conflict.

The Bethlehemites (males) and reapers (females) now all call out to Naomi: Naomi, back among us again? You've returned to Bethlehem?

Naomi responds:

Figure 17: Fino, "Ah! Non dite omai Noemi!" (“Ah! No longer say Naomi”), p. 28, reh. #31

Ah! Non dite omai Noemi! Bellezza è fiore, e mi s’è disfiorita! E sol’amarà radica ho più vita. Ecco, e son Mara, son Mara.
Con due figli partii, tutto, tutto mio bene, a due morti ora il cor singulta e geme.
Chi dice: fu Noemi? Chi dice: fu la Bella?

Ah! No longer say Naomi. Beauty is a flower, and I have been deflowered (dishonored) and have life only as a bitter root, and behold, I am bitter [repeated four times].
I left with two sons, they were all that was good in my life; now over two dead sons my heart sob and moans.
Who says: “This was Naomi”? Who says: “This was the beautiful one”?
Behold, I am ‘Mara’ (bitter)” [repeated four times].

The most striking omission from this text is the name of God and God’s role in Naomi’s misfortune (1.20-21, with its four mentions of God who caused her grief). Here she mentions her two sons, where in the Scroll she only refers obliquely to leaving full and returning empty. There is great emphasis in this version on Naomi’s bitterness.

The aria is marked larghetto and con grande sentimento di dolore (with great feeling of sadness). Its broad sweep and shifting rhythm have Verdian echoes. The melody starts on e’ and drops, initially a half-step and then a fifth, musically a sign of increasing sadness and resignation. The two-bar phrases consist of four quarter beats, and two beats of triplets followed by two
quarters. The word “Noemi” is sung to an ascending diminished fifth, f to c, where the listener would expect c#. When Naomi sings her first “Ecco” phrase (m.5), the orchestra doubles her notes, with no chords. Then the orchestra returns to its earlier interlude in a still higher register (3rd staff), returning to the home key of c minor (m.3). The high register of this section accentuates the lower register of the vocal line that follows. Naomi repeats the phrase “Ecco, son Mara” several times a capella, starting on g’ and moving down, ending on d’#, though the key remains c# minor.

The diminished fifth interval on “Noemi” vividly depicts Naomi’s bitterness. The unaccompanied voice and lower pitches at the end of this section create a feeling of desolation and solitude. The lack of tonal resolution at the end echoes Naomi’s bitter and hopeless emotional state.

The next part of the aria, “Con due figli partii” (I left with two sons; p. 30, reh. #27), is agitato, with a six-measure orchestral introduction setting the mood. The music consists of two-measure groups of rising and falling chords; most of the descending figures are chromatic. This is derived from the ‘sigh’ figure. The agitated orchestral figures continue under Naomi’s sustained line. Flutes play a sustained c’’#-e’’’#-c’’# octave throughout the first part, later playing different sustained notes as the key modulates. At the same time, a repeated C#-c# octave in the accompaniment is harmonically a drone and a rhythmic ostinato. On the words “singultae e gema” (sobs and moans), the voice drops an octave, singing the words on c’#.

The use of chromaticism and descending figures set a mood of despair, accentuated and dramatized by the drone and ostinato. The closing words almost imitate the sound of a sob.

The next part, “Chi dice” (Who says; p. 31, m.3 after reh. #28), is more like a recitative. After this, to the same broad, Verdi an tune as the opening of the aria, Naomi sings:

Ancelle [sic]: io sono ancella e piu son Mara.

Handmaiden[s]: I am a handmaid, and also I am Mara.

The reprise is shorter than the original, and the coda (p. 32, 5th staff, m.2) takes Naomi unexpectedly up to f’#, a minor 3rd higher than the expected diminished fifth interval sung in this spot earlier. This note, sung on “Mara,” is the highest in the aria; in the conclusion, the voice drops to c’, which leads to a shift to e minor.

After the harmonically startling and high-pitched “Mara,” the ending on this same word, with its minor tonality and low pitch, is a musical portrait of resignation and exhaustion.

The mixed chorus responds (p. 33, reh. #30):

Ah! Ch’essa reca come in un mortorio, alla terra dei suoi chiuse memorie.

E fiele e sangue gli occhi arsi le piangono, e nell’assenso ha beverata l’anima.

Ah, she returns as in a funeral, to the land of her closed memories, her burning eyes weep gall and blood, and her soul has drunk wormwood.

In the Scroll, the people do not respond to Naomi at all. Here they are very sympathetic to Naomi’s plight and empathize with her bitterness.

These words are sung a capella in a complex 4-part contrapuntal piece.
The voices singing unaccompanied could have a chant-like and mournful sound. The contrapuntal vocal writing would effectively transmit confusion and the multitude of reactions among the group.

"The people move away commiserating. Naomi remains still, facing her people, mute, pallid, like a statue."

Ruth sings (p.7):
Mother, you watch their pity, mutely, no longer looking at me; my own cry is almost a lost echo of their scream; you are a swallow looking for the nest, lost crossing the sea, and I cannot find your home.

Naomi responds:
O Ruth, it is the echo of every voice, crushed, as a wave is smashed on a rocky bank and the swallow conceals its wound, and no longer has its house, reduced to a skeleton without a stalk.

Naomi compares herself to a swallow without its nest or materials to build a nest, emphasizing her plight and highlighting her homelessness. This element is never the focus in the Scroll and its inclusion here adds pathos to Naomi's situation.

Ruth: Naomi, I see the eye of your son which returns to my heart with your look.
Naomi: He brings love back to your pity.
The theme of Ruth's love for Naomi's son as an element of her bond to Naomi was also found in the opening scene.

"The two women sit looking into each others' eyes and smiling. Ruth makes a sign towards the fields and Naomi assents with a nod; Ruth walks away and is lost in the fields from which the song of the reapers arises."

Chapter 2 Parte Seconda (Second Part; p. 9)

"In the hot afternoon, Boaz is speaking to the reapers near the well at an oasis. From the immense countryside the solitary voice of Ruth the gleaner rises."

Boaz sings:
Eagerness is muted. In the field only one is still cheerful: the gleaner...
The reapers respond:
Priest puts her songs in her heart, and she glean, hand and eye vigilant like the kid that gnaws the after-grass, like a hen pecking seeds.
Ruth's name is never mentioned in this exchange. Boaz is simply curious about Ruth's cheerfulness, and the reapers note that she is pious and glean like an animal, which could be a reference to her hunger or a subtle put-down, suggesting Ruth acts like an animal.

"The water bearers leave with the men in the field; Boaz remains alone near the field and has a start. Near him the voice of a veiled woman rises, which sounds strange and arcane to the old farmer" (p.10).
There is now an extended scene between Boaz and a "veiled woman" (more text in Appendix I, pp. 261-3). The words are mystical and suggestive. When they both hear Ruth’s song, Boaz is overcome with emotion as he seems to remember another young girl in the fields (p. 13):

The girl, my spouse in love, to whom I called to God all night with my outreached soul...and the sky was alive with stars and without a breeze, and the girl, married in another place...God on his throne didn't hear me crying...

The veiled woman:
The young boy, unaware, he grew up in the dark silence, with other pleasures than the young Bethlehemite girl..

Boaz (by now aware that he is in front of a woman who reads his heart like a page in a book, turns to her anxiously):
What do you know? You, woman—and keep silent?

The woman responds (her voice trembling with emotion):
It was Naomi, your first dream, tireless cicada, who in the fields, a blond starling, picked stalks.

Boaz continues (p. 14):
The enchanting voice that excited me then, an enchantment I have looked for all my life, in vain. O, is Naomi still in the fields, a blond starling who is gleaning? Who are you, Woman?

The woman, falling to her knees before him, proclaims:
I was Naomi!

*This scene has a mystical and dream-like atmosphere.*

"Following this confession, there is a long silence in which the strong heartbeats can almost be heard. Naomi has revealed herself and keeps her eyes lowered. Boaz looks at her and almost extends his arms to her, but Ruth's song once again passes between them almost like a summons and a reproof. Naomi gets up and silently withdraws, while Boaz looks in the distance for the singer. Naomi sees that look, quickly grasps as the will of God the separation from Boaz for the creation of new paths, and trembles at this realization. They leave each other thus, with not another word, only with a look filled with intimate significance."

By suddenly calling the "veiled woman" Naomi, Fino makes the situation very clear. Whether it is the present Naomi, or a mystical vision of the young Naomi, remains ambiguous. The idea that Boaz's first love was Naomi but that she left Bethlehem to marry, is an intriguing midrashic re-telling. Naomi is now ceding her place to Ruth, although it would seem that in Fino's version, Boaz is closer to Naomi's age. There is little textual basis for this interesting re-telling, in the Scroll, Naomi and Boaz never even meet. Fino seems to have based his idea entirely on Naomi's first mention of Boaz as a redeeming kinsman (2.20).

Most of chapter 2 is replaced by this encounter scene. After the reapers sing another song, Ruth returns from her day of gleaning and sings about her day gleanings in Boaz's fields.
Chapter 3

There is no break here in the opera; the scene continues with Naomi’s instructions to Ruth:

I: per il bene e per la pace io volgo tuoi di, figliuola, e con le figlie al campo oggi hai
cantato del parente nostro, che tira l’orzo, se fa notte, all’ala.
Or: tu sii monda; e sii d’unguento fina nella schiava che hai più bella.
E: caut, l’uom non ti sappia, ma tu si il giaciglio nota, e rimovi all’assonato il pallio, e ti
ghiacci ai piedi suoi, ch’ei dica a te tua via...

I direct your days for both the good and for peace, my dear daughter, and with the girls in
the field today you have sung of our relative, who gathers grain at night, fall, at the
threshing floor.
Now wash, put on fine ointments and your meest cloak; don’t let the man know you, but
you note the pallet and remove the blanket off the sleepy one, lie at his feet and let him
tell you what to do.

These verses are slightly altered from 3.1.2. There is an added reference to Ruth singing:
she has been heard singing in the fields in several scenes.

These words are to be sung dolcissimo (very sweetly). The opening words are sung on
rising notes of a C major chord, from c’ to c”. As Naomi gives Ruth instructions, her melody
remains calm and sustained; but as she tells Ruth “e caut” (be cautious: p. 106, reh. #55), the
accompaniment suddenly switches from an espressivo tune that interlocked with Naomi’s
melody, to repeated 8th note chords played pianissimo in a high register. C major chords in the
orchestra conclude (p. 107, reh. #56).

The key and tempo here are both indicators of calm and simplicity, while the rising
pitches transmit emotion. When the accompaniment suddenly changes, there is a musical
suggestion of both caution and agitation. The fact that the orchestra is playing pianissimo
means the listener has to pay close attention—as does Ruth. The return to C major at the end
is a kind of resolution, leading the listener to feel that there is nothing to fear.

After more dialogue, the chorus of reapers closes the scene.

Parte Terza (Third Part: p. 16)

Naomi sings:

Only the eye of God keeps watch over hearts, and Ruth has already soothed all distress,
Peace!

“The Moabite women (believing Naomi is sad at Ruth’s abandonment, giving vent to
their jealousy of the beautiful Moabite), sing”:

Steeped in bitter regret, her tears dropped, and the gleaner shed tears, Naomi, listen; the
land of Moab has sad women, and old grudges.

This is the only appearance of the Moabite women. It is an intriguing idea: if
Bethlehemites could live in Moab, why not the reverse? And if there were Moabite women in
Bethlehem, it would be logical for them to feel ambivalent about Naomi and Ruth.
“Ruth, who is lying at Boaz’s feet in the vast plain, knows she is obeying mysterious laws, and waits for the sky to signal her new mission.” She says:

There is peace and turmoil in this silent waiting!

Boaz awakens with a start and sees the woman at his feet. He immediately imagines a diabolic temptation and is afraid of it (p. 17):

Oh terror, a woman lying at my feet; or is it a demon wrapping my heart in its spell? Who are you?

“Ruth immediately gets up, and is on her knees before the old relative. Her voice is humble and supplicant:"

Servant to my lord. I gathered stalks in the field, but not for myself, and Naomi wants her progenitor. I pray you wrap me in your cloak, accept me, if the relationship is legal in your eyes...

These verses are based loosely on 3.9, but in the Scroll there is no reference to Naomi. Here Ruth is clearly motivated only by Naomi’s needs.

“Boaz is moved by the woman, so simple in her words, so good and humbly honest. He puts a hand on her head and speaks to her, looking at the sky:"

O daughter, your piety is blessed in heaven, for youthful ardor did not burn in your heart; and the honest ward of your relative, heavy with years, you have elevated with prayer.

Boaz does not invoke God’s name to bless Ruth here, otherwise the verses are similar to 3.10. But what is barely suggested in the Scroll about the relative age difference between the two is overt here. Qualities like “good” and “honest” are attributed to Ruth here.

Ruth continues:

Naomi said to me: “He will tell you your way, and holy Bethlehem will not have a scandal.”

Naomi did indeed tell Ruth that Boaz would tell her what to do (3.4), though she said nothing about Bethlehem or a scandal; but in the scene between Ruth and Boaz in the Scroll, Naomi’s name is never mentioned.

Ruth mentioning scandal may be intended as a ploy to pressure Boaz to do what he needs to do. It could also be a message from Naomi to Boaz (via Ruth) suggesting a subtle form of blackmail, telling him to keep their past relationship quiet.

“...In the mystery of the hour, an almost supernatural spell can be felt surrounding these two, Boaz pulls Ruth towards him with paternal gentleness and consoles her.”

There are several references to Boaz’s age: he is called the “old relative,” “heavy with years,” and he has “paternal gentleness.” Nonetheless, a lengthy love duet follows, so Boaz may be depicted as old, but certainly not as decrepit.
The love duet between Boaz and Ruth is lengthy; I have chosen several passages from the middle part, where the musical themes are most fully developed. The lyrics throughout are highly poetic and filled with imagery and metaphors.

Boaz sings:

Figure 18: Fino, “Donna, fu pura l’anima tua” (“Woman, your soul was pure”), p. 144, reh. #28

Donna, fu pura l’anima tua, pura siccome giglio all’alba, che al ciel tenebramente apre candore, ed aprasi così puro tuo core.

Woman, your soul was pure as a lily at dawn which opens candidly and tenderly to the sky and thus does your heart, equally pure, open up.

Though no part of this libretto is biblical, references to Song of Songs can be detected in some of the vocabulary: for instance, “lily” appears twice in that text (Song of Songs 2.1, 2). Other librettists take or adapt verses from Song of Songs for this love duet, probably feeling that this raises the expressions of love to a higher level (i.e., Schumann, p. 162; Rumshinsky, p. 175).

This section opens on $f^\prime$, relatively high for a baritone. It ends calmly, one octave lower.

The high opening note, coupled with the poetic language, immediately portray Boaz as a more lyrical and passionate figure than a bass Boaz would be, in spite of his age indicators in the libretto.

Ruth continues “with ingenuous abandon”:

Oh! Il core è nube che striscia, che fuma fasciata al monte; ma è, se poggia al cielo, velo d’argento per il firmamento.

Oh, the heart is like a cloud (haze) that trails along, that evaporates over the mountain, and seems like a silver veil for the firmament.

This section (p. 144, reh. #29), marked molto espressivo, begins with an octave leap from $f^\prime$ to $f^\prime\prime$; on the $f^\prime\prime$ the key shifts to D-flat major, a relatively complex key, considered by Cooke the “luxurious key” (Cooke 1959, 175). The rhythm changes to 4/4, a broader time, with the
accompaniment under Ruth’s flowing melody *arpeggios* in the bass, while the higher parts of the orchestra double Ruth’s voice. The tune is full of leaps: g’ flat up to f”, and an octave leap from a’ flat to a” flat (p. 145, m. 5 from reh. #29). The end of this section is in e flat minor, the final repetition of the word “argento” (silver) on e’ flat. The final E flat becomes a D#, leading to an enharmonic shift to B major with the bass part in the first inversion. In this key, the orchestra plays a variation of Ruth’s melodic tune, “molto dolce” (very sweetly). The bass note finally moves from the first inversion to the tonic.

The numerous vocal leaps coupled with the harmonic shifts are all musical indicators of great excitement. The choice of the luxurious D-flat major (Cooke 1959, 175) adds passion to the music. There is a momentary unsettled feeling with the first inversion, but when it moves to the tonic there is a sense of finality (Cooke 1959, 89).

Later in the duet, Ruth sings:

Long ago I came out from the darkness and the mystery and with a smile I slowly came into your thought, and with an arcane smile I revealed myself serenely to you. Now God hears us...

On the words “Or Dio ci sente” (Now God hears us...p. 48, top) in C major, the phrase is marked *radicandando molto* (much slower). Over an accompaniment of steadily ascending 16th note *arpeggios*, Ruth sings a startling leap of a ninth from g’ to a” . The orchestra echoes the vocal leap in the “luxurious” key, D-flat major; as it descends, Boaz enters, continuing the descending cadence (p. 148, 1 measure after reh. #31).

The unexpected C major, large vocal leap, and return to D-flat major, all depict the height of excitement and even ecstasy.

Boaz sings:

And God turns us in unspoken yearning towards the dawn, towards love.

After Boaz sings, the orchestra plays an interlude (p. 149, 3rd measure), marked *espressivo molto*, a lyrical melody played over 16th note *arpeggios* that steadily increase in speed and volume. The melody is a series of descending broken chords of uniform chromatic structure, starting on ascending pitches.

Harmonically this interlude could be connected with the concept of a supernatural vision, in keeping with the libretto.

Ruth answers (p. 18):

Oh! I am no longer a flower of the first dawn, nor do I know how to make a garland that does not also have a thorn among its leaves, and the smile of every bud makes me cry, and the rose and the acanthus I have woven into a crown.

There are oblique references to Song of Songs again; the mention of “thorn” recalls the “lily among thorns” (2.2) which thus also recalls Boaz’s opening line in the duet.

“Boaz detects in Ruth the delicate memory of her widowhood as she continues”:

I hear with trembling the voice of love that touches lightly, but does not dare.

Boaz responds:

Timid one, listen, and repeat: Wife...
"A force, almost a spell, has now taken hold of and linked these two souls. They have met in the purity of dreams and ideals...in that smile of the universe they completely abandon themselves as in a marvelous vision (p. 19)."

The librettist makes it very clear that this is not a simple love story between two mortals, there is a pure and mystical aspect to their love.

Notably absent in this lengthy scene between Ruth and Boaz is any actual blending of the voices. One of them will occasionally imitate a melody or theme first introduced by the other. But there is no "coming together" vocally. (This is true of all duets in the opera).

"Ruth has abandoned herself with ingenuous enthusiasm to the effusion of love she feels flowering in her soul...while Boaz has fallen to his knees with his forehead to the ground in adoration. In the sky a star passes which wrings a cry from the woman. Boaz is called back to life with that cry. He asks Ruth if she heard a voice in the heavens." She answers:

In the heavens was an infinity of stars, and one shone on my hills, alive, then quickly fell on your fields.

But Boaz, still seeing the vision from before, says:

On the indolent cry a hymn arose. God sought and God prayed: let the dewy heavens rain [bring forth] a righteous man, o Lord...But it was beyond the heavens that God shone light, and God spoke the Word to the universe beyond the heavens, saying: "He will come."

God's name has been mostly absent from this libretto, but now that the final scene approaches, God is given a role. Near the start of this duet, it was clear that there was a mystical aspect to the feelings between Ruth and Boaz.

"Boaz searches the sky as if awaiting the Messiah promised and prophesied to the Israelites; he almost seems to understand that the Messiah will come out of his lineage, and he exults. Ruth, on the other hand, not being Israelite, feels only love."

The implication of this comment is that both as a female and a Moabite, Ruth's integration will never be complete. This closing scene depicts a Ruth that remains outside the world of Boaz and Naomi.

Ruth continues:

The Moabitess heard no word but yours alone, and fascinated, she sealed it in her heart, smiling again at the reflowering of love.

This is the only time Ruth refers to herself as Moabite, implying that she feels more like an outsider than she has before. She also is depicted as accepting her inferior position.

"But perhaps Naomi the Israelite had the same vision as Boaz at that time, as she arises to sing the prophecy among the multitude of shepherds (p. 20)":

Exult, o Bethlehem! Raise your pure (innocent) brow to the centuries, o small tribe, for prophesied glory this wife's nuptial bed has mystical virtue. Exult, o Bethlehem! Now no longer the last Ephrathite from Judea, you are now among the cities from whose dwelling Emmanuel will come.

The use of the name "Emmanuel" is clearly a Messianic reference (Isa. 7,14; later Matt. 1,23), referring to the son who will come out of the house of David.
“The chorus of shepherds has repeated the prophecy with joy... the reapers have returned to work repeating their song which very softly weaves into the song of prophecy.”

Dawn touches the heavens with soft fingers, the skies are pink and the moon hides itself in its veils like a bride...

The final reference to a bride is obviously to Ruth, who will be responsible for the birth of the prophesied Messiah.

Summary

As a completely original libretto, this falls into the same category as Franck’s work, except that as an opera it could be virtually secular. The reference to “Emanuel” at the end may have been a nod to public expectations, as in Franck. Other than this ending, there are few references to God; most occur in the lengthy love duet. The librettist and composer presumably knew what would make the story of Ruth interesting and appealing for the audience of their place and time.

The libretto reads almost like a novel because of the extensive “stage directions,” which are often long narrative accounts. The most interesting element Fino added to the story is a sense of mystery, in the character of a “veiled woman” that seems to be Naomi as a younger woman. There is also a mystical element to the Ruth-Boaz relationship, which inspires “a sense of spiritual mystery and awe” (OED). There are several mentions of Naomi’s son in dialogues between her and Ruth, an addition to the story that suggests Ruth’s allegiance to Naomi is based on their in-law relationship rather than mere affection (see Fuchs comments, ch. 2, p. 27).

The chorus’s role is a dramatic element in this work, because they engage with the characters and express feelings. Boaz is referred to as an old man, though this does not affect the degree of passion expressed in the love duet with Ruth. Along with passion in this duet, there are many references to God, placing their love in another realm. This may have been Fino’s understanding of the biblical story.

The most frequent musical device found in this opera is that of the curving and arching melody. Voices swoop up and down in a kind of musical arc at every emotional point in the libretto—which happens in almost every scene. Naomi’s music has many flats, indicating sadness; this device was previously seen in Gaul’s work (p. 124).

Other devices seen elsewhere but used in a more extreme way in this work, include vocal leaps and constantly unsettled harmony and rhythm. The love duet is the musical highlight of the work, containing some of its most beautiful melodies. These are developed and sustained longer than more fragmentary melodies in the score, which are part of Fino’s style in general. The change seen here from fragmentation to sustained melodies might have been a matter of focus for the composer, and a compositional device utilized to convey a different mood. Both the text and music of the conclusion convey a sense of calm and resolution.

151
Part II. 20th Century

Georg Schumann, *Ruth* (oratorio) op. 20 (in German, with English translation)
F.E.C. Leuckart, Leipzig, 1909 (orchestral score); G. Schirmer, 1910 (piano score)
Ruth--soprano; Naomi--mezzo; Boaz—bass (no Orpah)

Georg Schumann (b. 1866, d.1952) was a prodigy on both violin and organ, and studied piano as a teenager at the Leipzig Conservatory. He was appointed director of the Berlin Singakademie with the title of Royal Professor in 1900, and remained in that post for fifty years (Joseph Clark in New Grove, vol. 22, 759). He conducted the final 20th-century performance of his *Ruth* in 1946, just six years before his death. The work was revived and performed at the Berlin Philharmonic on 4 November 2003. Because I attended that performance, and also had brief access to the orchestral score, I will be commenting more extensively on the orchestration than I have been able to for previous works. Schumann’s harmonic style falls on the border between the late Romantic and early 20th-century.

Schumann’s libretto is a mix of extended biblical passages—notably Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs—with “biblicized” passages blended in. There are two different translations. The one in the orchestral score includes the original German and an (unattributed) English translation. The piano/vocal score has English only, an “adaptation” by Henry G. Chapman.

Schumann uses leitmotifs throughout. Most notable is the “Whither thou Goest” motif, which opens the entire work in the clarinets (Fig. 23), and is then repeated in the strings. I am calling this Ruth’s leitmotif I, while I call the theme heard in Ruth’s aria to the text “Let me now follow after thee,” Ruth’s leitmotif II (p. 18, m.3 after reh. #31). Naomi’s opening phrase, Naomi’s leitmotif (Fig. 24, m.2), is also found throughout the work. These themes link all the sections and characters of the oratorio.

Figure 19: Schumann, first page of orchestral score: Ruth’s leitmotif I

This is the only example from the orchestral score I am providing. It highlights the solo clarinet opening.
Chapter 1  1. “Naomi’s Lament”

The work opens with Naomi expressing her grief and singing nostalgically of her past life (none of this text is from the Scroll). “Naomi’s Lament” (Fig. 24) is a very lengthy aria, showing Naomi’s prime importance at the beginning of this work:

O my God! Why hidest thou thy face from thine handmaid, O Lord? Wherefore smite thy servant, Lord, and take from her the joys of the living? Wherefore didst thou take my husband, and take the children whom thou hadst giv’n me, making us orphans, me and this one here?

Lord, behold and see now, if any sorrow be like my sorrow that hath o’ertaken me. Lord, conduct thou the matter of my spirit, and deliver my soul!

Lord, have compassion. Fear fills my heart. And my soul is sick within me for weeping. All my strength faileth me and is gone, and as one who dieth am I forgotten, like a pitcher that is broken at the well.

The opening line of this section is a paraphrase of Job 13.24; the middle section “if any sorrow be like my sorrow” paraphrases Lam 1.12; and the closing line is a paraphrase of Eecl. 12.6. These are based on some of the darkest and most pessimistic of all biblical texts. The rest of the text is written to sound “biblical”, to root Naomi’s expressions of grief in the biblical world. Though none of it is text from the Scroll, it elaborates the similar trajectory of emotions from fullness to sorrow found there.

The orchestra has a substantial introduction, to be played allegro agitato. Instruments heard in this introduction include trombones, bass trombones, tuba, harp, and kettledrum. The key is initially c# minor, but the chromaticism and constant modulations prevent the music from settling into one key.
After two pizzicato notes in the strings (audio tape), the first beat of the orchestral introduction to “Naomi’s Lament” is a rest, immediately establishing a syncopated rhythm. In addition to the syncopation, the repeated opening chords change from quarter-notes, to 8ths and triple-8ths. This rhythm is further complicated by the ties between notes. Under this unsteady beat, the opening figure, Naomi’s leitmotif, is played in the orchestra by English horn and clarinet (m.2. Fig. 20).

Naomi sings “O my God!” on three rising tones, A, B flat, C#: an ascending half step, followed by an augmented whole step. This is Naomi’s leitmotif. The repetition of this theme starts an augmented whole step higher, taking the voice to e’+, while the orchestra plays a forte c# minor chord (a rare moment of a simple triad). The same unsettled and markedly chromatic music marks the next section. “Why hidest thou thy face” (paraphrase of Job 13.24) (p. 5. m.5 after reh. #6).

After this section, a new theme enters, involving a descending major sixth followed by an augmented ascending fifth (like a leading tone) followed by a rise of a half step. To this motif, Naomi sings “Lord, have compassion. Fear fills my heart” (p. 7. m.7 after reh. #11). The word “heart” is sung to an a-minor chord in the unstable 6th position, accompanied by one beat by a tambourine. Then the orchestra begins a slow, pianissimo tremolo accompaniment, the strings playing “am steg” on the bridge; this creates higher overtones and de-emphasizes the fundamental tone. Over this Naomi sings: “And my soul is sick within me for weeping.” On the last beat of every phrase, horns echo the three-note leitmotif. The horns continue playing the melody with the voice here, while the strings play pizzicato. The last phrase descends chromatically (p. 8. m.8 after reh. #13) within a fourth, a traditional lament motif, with rests breaking up the words “pitcher” and “broken.” The only accompaniment at this point is an ostinato note in the horns and kettle drum. The final note of the section is a flat, with the voice doubled by the basses, accentuating its depth.

The combination of chromaticism with unsteady rhythm in this opening section creates a mood of restless urgency. Naomi’s leitmotif is first heard in English horn and clarinet, whose plangent sounds set the mood. In the midst of a series of dissonances, the sudden strong c# minor chord on Naomi’s repetition of her opening phrase gives a momentary feeling of resolution but also great sadness. The next tonal rest is also on a strong chord, but there the presence of drums heightens the drama and seems to deny any resolution. The unexpected sound of a tambourine is a fascinating if subtle reference to Naomi’s “oriental” origins. The strings playing on the bridge creates an ominous sound, especially in a section so filled with chromatic intervals. Breaking up the words “pitcher” and “broken” with rests gives the impression that Naomi has no breath or strength left to continue. The word “well” is sung at the bottom of the alto register, an example of tonal word painting. At this point, Naomi has reached her lowest level, emotionally as well as vocally.

The next section (p. 9. top) in D-flat major (the “luxurious key,” see Pt. 1. p. 148), marked “con espressione,” is slower, more lyrical and tonal.

I did also love the place where was my dwelling; great things, as well, I wrought there, builded houses, planted vineyards, too; I made me gardens and likewise orchards, and planted all manner of fruitful trees therein; I got me men and maidens, and many servants; and whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them, nor did I withhold my heart from pleasure (Eccl. 2. 4-5. 2.7. 2.10).

These words ascribed to Naomi create a rounded figure, with nostalgia for a previous life; if the biblical portrait of Naomi is a sketch, this is a life size painting including a background. The choice to place the words of the (male) poet Ecclesiastes in her mouth is interesting. Schumann’s choice of text may have been based on its pessimistic sentiments.
There is an echo here of Prov. 31, in which the husband praises the virtuous wife who, among other accomplishments, acquires an estate and plants a vineyard herself (Prov. 31:16). But the significant difference is that in this libretto, the woman speaks for herself, in a first-person account.

It would have been unusual, not to say impossible, for an Israelite woman to have the kind of wealth and independence described here by the male poet. But Schumann wanted to create a portrait of a strong woman and was not concerned with historical accuracy.

This section is far more melodic and soaring than the previous one, but dissonances and unusual intervals are still present. Horns and clarinets double Naomi’s melody, later joined by flutes and oboes. The rhythm is steadier and there is less chromaticism.

The next section (p. 10, reh. #17) abandons the sense of tonic orientation and returns to the previous fast tempo:

But when I looked on all my works that my hands had accomplished, and the labour
all that I there had labour'd, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit in it.

And then I saw how that wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness
(Ecc. 2. 11.13). Old and weary I return to the country of my fathers. Hopeless now, without desire, full of misery I have turned to death with longing!

Thou alone art now my refuge! Come, come, and deliver me from the thores of my spirit! Lift thou up my spirit to the stars, that illuminate remembrance, come, come!

The opening words are sung in a very low range (between c' and g) to a theme composed of very small intervals: half and whole steps, diminished thirds and fifths, augmented seconds and thirds, as the melody gradually rises in pitch. Initially only the cellos double the voice, then tuba and bassoon join, followed by flutes and oboes. There are strong contrasts between the roots of the chords (p. 11, m.1-4): f# minor-e minor-G-flat major-a minor. The tempo accelerates to Allegro con moto at the section starting “And then I saw how that wisdom excelleth folly” (p. 11, m.6 after reh. #18). The rhythm returns to the syncopated, irregular and jagged one heard at the opening of this lament.

The music becomes highly dramatic (p. 13, reh. #19); the voice descends and ascends an octave (d'—d'), then descends an augmented octave and ascends again chromatically. The pattern is echoed in oboe and clarinet while strings play tremolo underneath the dramatic melody, while the wind section echoes earlier themes.

The extensive use of brass and woodwinds to double Naomi’s voice creates a more dramatic, piercing, and also more poignant sound than strings. When the rhythm at the end of this section calms, it musically depicts a calmer Naomi, as she remembers her happier days. The vocal leaps and chromatic ascents in the final section create a sense of emotional chaos and uncontrollable grief.

The final section, “Thou alone art my refuge” (p. 13, reh. #20), marked pesante (heavy), opens with only strings playing underneath the voice; then oboes and clarinets join in the melody. On “lift thou my spirit to the stars” (reh. #21), bells ascend chromatically as an echo to the voice. The volume and pitch crescendo right up to the end. The final word “Come” is sung on d' flat (p. 15, top), which shifts upwards enharmonically to e'#. On the climactic note, strings in a high range double the voice, and the e-sharp minor chord includes a dissonant G natural.

The bells add a “heavenly” sound on the verbal reference to stars, and the rising pitches could represent a physical ascent. The continued increase in volume and pitch
musically illustrate Naomi’s grief as it builds to a frenzied longing for death. Because of the dissonance in the closing chord, the feeling is not only of grief, but a lack of resolution.

2. Dialogue, Ruth and Naomi

After Naomi’s Lament, there is a dialogue between Ruth and Naomi. Ruth opens with:

It is a good thing to wait in patience for the help of the Lord, and to trust him.

Ruth’s leitmotif I is heard, accompanied by flute and oboe trills plus harp, instantly tone-painting brightness in Ruth’s character to contrast with the darkness of Naomi’s. Ruth, like Naomi, mentions God’s name in her opening phrase, though with a totally different intent. Ruth speaks of her trust in God, while Naomi had opened with a complaint against God.

Their dialogue leads to Ruth’s “Intreat [sic] me not”:

Intreat me not to leave thee; My heart is grateful to thee, but my soul is bereft of consolation. My heart crieth humbly to the Lord. Let me now follow after thee, take me with thee, nor drive me away from thee! (1.16)

The first two phrases are sung a capella and ad lib., meaning the singer is free to sing the phrase at her own tempo and freely. They are followed by Ruth’s leitmotif I in the orchestra (Fig. 21, m.3-4), which has a light, upbeat feeling because of the sense of a major key and the 16th-note leading tones. On Ruth’s last phrase, “Let me now follow after thee” (p. 18, m.3 after reh. #31), both the voice and orchestra have a more flowing and passionate melody including big leaps, Ruth leitmotif II, which is repeated in several keys.

The singer’s freedom to sing a phrase ad lib. can heighten its expressive power because of the sense of spontaneity involved. The vocal leaps to steadily higher pitches depict increasing excitement.

Naomi responds to Ruth’s words:

Unto whom shall I compare thee, to give thee consolation?

The fact that Naomi responds at all to Ruth’s words is an addition (also found in other works), since in the Scroll she remains silent.

Ruth answers:

Say no more unto me, that thou dost desire me to leave thee! (p. 18, reh. #32)

This is sung to the Ruth leitmotif II, first heard on “Let me now follow,” but in a different tonality. The musical phrase continues to rise, up to a’ on “to leave” (p. 19, top; Fig. 22).
which is sung \textit{forte} and \textit{molto ritardando}. The voice descends a seventh to $b'$. leading directly into “Whither thou goest” (1.16-17, KJV):

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure22}
\caption{Schumann. “Whither thou goest.” p. 19, m.2}
\end{figure}

The opening measures are marked \textit{espressivo e con fuoco} (fiery, passionate). The melody, Ruth leitmotif I, opened the oratorio and has been heard in short snatches in previous sections. Though the theme is still in a major key, the dotted rhythm becomes more irregular here and is coupled with a complex and dense accompaniment. The voice is doubled in flutes and oboes, and the harp plays at the end of each phrase.

After “buried,” there is a \textit{forte} E major chord (p. 20, reh. #34) and a new time indication of \textit{largamente maestoso} (broad, majestic). The frenzied orchestral accompaniment suddenly dies down, and only a few chords are played under Ruth’s lines. The word “thee” is on a sustained $a'$ sung $ff$ and held for four full beats (2 measures before reh. #35). On the note itself, the chord is F major; but the orchestra ascends chromatically over the note, creating dissonance with the sung $a'$, until the voice descends to $e''$ and back to the home key of E major for final resolution. At this point, the dynamic marking is still $ff$, but a few measures of conclusion in the orchestra gradually bring both the pitch and volume down, concluding on a soft E major chord in the full orchestra, including snare drum, with the violins playing an open E (audio tape).

\textbf{Ruth’s leitmotif I opened the oratorio and has been threaded into the music before this scene. When the theme is sung here for the first time, its lyricism is combined with passion because of the complexity of the accompaniment. The climactic high note appears on the word “thee,” underlining the intensity of this relationship. The conclusion of this section on a soft tonic chord conveys calm and joy, as well as a sense of anticipation and mystery from the slightly eerie sound of an open E in the strings.}

\textbf{Part 2}

They enter Bethlehem; the chorus (mixed) recognizes Naomi (“Is this Naomi?” 1.19) and wonders what brings her back from Moab. They ask why she forsook their land when it was in need, and why she returns now. On the word “this” (“dass” in the original), they hiss on the final “s,” creating an angry sound.

Naomi asks:

\begin{quote}
Have I done any wrong, or aught that is unrighteous? Have I evilly treated those who dwelt with me in concord?
\end{quote}

She then continues with “Call me not Naomi” (1.20-21, KJV; p. 26, reh. #9).

This short (nine-measure) \textit{arioso} is introduced by strings playing high \textit{pizzicato} chords followed by two 8\textsuperscript{th} notes (bowed), playing a diminished seventh interval. The
opening measures move from e minor to G major, while the bass accompaniment remains B (2\textsuperscript{nd}, then 1\textsuperscript{st} inversion of the key). On “Call me Mara,” the key shifts from G major to g minor (m.3-4); the words “the Almighty hath dealt” are sung on e flat minor and b minor. The aria ends inconclusively on a C\textsuperscript{7} chord.

The effect of this arioso is of an island of calm resignation in the midst of the stormy chorus that precedes and follows it. The numerous minor keys portray sadness, but this is also a depiction of a strong and self-possessed woman, through the simplicity of the melody and solidity of the chords under it. Her confidence seems to wane, heard in the unresolved conclusion.

The people continue to express anger and hostility:
Why dost thou spread abroad thy trouble? Reply! Has the grace of God been known to fail? Wherefore didst thou forsake thy brethren and wherefore now return?

Naomi responds:
God’s ways are marvelous and how unsearchable his judgments (Rom. 11.33).

They are not sympathetic, and tell her:
Call not upon him, God the almighty. In his justice he hath chastised thee with righteous wrath! He has chastised her, that she forsook the land of her fathers.

Laughing, they say: See how her conscience weighs her down.

Naomi responds:
Over my mishap do ye now rejoice together, do ye all wish to band yourselves against me? Ye smite me, I cannot tell why; Ye pursue me, I know not for what. There are echoes of Job in these phrases.

They respond: God hath turned against her, Let her suffer, spurn her, curse her!

Naomi now turns to God: Lord, I cry unto Thee, hear me, O hear me!

The chorus (in music marked Allegro con fuoco):

Let her suffer, pursue her, and drive her away, even as smoke is driven away, even as wax is melted before the fire (Ps. 68.7)... Let her suffer, and show thou forth thy power!

The idea of the Bethlehemites being resentful of someone who left during a famine and then returned when the famine ended, is not completely far-fetched, even though there is no hint of this in the Scroll. The meanness and cruelty of the people contrast with the almost godly patience and gentleness of both Naomi and Ruth, even though all are calling on God for their own purposes.

The chorus stops abruptly at Ruth’s entrance, signalled in the orchestra by a high violin tremolo (audio tape). Ruth asks them:

Wherefore have ye turned your hand against this woman? Think ye your speech is just and righteous? Do ye judge a person with justice and honour?

The chorus wonders aloud who this woman can be, when she continues, singing over their voices:
Make an end of your oppression! See how she suffers! Can ye find one among you to measure her distress? Which one will share with her her sorrow, or bear her grief with her?

They again wonder who sent this woman to them, as Ruth sings a patchwork of words and phrases from Psalms, primarily Ps. 37.1-2 and 23.1-4 (as seen in earlier oratorios: Goldschmidt, p. 112; Damrosch, p. 117; Cowen, p. 129) to harp accompaniment, increasing the aura of holiness surrounding her. Naomi's leitmotif is interwoven throughout the section. 

*Naomi expresses love and gratitude to Ruth which are never seen in the Scroll:*

O Ruth, thou beloved, thou hast steadfastly journeyed with me. The Lord will keep thy feet upon thy way!

The closing words between the women indicate that their strength lies in their bond.

**Chapter 2** 3. In the Harvest Field.

The chorus of reapers is introduced by a solo oboe, traditionally used for a "shepherd" sound. The music is full of orientalisms (Preface to ch. 6, p. 105) and its folk-tune style is totally different from the previous section (audio tape).

Ruth hears the singing and begs Naomi to let her go (2.2: 2.1 is left out). Naomi's response is:

Why wouldst thou seek the fields of strangers?

*This is a logical reaction considering their reception in the previous scene, unlike Naomi's response in the Scroll, where she immediately grants permission.*

But Ruth convinces her to let her go and glean. After a chorus of peasants, Boaz enters and asks about Ruth. Boaz's entrance is preceded by several harp arpeggios in C major, a very bright, almost regal entrance. When the reapers answer (2.6-7: in place of the servant), he asks them to bring her to him.

Boaz's entrance could be mistaken for a page from Wagner's *Siegfried*, and when Boaz sings his request, accompanied by heavy brass (as he frequently is in this work), there is more than a hint of Wotan (from Wagner's *Ring Cycle*) in his music.

The reapers wonder why he is asking about this woman.

Boaz asks Ruth what brought her here. An orchestral interval depicts Ruth's hesitation. She answers:

Want and care it was that brought me here, to escape from suffering I have gleaned behind thy maids today.

Naomi, now my mother, left the land of Judah. With Elimelech and her two sons she found a home in the country of Moab.

'1 was love that led me to her house, where with vow for vow we pledged our troth now and evermore!

Yet for us in a strange land with the years there came misfortune. From Judah's soil uprooted, soon Elimelech and both his sons passed away: one was my husband.

And we were left behind, their mother and 1. So have I returned with her unto this land, seeking grace before the gates where once her home was: praying, hoping for grace.

*Ruth refers to Naomi as "mother" in other librettos: Tino (pp.141, 144) and Ramshinsky (p.172) are examples. These verses essentially sum up 1.1-7, even though they appear here in chapter 2. In this sense, the focalizer is Ruth, not Naomi (ch.1, p.18). There*
are some notable changes: it sounds as if Ruth’s love for her husband led her to Naomi’s house, where the two women exchanged vows. This would explain why Ruth wanted to follow Naomi; they had made a vow to one another ten years earlier. This is not elaborated further in the libretto.

“From Judah’s soil uprooted” preceding the recounting of the deaths of all three men hints that the leaving of their own land could have been a cause of their deaths. The stress on Judah rather than Bethlehem is also found in Berkeley (p. 189).

“Seeking grace” was never a motive in the Scroll, only finding food (and possibly a husband). This adds an element of piety or religiosity to their quest.

Boaz tells Ruth that he knows full well what she has done. Part of his response is sung to the melody of the Ruth leitmotif 1. Boaz gives instructions to the reapers (2.15) in very pompous music. The range of his music in this scene is quite low, ranging from F# to e.

**Having Boaz’s words sung to the Ruth leitmotif musically links the destinies of all three characters. The pompous music gives Boaz an air of importance and power.**

The remainder of the scene summarizes the action of chapter 2. While a male chorus sings a hymn-like and tonic melody accompanied by harp, Boaz sings over them (the music is marked *molto espressivo*):

O my God, what seed hast thou sown here in my heart! O Lord, whose mercy knowest he no end.

The metaphor of seed sown can refer to either love he is feeling for Ruth, or the seed that will be planted from their coming together. Either way, Boaz experiences it as something coming from God, which places his love on a higher plane (this was also seen in Fino, p.150).

**Part II 4. “Naomi’s Counsel” (p. 104)**

In a brief orchestral introduction, the Ruth leitmotif I appears in the cellos three times, rising by full steps on each repetition. This pattern is repeated while Naomi sings. The scene opens with Naomi asking Ruth:

Tell me now, my daughter, where hast thou gleaned and gathered? Where wroughtest thou in the field today? (based on 2.19)

Ruth responds, preceded by a short *melisma* in the oboe (p. 105, measure after reh. #2):

O Mother, can I tell thee where I went? For my feet were set in the way the others went, but my soul within me...

This could be based on the way Ruth seemed to have found Boaz’s field by chance (2.3). It expresses Ruth’s surprise at how this happened.

Naomi asks:

What causeth this trouble in thy heart, and wherefore so restless?

Ruth answers, *con passione*:

Ah, can a heart where towering waves are swelling escape the thoughts that from its very depths are welling? (p. 106, reh. #4)

In a passage of wide and unexpected intervals, Ruth mentions Boaz’s name, and Naomi tells her who Boaz is (based on 2.20). Ruth repeats the name “Boaz” on a descending sixth, from
c-flat to g-flat (p. 107, m. 6 after reh. =0); Naomi repeats the name on the same interval in reverse order.

The presence in this passage of oboe and harp playing melismas and the leitmotif signal Ruth’s “oriental” origin and perhaps stand for Moab. Naomi’s repetition of Ruth’s musical phrase on “Boaz” is a musical affirmation as well as a depiction of the “harmony” between the two women through Boaz.

Chapter 3  
In the score, there is no break from the previous section. Naomi sings:

Hear my daughter, shall I not seek thy comfort, so that it may be well with thee? (3.1)

Ruth interrupts her in the only measure where their voices are heard together:

O where can I find rest to still the troubles, that like the sea are heaving within my heart?

After Ruth’s outburst, Naomi gives her instructions to Ruth (3.4). The final words of the instructions are sung entirely *a capella* and *ad lib.* (reh. =12); only two chords are played before a sustained measure of silence, before Naomi asks: “Ruth, art silent?” (p. 111, top). After another prolonged rest in the music, Ruth finally answers:

I listen trembling to thy bidding, but a flame is enkindled here within my bosom, my heart burns me! (p. 111, reh. =13)

This chromatic series of ascending phrases is sung to a steady increase in tempo and volume. When Ruth stops, there is a long rest, interrupted by the oboe and harp playing the leitmotif variant. “All that you sayest” (3.5; p. 111, 5th staff) is sung to very sparse accompaniment, and “I will do” is sung *pp a capella,* with a half measure of silence before the word “do.” Ruth sustains the word on g” for another measure, while the orchestra comes in on an F major chord, in dissonance to the voice and anticipating the vocal descent to an F a measure later. The section ends peacefully resolved on an F major chord.

New elements found in this duet are overlapping voices and effective silences. When Ruth sings over Naomi’s voice, it is as if she couldn’t wait for Naomi to complete her sentence, so eager is she to proclaim her love. Naomi actually singing a phrase to the Ruth leitmotif I could be a musical suggestion of their closeness or even that Naomi is vicariously having Ruth’s experience.

The unaccompanied phrases and the two sustained rests combine to create a mood of both great intimacy and uncertainty. The half measure rest between Ruth’s “I will” and “do” indicates hesitation. Ruth’s continued sustaining of her g” after the orchestra has come in on an F major chord are a final moment of suspension. Even once the chord is resolved in the voice, a sense of breathlessness and hesitation remain in the ear.

5. Threshing floor. nightfall. A priest is heard from a distance, intoning:

By day, O Lord, we praise thee, we praise thee. Lord, by night.

This is sung offstage, creating the effect of distance. The tune is a chant in the Phrygian mode. A chorus of “keepers of the temple” respond “Amen.”

The Priest continues with more prayers, followed by a very lengthy chorus that seems out of place in the oratorio, its purpose either to set a certain mood or simply to display virtuosity. Schumann apparently intended the scene to “picture the fancies which tortured
Ruth’s mind as she wandered alone by night to seek out Boaz’ (Humiston, program notes: Appendix I, p. 265).

After this chorus, Ruth enters and sings:

Lord, thou alone knowest if my soul is walking in the right way. Go not from me, thee have I trusted. O my God. My soul, that once in darkness languished, is filled with radiance bright as Zion’s beams. Meseems, my heart goeth gently toward his heart. I do as was hidden me.

*Ruth does not pray for guidance in the Scroll, but this is in keeping with the more pious Ruth depicted in this oratorio. The reference to Zion is probably to remind the listener of Ruth’s connection to Israel.*

Boaz sings “Is there a woman at my feet there?” *a capella* (p. 138, reh. #53). Flutes play rapid high cadences over *pizzicato* in the strings. His next line, “Speak, who art thou” (3.9; m.6 after reh. #53) follows the same pattern. Ruth answers “Master, I am Ruth” (reh. #54) to the opening part of her own leitmotif. After she tells him her purpose in coming (reh. #55), Boaz continues (p. 140, m.3):

May the Lord now bless thee, o my daughter. All that thou couldst give hast thou given, what thou givest is great as thou are faithful (paraphrased 3.10).

The word “daughter” is sustained for two measures, shifting from c’ to b₃ (an interesting downward enharmonic shift) to c’₂. After Ruth responds, Boaz sings (p. 141, reh. #60):

Is not a virtuous woman most precious, and her price above rubies? (Prov. 31:10).

Hast ravished my heart, my sister and my spouse. Tell me, how foundest thou the way to me? (*Song of Songs* 4.9, KJV)

The *Song of Songs* verses are sung as an unaccompanied recitativo, followed by Ruth’s leitmotif! in the orchestra, played *adagio con espressione*, over drums. Ruth responds after this short orchestral Interlude (p. 143, reh. #62):

I slept but my heart kept watch. Then I arose and went about the city, to seek for him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not; I called, but he answer’d me not. The watchmen that go about the city found me, to whom I said, have ye not seen him, whom my soul loveth? (*Song of Songs* 3.1-3).

This section begins as a quasi-recitativo and with a few rare tonic moments—for example, E major is clearly heard (m.1, 3, 5 after reh. #62), as well as G major (reh. #63). There is a feeling of calm but from the phrase “I sought him” (p. 143, 3rd staff, m.3), the rhythm becomes slightly more agitated. Harp is included in the accompaniment.

Boaz continues (p. 144, reh. #64):

What is thy love above another? O thou fairest, fairest of women! O my beloved, thou are fair as the rose of Sharon, as the lily of the valleys (*Song of Songs* 2.1, but there it is spoken by the woman, in first person).

Ruth:
Tell me whither is my beloved turned aside? (*Song of Songs* 6.1; p.146, top)

Boaz:
As a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters. (*Song of Songs* 2.2; p. 146, reh. #66)
Ruth:
I charge you, ye watchmen of the town, tell my beloved if you find him, that I am sick of love (Song of Songs 5:8).

Boaz:
Lovely and fair is thy face, thy voice is sweetness. Fair as the rosy morning, and set apart like the sun are thou. O hark to the voice of thy beloved (mixed and combined verses from Song of Songs).

Ruth: I hear his voice, my beloved is mine, and I am his (2.16).

The Song of Songs verses express love within a biblical context.

This is the only moment the two voices come together and “touch.” Ruth’s word “his” (p. 148, 3rd staff) is sung on a d’, rising to d’# on the third beat; and on this beat, Boaz enters on a g, an octave and augmented fifth lower, creating a suspension. Boaz’s music in this duet is soaring, and in a much higher register than in the previous scene: the range is up to e’ flat and hovers around c’.

The opening of this scene, when Boaz notices Ruth and flutes play high cadences, musically portrays excitement and mystery. The predominance of the harp throughout seems fitting for a setting of Song of Songs, possibly because of its association with the biblical David.

Both in the vocal range and in the text, this is a very different Boaz from the one portrayed earlier. The high range depicts ardor, though somewhat suppressed as expressed musically by the separation between their voices, which only blend for an instant in the entire duet. When Boaz’s music is relatively tonic, his keys are flatted, in contrast to Ruth’s; this musically paints a different character.

Boaz continues:
Now arise and come, and follow me. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, o my sister and my spouse. Kiss me, o my spouse, with the kisses of thy mouth, love (Song of Songs 1.6, 2.13 and other verses; p. 149, rch. #69).

The phrase “Kiss me” is to be sung ff and molto espressivo e con moto. It starts on c’, rising to c’# and d’, before dropping and rising chromatically to c’# again (p. 149, 3rd, 4th staves). This note is held for five beats before abruptly dropping to d’, giving the effect of being cut off. The next measure is silent except for a single note in the horns, an orchestral exclamation point.

As the duet builds to a climax, ascending chromatic lines sung at the top of the baritone register seem to convey the concept of ecstasy. After this buildup, the sudden drop of the voice, which makes it sound almost cut off, makes it easy to visualize the kiss that follows.

A distant horn is heard. The horn solo was meant to represent the shofar, or ram’s horn (Humiston, program notes). The priest greets the rising sun, from a distance:
O give thanks unto the Lord.

Ruth says to Boaz:
Hearest thou the matin song of the priests? Let me now go from thee, that none may know that a woman came here to the floor (3.14, but there Boaz thinks this, it is not spoken).
Boaz doesn’t want her to go; he wants to tell everyone he is taking her to wife. They kiss again.

Chapter 4 6. Morning dawn: a chorus of priests and people sing a psalm of thanks to God.

As Ruth and Boaz sing more love verses, the chorus continues singing praises to God in the background.

The libretto retains the language of the KJV Bible for non-biblical verses throughout this scene.

In Ruth’s final phrase, her music soars to $b'$ flat, never to the high $c'$ it seems to anticipate. In the last section, soloists and chorus all sing Ruth’s leitmotif II (“Let me now follow you”).

The chorus closes with:

O give thanks unto the Lord our God.

Summary

There are several unusual features in this oratorio. Naomi’s role is greatly expanded, and she has two long solos—significantly, the work opens with her most extensive aria. For dramatic purposes, Schumann makes Naomi a towering, tragic figure in the opening scene. He tries to make Ruth larger than her biblical portrait by painting a woman of great passion. The spotlight shifts gradually from Naomi to Ruth and then to Ruth and Boaz, until Naomi vanishes from the final scenes.

Schumann’s extensive use of biblical texts differs from earlier composers and librettists because he does not rely so heavily on Psalms. He incorporates biblical texts such as Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs dramatically. These texts become part of the drama and an element of character portrayal.

Two interesting midrashic touches are the chorus that angrily turns against Naomi (found later in Berkeley; p 193), and the reference to a pledge made between Ruth and Naomi when they first met. These are interesting dramatic additions to the story, serving to explain motive. The oratorio ends with praise of God, as do all the oratorios in this thesis; in this case it seems to be a nod to public expectations, as in Franck.

Leitmotifs are used more extensively in this work than in any other I am analyzing. There are two associated with Ruth and one with Naomi. Their function is to continually remind the listener that Ruth’s initial act of following Naomi set the stage for everything that happened subsequently. Musically, the characters are clearly defined by different styles. Ruth’s vocal part and her accompaniment are higher and brighter than Naomi’s. Boaz’s music in his two scenes varies dramatically in style and range; it could almost be sung by two different singers.

Schumann’s style includes unusual intervals and dissonances; dramatic climaxes, often with high sung notes; syncopated rhythms to create excitement; effective use of silence, with sustained rests; and interesting tonal painting through pitch. The unusual instrumentation, including harp, drums, and tambourine, lend a Middle Eastern flavor to the score.

164

I libretto by L. L. Wohlman; copyright 1949 by both authors.

Ruth—lyric soprano; Naomi—mezzo; Orpah—soprano; angel—alto; Boaz—dramatic tenor; Gideon, Machlon, Chilion—all tenors; Elimelech—baritone; To—baritone.

Joseph Rumshinsky's (b. 1881, d. 1956) first music studies, in Vilna, Russia (now Lithuania), were with a cantor and at music conservatories. Most of his life was devoted to writing Yiddish music for the Second Avenue Theatre in New York.

The opera *Ruth* was his last work. He died before orchestrating it but had intended to do so (personal correspondence with his daughter Betty Fox, 11/19/01), and made a few instrumental notations in the piano score to which I will occasionally refer. He studied Hebrew with a private tutor before collaborating on the libretto with L. Wohlman (Betty Fox). Rumshinsky's dream of seeing this work performed on stage in Israel was never realized. Later attempts to see it staged in Los Angeles all failed (Rumshinsky archives, UCLA Music Library).

The story opens before the beginning of the biblical story, with a birthday celebration for Elimelech in Moab, and the weddings of Machlon and Chilion to Ruth and Orpah (my translations throughout). I will cite the Hebrew text as transliterated in the score; the libretto was never written in Hebrew characters.

Scene 1 (Prologue): All praise and thank Chemosh, their god. Elimelech tells the story of their sojourn in Moab. Naomi sings (full text in Appendix I, p. 269):

> In my dream [I saw] a sycamore with a wide trunk. its many wide branches penetrate the sky above, while its other parts drop down, and on a thin stalk at the top of the tree a small bird burst into song, a sad mournful song about the destruction of the fertile sycamore... I awoke and realized it was a dream, and the dream passed: and I cried bitterly over the fate of the sycamore.

*Rumshinsky's midrashic use of a dream of a sycamore tree has particular resonance. These were the first trees planted in Tel Aviv only a year before Rumshinsky wrote his opera, and there are also a few biblical references to the sycamore, notably Ps. 78:47, where God destroyed the sycamore trees, Isa. 9:9, where the sycamore trees were cut down, and Amos 7:14, where he describes himself as a tender of sycamore fruit.*

A wedding scene follows, in which all join in a brindisi (drinking song). Naomi addresses her daughters-in-law:

> Welcome, you are my daughters, I want to kiss you, my two gems. It seems to me that even in the heavens above they are playing the drums and timbrels. The stars gather and wink at the lovers.

*The purpose of this scene is partly to "open up" the story by depicting a scene that took place long before the opening of the biblical narrative. It might also be for the purpose of contrast with the scenes that follow.*

Chapter 1 Scene 2 Two paupers on the road to Bethlehem talk about hunger and bread. One says he was a charioteer in the house of Elimelech the Efrati. They relate the story of the deaths of Elimelech and Chilion and their children. They're headed for Bethlehem because the banquet is ready.

*By means of this device, the dialogue between these two characters essentially replaces 1.1-7, providing the necessary background for the story.*
The next scene is between Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah. After Naomi tells Ruth and Orpah to return (1.8), Ruth responds:

Please do not cast me away; now that we have come here, we will rest by the roots of the sycamore with the broken branches.

Naomi responds in a recitative:

What is this? A repetition of the dream? Foolishly, my legs brought me here to see the interpretation of the dream.

This is followed by an aria:

Figure 23: Rumshinsky, “Ki kamoni kashikma” (“I am like the sycamore”), p. 81, 2nd staff

Ki kamoni kashikma sh’chol v’ammon l’mot ishi uvanai Machlon v’Chilion; ani m’leiah halachte v’reikam heshivani ja; rekam shakulah v’galmuda shava l’Betlehem Yehuda. Oy li umi yiten moti ki tov hamavet li mechayim.

I am like the sycamore, I lost my husband and my sons Machlon and Chilion; I went out full and God [translating “ja” as an alternate term for God] brought me back empty; and empty and lonely I return to Bethlehem in Judah. Who will give me death, because death is better than life for me.

The only verse from the Scroll paraphrased here is 1.21. Naomi mentions her husband and the names of her sons, which she never does in the Scroll. And nowhere does she express a longing for death in the Scroll, so she is portrayed here as a far more depressed woman.

This lament is in g minor with modal characteristics (g aeolian). It is in 4/4 time, marked maestoso con dolore, “majestically with sadness.” A traditional funeral march rhythm marks the opening measures. The last part of the first sentence, starting with “rekam shakulah” (empty and lonely), is sung to a progression of alternating short unaccompanied phrases and an accompaniment echoing the descending figure (p. 82, m.2). The bass notes in the accompaniment descend chromatically. The second sentence reprises the opening theme before ending on a dominant (D7) chord (p. 82, final measure), anticipating a resolution in g minor.

The combination of rhythm and modality creates a sense of great sadness, amplified by the effect of breathlessness and fatigue in Naomi’s short broken phrases in the middle.
The chromatic descent in the bass is typically a sound of grief. The piece ends on a seventh chord; there is no resolution in the music or for Naomi.

Ruth and Orpah respond:

Lo'lu' [lei] galmda, at chamot ki vanot lach sh'tayim
You're not lonely, my mother-in-law, you have two daughters-in-law.

The two women take on the role of comforting Naomi, rather than simply stating that they want to go with her (1.10).

Instead of the expected g minor chord, Ruth enters (p. 82, last measure) singing d'' to f'' over Orpah's h', part of a diminished G7 chord which leads to e minor. There is ambiguity because of an A flat in the accompaniment. Under Ruth's sustained notes, Orpah echoes both phrases a minor third lower, until their voices join in harmony at the close of each phrase (p. 83, 1st-2nd staves). The chromatic and diminished third intervals in the accompaniment create tonal ambiguity throughout.

The lack of a tonal center creates a sense of unrest. Musically, Orpah is depicted as subservient to Ruth while also "in tune" with her, since her notes never create a dissonance as do the orchestra's.

Naomi responds:

Shovna b'notai, shovna, haya niporeda uval t'lavuni vaderech asher ani holechet.
Bimei hastav li v'hashalechot. V'aten avivot porchet sh'tayim, avivot porchet b'gan hachayim. Hava nipareda uval t'lavuni.

Return, my daughters, let's separate, please don't accompany me on the road I'm taking. I am like the autumn leaves that fall, while you are two blossoming springs in the garden of life. Come, we must part.

The theme of the tree can be glimpsed here in Naomi's reference to autumn leaves.

Only now does the key finally modulate to e minor (aeolian). Naomi sings the same tune as at the opening of the scene, but a fourth higher and more dramatically. The word "ani" (I) is sung on g'', the highest note sung to this point (p. 84, m.3). On the reference to "gan hachayim" (garden of life) there is a sudden momentary shift to C major (p. 85, m.2). Naomi repeats her earlier words "Hava nipareda uval t'lavuni" (Return, my daughters, let's separate) over dramatic, hammering chords, reaching a'' flat, her highest note (p. 85, m.4).

Singing the same tune in a higher key is an effective way to show an intensification rather than a change of feelings. This device is used twice in this short section. The "garden of life" is pictured musically in the bright, simple key of C major. There is a steady buildup of emotional intensity throughout, indicated in the rhythmic accompaniment and constantly changing tonality.

Ruth and Orpah continue:

Lo chamutit ki itach neilech. Lo ma'azveich vilo narpe mimeich ka'em hayit lanu ve'itach neilech.

We will not leave you and will not let you go. you have been like a mother to us, and we will come with you (1.10, paraphrased, p. 85, m.5-6).

Ruth enters on f'', Naomi's ending note. The tempo is marked più mosso (faster). The harmonies are striking--open fourths and fifths--both between the women's voices and in the accompaniment. This is a reference to folk music in general, often more particularly to the Orient. Orpah again echoes Ruth's voice, as she had earlier, but in different intervals.
Ruth singing Naomi’s note musically indicates closeness. Orpah is subservient to Ruth, echoing her thoughts.

Naomi responds with 1.11-13 slightly abridged, following which Ruth sings “Don’t urge me to leave you” (1.16-17):

Figure 24: Rumshinsky, “Al tifg’i vi” (Do not urge me to leave you), p. 94

The unusual setting of this text is highly dramatic, almost frenzied. It starts as an aria, but becomes a scene between Ruth and Naomi. The orchestra opens with a rapid repeated figure of 32nd notes, with an ostinato tremolo A in the bass, a drone punctuating each beat. Over this agitated accompaniment, Ruth’s opening phrase leaps an octave from e’ to e’’, descends a half step to d’’# and another to d’’’. These modal characteristics (E-D#-D) give the phrase an “oriental” sound. The next phrase repeats this pattern, while the orchestra continues its hammering accompaniment.

Suddenly the orchestra plays a sustained dissonant chord (p. 94, m.7), followed by Ruth’s phrase “ameich ami” (your people are my people) sung unaccompanied on e’’. The first word of the next phrase, “elohaih” (your God), is sung unaccompanied and ff on f’’# (p. 95, m.2). The orchestra then plays a dissonant chord over Ruth’s voice as they ascend chromatically together on “elohai” (is my God) to g’’# (m.4).

The opening of this aria is very dramatic. The setting of the crucial words “ameich ami,” “your people are my people” seems to stress Ruth’s isolation at the moment of her declaration, because her voice is unaccompanied at the start of that phrase. There is also a reference to the “dissonance” of the declaration because of the harshly dissonant chords that appear in the next phrase. But the fact that the voice continues to rise in pitch and volume throughout signifies Ruth’s great determination and confidence.

Naomi interrupts to ask (p. 95):

What has come over you to leave your god Chemosh and your birthplace to go after me and cling to this god, Shaddai.

This is an interesting addition to the Scroll, where Naomi never asks Ruth this question, nor does she ever mention the god Chemosh. The story makes more sense with this addition; it is only logical that Naomi would ask Ruth about her motives.

Ruth answers (p. 96):

The grace of your ways and the god of your people I have known. I am dead to Chemosh the idol of Moab and I have chosen the god of Naomi.

In addition to Ruth’s declaration of loyalty to Naomi’s God, this libretto adds Ruth’s explicit rejection of her own gods. This midrashic addition could be explained by the Jewish orientation of the composer and presumably the librettist.
Naomi responds (p. 97, m.3):

Ai na Ruth al na bini, shuvi l'artzeeh l'ameeh ul'elohayich

Please Ruth, my daughter, go back to your land, your people, and your god.

In this libretto there is no reference to “your mother’s house” (1.8). Naomi’s words here foreshadow the second part of Ruth’s pledge (1.17).

The key suddenly shifts to C♯ aeolian for this phrase, which has the same tune (a leitmotif) and modality as Naomi’s previous aria. Naomi sings the last phrase on repeated g♯-es, an overtone of C♯. This would be vocally difficult and might render the text incomprehensible. Rumshinsky has written the melody into the orchestra, but did not double it in the voice, which he is treating instrumentally in this phrase.

This very dramatic phrase is like a strong admonishment to Ruth.

Ruth continues with the biblical text of 1.16-17, which was started before the dialogue with Naomi (p. 97, 4th staff):

Al titgi vi lashuv meachrayich basher tamuti anat v'sham ekaver...[through beini uvenech].

On the last phrase, “Ki hamavet...” (Only death will part you and me) (p. 98, m.6), the vocal line ascends as the orchestra doubles the voice and plays a high tremolo. The last sung note is a sustained g♯ with an optional c♯ also marked (p. 99, top). This is to be held five measures, while the orchestra hammers out the main theme alternating with rapid descending 16th-note phrases. The aria ends on a dissonant chord.

This highly dramatic and vocally difficult ending indicates that Rumshinsky had a dramatic soprano in mind for Ruth. This ending phrase would express virtual emotional frenzy.

Ruth continues with a much longer aria, a midrashic expansion of 1.16-17 and opening with the same phrase she used earlier in the scene:

Please do not drive me away (לא אליטריך). Naomi, don’t cast me out of the heritage of God, for I am a daughter of El Shaddai and the people of Israel; don’t drive me away, for since the day I came to sit in the shadow of your doorway like a branch, your love covered me, and I felt this came to me from El Shaddai, the god who hides in the depths of the sky. I will leave the filth of Moab and the believers in man-made stone and wood idols, and quietly raise my hands to El Shaddai...

The Jewish orientation of the librettist and composer are visible again, in phrases like “the filth of Moab” (related to “Chemosh the abomination of Moab” in 1 Kin. 11.7 and 2 Kin. 23.13) and references to “believers in man-made stone and wood idols” which recall prophetic utterances (for example, Is. 37.19). There is also a reference to the theme running throughout the work, that of a tree and its branches, standing for the family that has lost, and will regain, its “branches.”

Scene Three opens with the Bethlehem crowd singing:

Here they come, here they are singing. Naomi with a friend of the Moabites.

In the Scroll, the crowd does not even acknowledge the presence of Ruth, let alone identify her as a Moabite; nor does Naomi (1.19).

“Lo” steps forward to identify himself as Elimelech’s brother. He recognizes Naomi as the widow whom he hasn’t seen in 11 years. Naomi sings a greeting to the city of her birth.
her “beloved city.” When they all greet her as Naomi, she sings “Don’t call me Naomi” (1.20):

Figure 25 Rumshinsky, “Al tikrena li Nomii” (Don’t call me Naomi), p. 112

Don’t call me Naomi, call me Mara; every disaster, plague and trouble overcame me. Because Shaddai made it bitter for me, what else can happen? The text is from the Scroll, with two interjections about disaster and plague, and a resigned and bitter final question. She does not continue with 1.21, probably because that verse was paraphrased earlier, in her dialogue with Ruth.

This lament is in 12/8 time (very slow and broad) and a-flat minor, both unusual markings. The melody is played first in the orchestra and then repeated three times in the aria; the middle repeat is sung higher, in d-flat minor. The closing measures, two repeats of “umah lachen od” (what else can happen) (p.113, m.5-6), are a series of descending minor thirds or augmented seconds and a phrase dipping down to b flat before ending quietly in E flat major. The sense of calm from this final chord is immediately shattered by loud chromatic ascending chords leading to Tov’s public recognition of Naomi.

The insistent accompaniment features repeated descending half-steps, a sighing effect heightened by the slow, dragging beat. The device of repeating a tune in a higher key has been seen elsewhere; it serves to increase the excitement. The many flats and descending figures at the conclusion all portray great sadness and loss of hope.

Responding to questions about Ruth, Naomi tells the people:

Ruth, after the death of her husband, left her father and mother and came with me to Bethlehem; we came together in the shadow of the wings of the God of Israel.

While in the Scroll neither Naomi nor the people seem to even notice Ruth’s presence at her side, here Naomi not only recognizes but even praises Ruth’s actions. The people bless Ruth, saying she will be at Naomi’s side “like the tree in spring which keeps alive and renews its leaves” (paraphrase of Ps. 1.3), another reference to the central themes of the tree and renewal (this chap., pp. 165, 167).

Then Ruth and Naomi sing a duet, how one is the leaves to the other’s tree, and they are each other’s hope.

Both sing:
Your happiness is my happiness, your peace is my peace. You are the bird in my dream. You are like a daughter of my birth.
Chapter 2  Scene Four: Afternoon in Boaz’s field.

The chorus sings about the harvest. When they leave, Gidon (the head reaper’s name in this libretto) stays behind. Ruth arrives, tells him who she is and that she is there to glean. He tells her she is beautiful, then serenades her (full text in Appendix L, p.269):

In truth and not in dreams I have come to you, maiden; my name is Gidon, master of Boaz’s house, son of Salmon the judge. I am the head of the reapers in the fields...Come Ruth, and with me you will live...

The only rationale for the head reaper to be attracted to Ruth is to create a love triangle, in keeping with the genre of grand opera to which Rumhinsky aspired.

Boaz enters with his workers. After Gidon tells him who Ruth is, Boaz tells her where to glean (2.8-9). The rest of the scene is taken up with chorus and soloists singing about their work and nature.

Act 3 opens with Naomi singing to God as she grinds grain:

Odeha adonai elohei ki roimamtani ul’hashbit m’eretz zehri...Lil shadai m’choneim um’chavei mil’dei kol neleish chai. Hein Ruth zu asher k’vat bi, imatzia likot shibolei geir v’ani shlaachtita v’hinei mibli da’at umibi chashov davar, vehovilu ota ragleha lisdi habar shel ben achi Elimelech, l’Boaz hagoeil. Bein asrot hanaarov hakotzotzot rak aleha yarf mabat ayin v’she’el v’choker v’doreish ‘I’mi hanaara hazot’; v’elei hagarinim mib’ehrei hamimim asher b’ehol yom vayom hu b’mitpacheita sam v’galet hasaar bach zei Ruth. Uv’rak haeshe baishonim bi’aha lehem pitromim.

God, who has raised me up and brought me back to the land I remember...El Shaddai is gracious to all living creatures. Ruth is like a daughter to me, I gave her the courage to go and glean, I sent her out, and now look, without knowing or planning, her feet took her to the fields of Elimelech’s relation, to Boaz the redeemer. Amongst the many other gleaners, only on Ruth did he cast his eye and ask, ‘Whose maiden is that?’ And these are the seeds which every day he puts in her apron. The answers for them will be in love. [text is obscure]

This text makes Naomi a more religious figure, who now thanks God whom she blamed for her earlier misfortunes. In addition, she seems to know everything that has happened and will happen to Ruth before Ruth even comes home.

This aria (p. 205) is based on a modal scale. The middle beat of each measure is a rapid figure of 16th notes, almost a trill, over which Naomi sings a slower melody (m.7). This melody has a lamenting sound: the voice ascends a fifth and descends a half-step. Naomi begins talking about Ruth (p. 208) in a recitative accompanied only by a tremolo. On the word “v’hinei” (“and now look;” m.4), the accompaniment becomes a group of 16th note arpeggios with the soaring melody doubled in the accompaniment.

In the next section (p. 210), “Eile hagarinim” (“These are the seeds”), the key is D major and the tempo increases (m.5). In the next few phrases, the same musical figure is repeated a step higher each time. The closing section returns to the opening melody and key of the aria (p. 211). On the last ascending fifth, the voice remains on the fifth rather than descending a half-step as in all previous ascending fifths in the aria (3rd staff). The voice
sustains a c' for the final three measures, and the final pp chord in the accompaniment is an open fifth of F-C.

The trill-like accompaniment at the opening of this aria has the sound of a rapid pulse, indicating Naomi’s anxiety. The pattern of ascending or descending fifths throughout, coupled with many dissonant moments, create an unsettled and sad mood. But the change in tone from mourning to hope comes after the measure in which Naomi seems to imagine Boaz’s speech. The transition to the bright D major and the steadily higher pitches show Naomi’s increased excitement from that point on.

Ruth enters; they greet one another, and Naomi says she is glad Ruth returned, and comments on how tired she must be. Ruth answers:

Lo ayafti ki im ahavti, hoi kama ahavti. Hoi cim y’kara ve’nishmat chayai, hamimeich et sa’arot nafshi astira, hoi Naomi kayam nigrash l’avi.

I didn’t tire, because I loved, oh how I loved. O my dear mother, breath of my life, from you I will hide the agony of my soul, o Naomi, my heart is torn like the sea.

Naomi responds:
Shvi biti ul’nafsheich hasara sheket avi. Im libech kayam nigrash, ani hasira sirat mif rash.

Sit, my daughter, I will bring peace to your tormented soul. If your heart is ripped like the sea, I will be the boat.

An interesting element of this dialogue is the imagery of the split sea (Ex.14.21-22), with Naomi as the boat to bring them across. An oblique reference to the splitting of the Reed Sea is possible, and seems an attempt to place the story of Ruth and Naomi in the context of the nation’s history.

The fact that Ruth and Naomi both refer to Ruth’s soul as “in agony” and “tormented” is an attempt to turn this into a melodramatic moment appropriate to the genre of grand opera.

Ruth’s opening phrase, “lo ayafti” (p. 213, m.4), goes to a”. On “ki im ahavti” (“I loved”), the tempo slows and the phrases are sung in short descending phrases, partly a capella with the orchestra echoing some of Ruth’s notes.

The accompaniment abruptly slows when the key changes to d minor (p. 215, m.4), with thumping notes in the bass. Naomi’s words (from “shvi biti,” “sit, my daughter,” m.5) are sung as a recitative over single sustained chords alternating with the pattern of low repeated notes.

The opening section of Ruth’s music, with its short descending phrases, conveys a sense of breathlessness. The thumping accompaniment later in the duet simulates a heartbeat slowing down. There is interesting contrast here between the two women as portrayed in their vocal parts.

Ruth continues:

I love Boaz, I only thought to glean in his field. He said nothing of his love for me but the burning irises of his eyes have become the dream of my life, and all the parts of his body and movement of his height and strength spoke of his love, without saying it.

In this midrashic re-telling, Ruth has fallen in love with Boaz, and this is no elderly man as some midrashists have suggested, but rather a tall, strong, and presumably virile one. And based on his body language, Ruth assumes he returns her love. The inclusion of a
physical description underlines the importance of the visual element in this work, meant to be performed onstage by singers who could convincingly play these roles as written here.

Naomi tells her Boaz is the redeemer (2.20):
Don't be ashamed. When you came to his field you did not yet know the secret of who he was; and this came from the God of Israel.

Naomi also mentions God in the Scroll after Ruth tells her about Boaz (2.20).

Chapter 3

The scene ends after 3.4. Naomi tells Ruth what to do (3.1-4), then again tells Ruth she is like her own daughter. Ruth responds with a passionate declaration “My mother, Naomi” (similar passages are in Fino p. 144).

Scene 6: The Threshing Floor

The scene opens with Boaz, who has a dream, or vision, in which an angel appears and sings:
A hundred women spread a net, an arrow flew from the bow, you didn't freeze from the frost or burn from the flame. And behold Ruth the Israelite woman.

Boaz interjects and corrects the angel: “Ruth the Hebrew.”

The angel continues:
Tonight a halaechic judgment has been made: [the law intends] male Ammonite, not female; Moabite male, not female. I was sent down from above to announce this to you.

The angel vanishes and Boaz sleeps.

This unusual midrashic addition could be made only by Jewish writers, since it quotes the halaechic midrash (BT Yebamot 47b) explaining why Ruth, from the accursed Moabite tribe (Lev. 23.4: לא אב משבטי את אשר היוה “No Ammonite or Moabite male shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord”), was deemed acceptable as a wife for Boaz (and as the progenitor of David).

Ruth enters and prays to the God of Israel for strength and courage. When she lies at Boaz's feet and he awakens, she identifies herself and sings:
I hurried to come and ask something of the judge.

Boaz answers:
I am indeed a judge in Israel; what is your question?

This addition makes Boaz sound more like a judge than a lover; he does not take on the role of judge in the Scroll until chapter 4.

Ruth continues (p. 248, last measure):
Ha’oo ish Mahlon met b’ereitz Moav ubanim ein lo l’hakim sh’mo al nachlatay l’ma’an lo yimache shmo…v’im ani mazatti chein b’emcach utarastra knafecha al amatecha, v’lo yikareit sheim hameit mi Yisrael, ki ata hagoeil.
My husband Mahlon died in the land of Moab, and he had no sons to carry his name for his inheritance; so that his name should not be erased...so if I have pleased you, my lord, please spread your wings over your handmaid (3.9) so the name of the deceased should not be erased from Israel, for you are the redeemer (3.9).

Ruth is spelling out what she wants from Boaz much more explicitly here than in the Scroll, where Ruth never mentions Mahlon’s name. In the Scroll, Boaz mentions Mahlon’s name in 4.9-10, where he explains how taking Ruth as his wife will perpetuate his name. In other words, in this libretto Ruth’s words to Boaz pre-empt his speech to the whole community.

This section, to be sung //an f turioso [sic], lies in a high tessitura, reaching a’’’’ and with several a’’’’ flats, and most notes above f’’’’. This range might obscure some of the text (ch. 4, p. 92). Ruth’s final words, “ata hagoeil” (“you are the redeemer”), are sung twice, over a tremolo accompaniment: the first time, the phrase descends chromatically from a’’’’ flat to f’’’’; the second is a modal descent of an augmented second, from f’’’’ down to e’’’’ flat, during a big rallentando. The key modulates unexpectedly to G major for Boaz’s entrance (p. 250, last measure):

Brucha at l’adonai biti, al tiri kol asher tomri elai c’esch lach.

You are blessed to God my daughter, do not fear. I will do all you asked (based on 3.10-11).

The opening word takes the voice to g’, taking advantage of the optimum range for a tenor. The accompaniment is simple, repetitive high arpeggios which descend chromatically to a different tonality in every measure (p. 251). A very similar pattern is found in a section near the end of the opera (p. 339).

A sense of suspension and ambiguity in Ruth’s opening words is created through the use of augmented chords, which sound farther from resolution than a simple dominant seventh chord would. Chromaticism and modality are used to convey emotion in many of these passages.

Ruth proclaims her love for Boaz, and in a duet to be sung “con amore,” he tells her of his own love for her (they both sing the same words: p. 255):

Ani ahavtieh chol leiv ahavtieh Ruth, uva’adonai mivtach ki ani hagoeil (ata hagoeil)

With all my heart I love you, and swear by God that I am the redeemer (Ruth: you are the redeemer).

Rumshinsky uses extensive chromaticism in this love duet. Boaz opens with an ascending chromatic figure: Ruth joins him on his last note and continues the ascending pattern. This pattern is repeated twice, taking Ruth to a’’’ on “leiv” (“heart”). The duet continues with Ruth’s entrances always “stepping on” the final notes of Boaz’s phrases.

Chromaticism is often used, as here, to express the most passionate feelings. Ascending chromatic lines also express eagerness, which can be seen in Ruth, who seems so eager to repeat what Boaz says that she cannot wait until he finishes.

The second part of the duet (p. 259) is accompanied initially by high arpeggios over sustained sung notes, the arpeggios dropping to a lower register while the orchestra doubles the high vocal line. Boaz sings:
Deep in my heart I buried this love. My lips ("ishfatajim" in the score, misreading "ishbatajim," "statayim") are burning like coals.
I closed it in a secret place, until the love burst forth like fire. Who will calm it? Could all the waters of the Jordan? (Song of Songs 8.6 paraphrased)
These verses, through a few key words, evoke the Song of Songs. This is not the only libretto to use or imitate these verses for a Ruth-Boaz duet (see Schumann, this chap., p. 162). Their love is placed on a different plane by being expressed in biblical language.

In this part of the duet, the voices follow one another less; they sing together, in tonal harmony but not identical melodic lines. In some places the voices echo each other's lines (p. 260, end-p. 261, top). The range of the duet is quite high, hovering (for Boaz) between c' and a' flat, and higher still for Ruth, utilizing the tenor and soprano ranges. The key modulations are virtually hidden under the chromaticism and dissonance. The duet ends with Ruth singing g'' in harmony with Boaz's b' over a dissonant augmented triad A-flat-C-F in the high orchestra parts (p. 265, top). The maestoso (majestic) orchestral conclusion ends on four heavily accented G's.

The accompaniment found at the opening of this section seems to express rapture.
The effect of Ruth and Boaz singing sometimes together, sometimes apart, is of two distinct people blending their feelings. The potential of the tenor voice for expressing romantic fervor is fully utilized here. His ending note of b' is near the top end of the tenor range and its sound is inevitably dramatic and thrilling. The conclusion of this duet is a musical expression of ecstatic union.

Chapter 4  Scene 7: At the city gate
The crowd addresses Gidon, wanting to know why the elders were suddenly summoned to the gate. He answers:
No bull attacked a cow, and no man was attacked by stones by accident. And the drowsy elders have been called here to make a judgment.
These are oblique references to laws found in the Torah (variants found in Exod. 21.13, 21.35), placing the scene in a "biblical" context.

Gidon explains the situation with Ruth, and who might redeem her, and expresses sadness at not being the man. This makes it apparent that he has either lost interest in Ruth or realized the situation offered him no hope. Boaz appears and explains the situation, then waxes poetic:
Can a man look at blooming roses and his heart sing like a violin? Will he not be happy at the desire of a girl filled with light who spread her rays on me last night?
Boaz's language here could not be further from his cool and legalistic language in chapter 4 of the Scroll. The librettist's focus is on Boaz the lover, not the clever manipulator.

The chorus joins Boaz in reciting this love poem. The elders enter and explain that the other redeemer is Tov. When Ruth hears that, she cries out "Oi va voy li" (a modern Hebrew expression of dismay that comes from Yiddish, which would have been understood by the Yiddish-speaking audience Rumshinsky had always written for). 1  The chorus comments on her pain.

1 There are also biblical examples of this term. The word "oi" (oy) appears 24 times in the Hebrew Bible: 2 in Numbers, 2 in 1 Sam., 4 in Isa., 8 in Jer., 4 in Ezek., 2 in Hosea. 1 each in Prov., and 1 am. It is used together with "va" (vo) only in 6 cases: 2 in Isa., 4 in Jer. The term "vo" appears only once, in Prov. 23.29 (together with "oi"). Rumshinsky may have been referring obliquely to those biblical occurrences.
In the Scroll's chapter 4, neither Naomi nor Ruth is present, while here they feature prominently. By eliminating 4.5-6, where the redeemer refuses to redeem Ruth along with her land, the librettist has created a conflict between Boaz and Tov for dramatic effect. The conflict is complicated further by the open expressions of love between Boaz and Ruth, with Naomi and the people also siding with the lovers.

Ruth cries out to the God of Israel, to have pity, not to let her commit a lie in her soul by lying with Tov. She proclaims she and Boaz love each other, and sings:

It would be like prostituting myself. I would rather be dead in the grave.

The Head of Elders explains that according to their law Ruth belongs to Tov (levirate law, in Deut. 25), and invites him to present his side.

Tov, upholding his legal rights, sings:

Don't cover my face with shame. You all heard from the mouth of the Head Elder who stated the law.

Ruth responds in a wail: “Alli lai li oili vavoiih.”

Naomi says to Tov:

Listen, brother of my husband Elimelech, a woman without love in a house is the source of all trouble to her husband, she is pain and disaster, a snake in the house is she. Please, take the field for no money, look. I am giving you the field for free, Tov: just leave Ruth alone.

Tov responds:

I wouldn’t want charity. If I have Ruth I will keep her on my hands like the apple of my eye.

Ruth again responds “Oi v’avoii h.” Tov says he wants to hear what the elders say; he doesn’t want to incur sin by bringing Ruth home.

A dramatic scene has been created here by the device of Tov refusing to relinquish his rights to Ruth. Naomi is arguing with him. Ruth is wailing about her misfortune, and the suspense builds towards a climax. None of this is in the Scroll, but to set chapter 4 as a dramatic scene required some kind of additions.

Boaz interrupts this discussion:

I didn’t come here today in sin, but because this night I saw an angel in my dream.

He relates his dream to everyone in an aria, “Ra’iti mal’ach” (“I saw an angel”), concluding with “Ammonite male, not female; Moabite male, not female.”

Gidon says: “A messenger from on high was sent to Boaz.”

They are all convinced Boaz is the true redeemer, based on the angel in his dream. Boaz tells them they are all witnesses this day, that he has purchased all that was Elimelech’s, Chilion’s and Machlon’s (4.9).

The chorus sings, with Naomi:

Blessed is God who did not withhold a redeemer and did not erase the name of your son Machlon in Israel. (4.14)
The first part of this phrase is said by the women only in the Scroll, and after Ruth has given birth. Instead of "has not withheld a redeemer from you," the libretto verse has "did not erase the name of your son Machlon," a subtle difference that reminds the audience what this marriage will accomplish for Naomi and for Elimelech’s house.

Naomi expresses gratitude at the judgment of the elders. The Chief Elder says it was the judgment of the heavenly messenger.

Naomi continues:
Blessed is my God who brought me here today to hear the interpretation of my dream: Ruth and Boaz, take each other’s hand.

The libretto includes a wedding scene, presided over by Naomi and with Ruth’s active participation. This is a major change from the terse narrative of the Scroll’s chapter 4. It also brings the drama full circle from the opening scene, which was also a wedding.

Ruth sings (p. 337; 3rd staff):
Ve’erastani Boaz l’olam, b’chesed uv’rachamim, hein miyum harishon li b’sadecha katal hiratta alat et chasdecha.

I wed you, Boaz, for eternity, in kindness and compassion. From the first day, your kindness fell on me like dues.

In Hebrew: מראשתני עולם וראשתני חסד ורחמים,هيינ מעומ חרוש לי ברשדך כלת היירת אלת ואחסדך
This is almost a verbatim copy of Hosea 2:21:
מראשתך לעולם וראשתך לא מעומĆ חסדך וחסדך ורחמים

These verses are recited during the ritual of putting on tefillin (phylacteries), which expresses love and faithfulness between the Jewish people and their god. This liturgical use of the verses grew from the belief that they refer to God’s betrothal to Israel. Both librettist and composer were surely aware of these allusions, and were elevating Ruth and Boaz’s marriage to the realm of Israel’s historic covenant with God.

This, Ruth’s final solo, is marked allegretto con anima and is marked by successively wider ascending interval leaps—a sixth, seventh, then octave. The accompaniment is a series of very rapid arpeggios under the soaring vocal line. The opening melody returns on the last page of this aria (p. 339); after the octave leap, a’ to a”’ (m.4), the voice descends chromatically to finally end in one of the few clearly tonic moments, in D major.

This chromatic descent was heard earlier in Boaz’s aria (p. 251). This conclusion therefore links them together with the same ecstatic theme.

Boaz says to Ruth, with the chorus repeating his words:
Our hearts cling together. we will march towards our future in the trail of strength just as the bird prophesied.

The librettist brings back the metaphor of the bird heard in the first scene, but since Boaz was not present in that scene, the listener must imagine they all share a similar vision.

The closing chorus, led by Gidon, sings:
On all the nations of the world, a new light will shine.
(על כל העמים ארד והש ילה)
Summary

There are many original elements in this opera. The story opens earlier than the Scroll narrative, an interesting example of gap-filling. The central theme of a tree, its branches and birds, is first found here when Naomi relates a dream vision. This theme could be associated with the biblical theme of land that is central in the Scroll and is an example of a literary leitmotif (ch. 2, p. 38). The Jewish orientation of the composer (and probably librettist) shows itself in references to the “filth” of Moab, and to talmudic and biblical passages. The librettist has created love triangles in two places, one in the field with Gideon approaching Ruth, and one in the final scene, when the redeemer, here named To, does not want to relinquish his right to take Ruth. This creates dramatic conflict which Rumshinsky probably felt was necessary in an opera.

Musically this is also a very unusual work. Modality features significantly, probably a result of Rumshinsky’s early training in Eastern Europe, as well as his many years writing for Yiddish theatre. That music would also have incorporated modal sounds. In addition to modality, Rumshinsky uses chromaticism and dissonance very effectively to heighten dramatic moments.

In a few highly dramatic spots, the vocal part involves singing repeated notes in a very high range of the voice, which could obscure the text. This suggests that the composer placed higher value on conveying emotional passion than on having every word of the text understood.

Wilfrid Mellers, The Song of Ruth, cantata

Words written and arranged from The Book of Ruth by R. J White
Alfred Lengnick & Co., Ltd., 1950
Ruth--soprano; Naomi--mezzo; Boaz—baritone (no Orpah);
Narrator—solo voice or chorus

Wilfrid Mellers’ (b. England, 1914) early work was influenced by the Baroque, but this changed with his increased interest in the music of other cultures (Leslie East in New Grove, vol. 16, 350). He wrote The Song of Ruth as a piece suitable for amateur choral societies. It was performed numerous times shortly after its publication, in modest, mostly provincial productions (Mellers, personal communication, 29.1.2003). Though this analysis is based on a piano score, there are instrument notations throughout, to which I will refer.

Chapter 1 “The Road to Bethlehem”

The Chorus in 4-part harmony opens with:
The women mourn in the land of Moab for the sons of Judah and their wives mourn with the mother (pp. 2-3).

Though other librettos have set scenes that took place before the Scroll narrative actually starts, this one is unique is starting with a Greek chorus commenting on the mourning of the women in Moab. It is also a sort of synopsis of the events recounted in the Scroll’s 1.1-7.

Naomi continues (p. 5, 3rd staff):
Let each depart unto her own people. Tarry not for me my daughters for I am old. I have no more sons to give you. Let each depart unto her own people and I will return into Judah.

These verses summarize 1.11-13. The librettist has altered “each to her mother’s house” (1.8) to “unto her own people.” In the Scroll, the narrator mentions returning to the land of Judah (1.7), but Naomi never does.

The tonality shifts throughout these passages. There are several descending fifths and sevenths, including a major seventh, in the voice (p. 5, 3rd-4th staves), while the strings play ascending and descending chromatic figures (3rd staff). The first clearly tonic chord, in e-flat minor, appears on the word “old” (p. 5, 4th staff, m.3). The opening melody is repeated a half-step lower (p. 6, m.4), leading to the word “return,” which is sung on an octave leap, e’ flat to e’ flat which is then held for 2 1/2 measures (p. 6, 2nd staff, m.4) before ending on “Judah” on e’ flat with trombones playing e-flat minor chords under the voice.

Musical effects suggesting sadness in this short aria are the flattening of the E that dominated the previous section, and the many descending intervals. The closing trombone chords create a somber effect.

Ruth now sings “Intreat me Not” (1.16-17):

Figure 26: Mellers, “Intreat me not,” p. 7

This aria is in E-flat major, a contrast to Naomi’s e-flat minor. As in Naomi’s aria, the orchestra echoes Ruth’s phrases. But here, rather than doubling the voice, the instruments and voice weave around each other, mostly in consonance, sometimes completely in dissonance with one another. One example of dissonance is the word “people” (p. 7, 4th staff, m.3), sung on f’ anticipating the next note, e’ flat; the orchestra sustains an E flat throughout that cadence. The most dissonant moment is notably on the word “death,” where the vocal part has g’’ against the orchestra’s g’’’ flat (p. 8, 4th staff, m.2).

The aria also has strikingly wide leaps for the voice: “Thy people shall be my people” leaps a ninth from e’ flat to f’” on “my” (p. 7, last measure), while “thy God” ascends a tenth, from e’ flat to g”’ flat (p. 8, m.2). The words on these higher pitches are also more sustained than the rest of the text, which is mostly sung on eighth and quarter notes. The aria ends on e’ flat, an octave lower than it started, and with the same somber e-flat minor chords in the trombones that ended Naomi’s previous aria.

The E major opening of this aria musically depicts a sharp contrast to Naomi’s e-minor, portraying Ruth’s more positive outlook. There is a sense of restlessness and excitement in the changing rhythms and wide vocal leaps. The dissonance of Ruth’s G natural against the G flat in the accompaniment on “death” is almost a musical struggle
between the major and minor keys. In the closing measures, e-flat minor wins the struggle. Singing in Naomi's key, accompanied by the same somber trombone chords, Ruth is sharing Naomi's sorrow.

In place of 1.18, where Naomi does not respond to Ruth, after the aria the narrator (alto solo) sings (p. 10):

And Naomi held her daughter to her heart and kissed her.

In the Scroll, Naomi only kisses the two women together, as a parting gesture (1.9). Here, she kisses Ruth out of affection, in place of the silence with which she responds to Ruth's pledge in the Scroll (1.18).

Before Naomi's aria "Call me not Naomi" (Fig. 27; 1.20-21) the narrator (solo) sings:

And Naomi hid her face from the people and said.

This description of a gesture, not found in the Scroll, suggests Naomi's feelings of shame or her wish to not be seen.

The orchestral introduction to "Call me not Naomi" (p.10, m.2) opens with an ostinato B flat in a low register; over this, a rising chromatic, dissonant figure heading for B flat is played by horns (m.3), then trumpets (m.5), with a steady trill played on B flat in the horns throughout. The volume and pitch increase steadily up to Naomi's opening phrase.

The use of brass and dissonance makes this an ominous and very dramatic buildup to the aria. A sense of increasing excitement derives from the directional nature of the dissonant melody, which is heading for B flat.

Figure 27: Mellers. "Call me not Naomi," p. 10, 3rd staff

The 8th note immediately preceding Naomi's opening f' is a dissonant chord of e' against f', another example of two pitches struggling for dominance. Naomi's opening words are sung forte but immediately descend from the starting pitch of f'. The word "Naomi" ends on c'#, and "call me" on the next beat starts on d' flat, an enharmonic shift that in notation lowers the pitch without actually doing so.

This setting of Naomi's words is more jagged and angry-sounding than others (Rumshinsky's and Franck's settings, for example, are poignant), which usually reflect grief more than anger. Wide leaps alternate with chromatic passages. Above the vocal line, the orchestra plays a different melody line, much of it utilizing trumpets in a high range. This could potentially drown out Naomi's words sung in the middle register, but at the same time the piercing trumpet sound greatly intensifies the mood. There is also a
continual ostinato in the bass that descends an octave chromatically from the starting B flat (p. 10, 3rd-4th staves).

The aria does not really “end.” The last measures are marked fortissimo and the words “And the Almighty hath afflicted me” (p. 11, 2nd staff) are marked as heavily accented notes ranging between f' and a' flat, before leaping down a diminished seventh to b'. Even with the sparse and low-range orchestral accompaniment under this phrase, some singers might have problems projecting text in that range.

The descending line in the opening measures signifies pessimism or sadness. The enharmonic shift before the reference to “Mara” subtly anticipates Naomi’s reference to bitterness. This bitterness can be heard in the pounding descending chromatic notes under her voice. Even though the singer’s words might be obscured by the high and loud notes she must sing at the end, the effect is a Naomi almost crazed by anger and grief.

After this aria, the women’s chorus sings (p. 11), “The women mourn in the land of Moab,” followed by a mournful, wordless chorus “Ah,” like a wail (p. 12).

Chapter 2  “The Harvest Field”

After some sung narration and a male chorus, Boaz addresses Ruth (2.8-9, 2.14). She responds (p. 19, last measure):

Why have I found grace in thine eyes, O Boaz? Why hast thou shown favor unto me, a stranger out of Moab? Why hast thou comforted me and spoken kindly unto thy handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thy handmaidens (2.10, 2.13).

The libretto combines two verses, skipping Boaz’s words that come between them (2.11-12). It also changes “foreigner” to “stranger out of Moab,” echoing the reference to Ruth’s origins found in the opening chorus (above).

Ruth’s music in these measures is marked by constantly fluctuating time signatures: measures alternate restlessly between 5/4, 3/4, 4/4, even 7/8 time. Some words are sung to sparse accompaniment, while others have rapid and wildly irregular high-pitched patterns in the background. There are rapid melismas in flute and clarinet (p. 20, 2nd staff) that have a dissonant and modal quality: for example, c-natural in the strings against e7 in the flutes (2nd staff, m.2) and e-natural in the voice against e7 in the flutes (4th staff, m.1).

The fluid rhythmic patterns and vocal leaps against the melismatic accompaniment create a vivid musical portrait of nervousness and excitement. The high melismas, with their modal sound, might be an attempt at “orientalizing,” as they appear around the reference to Moab.

While Boaz instructs his reapers about leaving extra grain for Ruth (2.15-16), Naomi sings at the same time, over the chorus (p. 22, last measure):

The Lord God hath moved the heart of Boaz my kinsman and he shall comfort Ruth my daughter.

Including Naomi at this point in the story gives the impression she is also in the field, observing what has happened between Ruth and Boaz. (Rumshinsky’s work used a similar device: p. 171).

The scene closes with everyone singing together (p. 30):

Blessed be the name of the Lord.
Chapter 3  "The Threshing Floor."

Naomi and Ruth’s dialogue (3.1-5) opens the scene, followed by a mixed chorus singing:

Long, long ago when Ruth came into Boaz side, and laid her down, there to abide, no more from thence to go (pp. 35-36).

This is an interesting use of time- jumping from the present to the distant past, then back to the present. The language imitates that of a fairy-tale.

Ruth enters immediately after the chorus, singing the short phrase:

Behold thy handmaid Ruth (3.7; p. 37, 2nd staff, m.2).

This phrase takes Ruth from f' to a' flat, then abruptly descends a tenth to f'.

This is a musical depiction of breathless excitement.

Boaz continues with 3.10-12, inserting an additional verse (p. 38, 1st staff):

Of thy gentleness art kind to me, as thou wast kind to Naomi thy mother (refers back to 2.11).

Fear not, for all my people know that thou art a virtuous woman. Tarry here this night, and on the morrow I shall do to thee a kinsman’s part, requiting all thy loss.

There is no real home key in this section. On the word “mother” (p. 38, 3rd staff), there is a clear C major chord, followed by two measures of dissonant chords. After this, Boaz sings “Fear not” (3rd staff, m.4) against a C major chord played by oboes, clarinets, and trumpets. But even against a continual tremolo on C, pitches alien to its scale (such as C#) constantly intrude (4th staff). The section moves dynamically from mf at the start to f at the end.

The steadily increasing dynamic range together with the relatively high note of e’, and the constant pull both to and away from the bright C major, all indicate increasing emotional excitement and suspense.

There is a tempo marking of molto calmo before Ruth responds (p. 39, 3rd staff):

Glad is the heart of Ruth; and my tongue shall praise the Lord for all his favor unto me, that he did move the heart of Boaz to my aid. Blessed be God and his servant Boaz.

In the Scroll, Ruth does not address Boaz again in this scene; her only words are in 3.9. In this libretto she not only expresses joy, but also gratitude to God (twice).

This phrase opens on a sung g’, in C major though with the intrusion of dissonant notes. The accompaniment is in the strings, contrasting with the winds and brass that played under Boaz. The rhythm is excited and upbeat. There are chant-like elements to some of Ruth’s phrases (p. 39, 4th staff, m.2).

The use of different instruments to accompany different characters is a character-painting device. The predominance of brass for Boaz is also found in Schumann (p. 159). The chant-like sound of some of Ruth’s phrases once again recalls her “oriental” or “Moabite” origins.

Chapter 4  "The Seed of Israel"

The chorus sums up the remainder of the story (4.13). Following this summary, Naomi sings:
Blessed be the Lord which hath not left me this day without a kinsman. For the son of Ruth shall restore my life and shall nourish my old age. My daughter that loved me, that is better to me than seven sons, she hath born him (4.14-15).

The lines Naomi sings here are spoken by the women to Naomi in the Scroll. Ascribing these words to Naomi attributes to her an awareness and appreciation of what Ruth has done for her not evident in the biblical version.

Both Naomi and Ruth have large parts in this final scene, in contrast to their absence in the Scroll's chapter 4. Most of the biblical chapter, including all the legal proceedings, is deleted. The word “kinsman” here replaces the more accurate “redeemer,” a crucial term in the legal proceedings but perhaps not understood by the librettist.

Ruth follows Naomi’s proclamation with her own, using the same words but changing the pronouns (p.46, m.2):

Blessed be the Lord which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman for the son of Ruth shall restore thy life and shall nourish thy old age. The daughter which loveth thee she hath born him. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

In this version, Naomi and Ruth, rather than the Bethlehemite women, acknowledge what Ruth has done for Naomi. Rather than being silenced at the end, as in the Scroll, both women affirm their roles in the story. In addition, Ruth once again praises God.

After Ruth and Naomi finish, Boaz sings (p. 48):

My son shall be famous in Israel. the son of Ruth shall be the seed of many Kings. The heart of Boaz shall rejoice for the child of my old age shall gladden all the people and of his seed there shall be no end.

Boaz does not speak these words in the Scroll; in fact, after he marries and impregnates Ruth his voice is silenced just like Ruth and Naomi’s. Of note here are Boaz’s understanding that their son will be the “seed of many kings;” his reference to his old age; and his belief that this child will “gladden all the people,” which anchors him in the milieu of public responsibility.

This is sung like a proclamation: the vocal line is unaccompanied, but after each phrase the orchestra plays rapid fortissimo chords in the bass. The time signature shifts in every measure, an adaptation to the word-grouping and part of the proclamation style, also lending these measures the quality of a free chant. Though the key is E major, the final phrase modulates first to C# minor and then unexpectedly to C# major, as Boaz sustains an E on the last word. The closing chorus starts in C# major, for a bright, triumphant sound, accompanied by harp and celeste [also called celesta].

The overall effect of these shifts in pitch is one of triumphant affirmation. This is underlined by the heavily accented chords that come in after each sung phrase as though standing for “amen.” The sudden unexpected chromatic shift from C# minor to C# major is also very affirmative.

Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz sing “Rejoice and no more weep” while the chorus sings:

She who left all for the love of Naomi her mother
She who brought joy into the old age of Boaz.

After many choral “Blessed’s,” the final chorus joins with Ruth and Naomi:

Let every heart be lifted up to sing the praises of our God and Israel’s King.

183
The volume decreases and the key switches to \( \text{c}^\# \) minor (p.54). Ruth reaches a climactic \( \text{b}^\# \) for the strongly rhythmic ending (p. 61), with the unusual dynamic marking of \( \text{fff} \) (also found in Cowen, Pt. I, p. 129).

The chorus refers at the end to Boaz's "old age," which was not mentioned earlier in the libretto. Perhaps it is brought in here to accentuate the miraculous nature of Ruth's pregnancy. The praises of "Israel's King" could refer to God but also to David, an example of foreshadowing. Though the closing line is not Psalms or Isaiah, as in some earlier oratorios (Table E, p. 229), the goal is to anchor this work in the tradition of religious oratorios whose primary purpose was to praise God.

Summary

There is no significant change to the text, which is largely from the Scroll. Naomi's presence has been increased, as she appears in scenes from which she should be absent. There is new text mostly for the chorus, which serves as a "Greek" chorus to comment on actions and emotions not found in the text itself. This offers an insight into characters' inner feelings never found in the Scroll.

Musically, Mellers utilizes several devices seen in other works: shifting tonalities and rhythms, which here give a fluid feeling to many sections; many wide leaps for the voices; and a few instances of "orientalizing" through modal phrases. Mellers uses different instruments to musically paint characters, such as brass for Boaz and strings for Ruth. [This technique cannot be commented on for most composers, in the absence of an orchestral score or instrumental indications in the piano score].

Adrian Beecham, Ruth—Cantata

London, Joseph Williams Ltd., 29 Enfold St., Marylebone, W.1
US: Mills Music Inc., NY, 1957
Ruth—soprano; Naomi—alto; Orpah—mezzo; Boaz—baritone
Narrator—soprano; Chorus (mixed)

Adrian Beecham (b. 1904, d. 1982) was the son of the famous conductor Sir Thomas Beecham. His most successful early work was an opera based on The Merchant of Venice.

This is one of only two works that uses exclusively text from Ruth (the other one is Aloni); Beecham even indicates the verses in the score. He includes virtually all of chapters 1 and 2, and selected verses from chapters 3 and 4 (KJV). He wrote this work for the choir at Johns Memorial Church in Farmville, Virginia.

Chapter 1

After the narrator sings the opening verses, Naomi's first aria is to the text of 1.8-9, "Go, return" (p. 12, 3rd staff). There is no home key, but a strong suggestion of \( \text{C}^\# \) in the Phrygian mode. Naomi starts on \( \text{c}^\# \) and the aria does not rise more than a fifth above this note until near the end. The orchestra repeatedly plays an open fifth of \( \text{C}^\# \) and \( \text{G}^\# \) in a syncopated rhythm, having the effect of an ostinato or chant under Naomi's melody. The chant-like phrases are repeated in the accompaniment as echoes of Naomi's and also polyphonically, while she sings (p. 13 and on). This general pattern is not altered until it is repeated on a higher pitch (p. 13, reh. \#9), with the open fifth chords in the accompaniment briefly changing to \( \text{G}^\# - \text{D}^\# \), and then changing the pattern.

The weaving together of the voice and orchestra grows more complex beginning with "The Lord grant you" (1.9; p. 13, reh. \#9), with more chromaticism and strange, unexpected intervals. The longest phrase, with melismas giving it the quality of a wail, is on the last
word, “husband” (p. 14, m.3), taking the voice up to e’’ before ending on c’’#, an octave higher than the opening note. Then the ostinato fifths in the accompaniment return.

There is little obvious emotion expressed in this modal and chant-like music. Naomi ending on a higher note than the starting one could indicate optimism and hope. But the opening part is repeated at the end (standard musical convention of ABA form), concluding on a dissonant chord which could indicate hopelessness.

Orpah starts the duet “Surely we will return with thee” (1.10; p. 16, 2nd staff), followed after two measures by Ruth. The time signature is an unusual 5/2, creating phrases so long as to give the impression there are no bar lines. In fact, a few measures later the bar lines are virtually erased (p. 16, 3rd staff). As in the earlier solo, there is no audible home key, but the impression of A-flat in the Mixolydian mode. Orpah starts on a’ flat over an A-flat major chord, and Ruth starts a fifth higher accompanied by the same chord. Ruth echoes each of Orpah’s phrases in a higher range, while Orpah continues under Ruth’s voice, leading to an ambivalence about which woman is “in charge.”

The duet grows louder and higher, reaching a’’ flat on “people” (p. 17, m.4). There is sparse accompaniment throughout, only syncopated chords. Near the end, two phrases are sung unaccompanied, possibly to make the dissonance between the voices more obvious: on “thee.” Ruth sings f’’ against Orpah’s g’ flat, joined then by an c flat in the bass accompaniment (p. 17, 2nd staff, m.3). In the second unaccompanied phrase, on “people,” Ruth holds a d’’ flat against Orpah’s e’’ (3rd staff, m.1). Both of these dissonant moments involve sustained notes. Their final harmony is b’ flat and e’’ flat, an open fourth. The tone of the duet, like the rest of the cantata, is that of a chant.

The music of Orpah and Ruth could be interpreted as a comment on their relationship, since the ambivalence of who is really in charge is reflected musically. The two seem to affirm each other. The fact that their voices seldom sing together homophonically, and in fact are often in sharp dissonance or in open fourths, could musically indicate a kind of separation and could be highlighting their individuality.

Naomi’s next aria is “Turn again, my daughters” (1.11-13):

Figure 28: Beecham, “Turn again,” p. 18, 3rd staff

This aria is in a faster tempo than the previous section. The key is an ambiguous D-flat major and b’ flat minor, later with a suggestion of A-flat Mixolydian (p.19, top). Like the earlier aria, it stays in a low range and is marked by chant-like figures against mostly syncopated chords in the accompaniment, or rapid ascending arpeggios and runs.
As in the previous aria, the second part (p. 19, reh. #12) repeats the same melodic figures in a higher range. The last section, "Would ye tarry" (1.13: p. 20, reh. #13) has a much fuller accompaniment, with the higher instruments echoing Naomi's tunes and the bass playing four groups of 16th note figures. There are three octave leaps here: first on "would ye tarry" (reh. #13), from a flat-a' flat; then on "would ye stay" (p. 21, m. 3), d' flat-d'' flat; finally on "the Lord is gone out" (p. 22, m. 2-3), e' flat-e'' flat. She sings her final words, "against me" (p. 22, 2nd staff), on melismatic figures that continue for three full measures. At the end of this passage, Naomi sings an unaccompanied f', leading to a momentary resolution in the next measure's D flat major. But the final ending of the aria is a dissonant chord, containing within it both b flat minor and D flat major (p. 22, 4th staff, m. 2).

There is great subtlety in the representation of emotional states. The raises in pitch in Naomi's octave leaps indicate an intensification of emotion. The prolonged melismatic figures of her final phrase sound like a moan. The very temporary resolution dissolving into dissonance is a musical portrayal of dashed hopes.

The next aria is Ruth's "Entreat me not" (1.16-17):

The solo line is much more sustained and melodious, and less chant-like than Naomi's music. The third part of the aria, to the text "Thy people" (p. 26, last measure) starts a fourth higher (on g') than the opening part, but does not remain in this high tessitura. The last line, "The Lord do so to me" (p. 28, m. 2) also starts on g' but remains in this range, and is the most dramatic part of the aria. This part is all sung above e', reaching a'' on "also" (2nd staff, m. 2). There are echoes of Naomi's earlier chant-like melismas, but transformed by both the higher range and the dramatic and heavy chords under the vocal line. These contrast greatly to the sparse accompaniment of Naomi's earlier aria. The words "part thee" (p. 28, 3rd staff, m. 2-3) are accompanied by an unexpected C major chord, the 4th degree of G Doric, under Ruth's g''. The voice then drops a seventh to a', sung unaccompanied. The orchestra follows with a few measures of unresolved phrases, before murmuring to a close on a soft tremolo fifth chord of G-D, with a suspended C.

Again, the messages about character's emotional states are suggested in subtle ways: the steadily higher pitches suggest increasing excitement, along with the louder and heavier accompaniment. As in the last aria, there is a sense of promised resolution at the conclusion that is almost immediately shattered by dissonance. There is still suspense at this stage of the story and this is reflected in the music.

The next aria is "Call me not Naomi" (1.20-21):
The first three measures are in C major. The opening measure is sung unaccompanied; when the orchestra does play, it is only sparse chords, playing on the off-beats. On the word “mara” (“bitter”), the accompaniment is in d minor, against Naomi’s e’. On the last syllable of the word, the b’ becomes b’ flat. The highest note of the aria is on the word “full,” e’ sustained for five beats over open fifths that become an E major arpeggio in the orchestra (p. 32, reh. #21). “Why then call ye me Naomi” is sung unaccompanied, and the phrases that follow lead up to another e’ on “Lord” (p. 33, top). But in contrast to the e’ on “full,” there is no tonic E major but only ambiguous harmonies. The voice continues to descend from this point. The aria ends accompanied by an arpeggio of open fifths between E and B (p. 33, 3rd staff, m.3). So the aria that had started with a simple C major tune ends in E Phrygian, known as the “lament” mode, and also ends on Naomi’s lowest note, e’.

The flattening of the B on the end of “Mara” is a musical representation of the shift from the name “Naomi” to “Mara.” The climactic moment of the aria comes on the word “full,” which lands on a tonic E major to musically paint Naomi’s memories of a happier time. But by the end, there is no tonic but rather a lamenting mode, a bitter, empty sound. It is a short journey from consonance to dissonance, musically painting Naomi’s mood darkening as she relates her story.

Chapter 2

There is a slight alteration, with the deletion of the narrator’s words from 2.7 and 2.10. Ruth sings the text “I pray you let me glean” (2.7) herself, in a short “Pastorale” (p. 45). This 9-measure song, with its steady rhythm and less complex harmonies, has a folk-tune quality but with dissonant intrusions (B flat against a sung a’ in m.3; d minor chord under sustained g’ in m.8). C major is heard in 1 1/2 measures, on the word “reapers” (m.6-7).

The lack of modality and chant imitation found throughout the work may be an attempt to portray a simpler Ruth than was seen in her music of the previous chapter; or a Ruth trying to appear simple to appeal to Boaz’s chivalry. On the other hand, this song may just be an attempt to create a pastoral mood.

Boaz’s aria “Hearest thou not” (2.8; p. 45, reh. #8) starts in c minor and 4/4 time, but has a chanting quality and no sense of a home key. The accompaniment echoes most of Boaz’s phrases in different keys.

Ruth’s next words, “Why have I found grace” (2.10; reh. #10) are sung to a simple 9-measure melody. She enters on b’ flat, the tonality in which Boaz just ended. The tune is initially sung unaccompanied, then shifts into E-flat major, relative to Boaz’s ending B-flat
major, to a simple accompaniment. The bottom note of the accompaniment is in the first inversion, so there is still not a strong sense of a home key. There is a brief sound of B flat major before the ending on an open fifth chord, B flat and F (p. 48, top).

The accompaniment to Boaz’s words to Ruth, “Hearest thou not,” includes repetition of Boaz’s phrases, which musically underlines them while also suggesting pomposity. Ruth entering on a note that is part of the closing chord of Boaz’s aria musically shows a kind of connection with Boaz, or possibly subservience.

Boaz sings a slightly longer aria. “It has been fully showed me” (2.11). Ruth’s response (2.13: p. 50, reh. #13) sounds entirely different from her previous “Pastorale.” In this short section, she sings more of the “chant” style heard in Naomi’s and Boaz’s music, and in her own when she was with Naomi. The difference is that here she sings in her highest range, reaching a $b'$ flat (p. 51, m.4). She sings the same kind of melismas as earlier, but all in a much higher tessitura. The section ends on an open fifth chord, B flat-F, as heard earlier.

Assuming the “chant” style is a truer musical portrait of each character, then in this scene Ruth seems willing to show more of her true self. In any case, in this section her music is more complex and in a higher range, showing more feeling.

Chapter 3 After Naomi’s instructions to Ruth (3.1-4: p. 57, reh. #2), Ruth’s response is omitted (3.5). The dialogue between Ruth and Boaz beginning with “Who art thou?” (3.9: p. 59) is followed by Boaz’s aria (3.10-13: p. 59). The rest of the chapter (3.14-18) is omitted, including the Ruth-Naomi scene.

Chapter 4 Boaz’s music in this scene (p. 65) has orientalist features, such as chromatic complementarity, and resembles chant more than any other part of the cantata. The chorus sings “We are witnesses” (4.11-12) in unison, followed by a two-part fugato with the sopranos and tenors against the altos and basses (pp. 66-67). After these verses, there is an orchestral interlude played allegro con brio (pp. 69-70). The final line of these verses, “be famous in Bethlehem” (4.12), concludes the oratorio. As the chorus sustains the final C major chord, the orchestra plays an ascending C major scale together with an Aeolian scale a third above it (p. 71). This is a very upbeat conclusion in an almost-conventional key, but with the addition of a modal scale consistent with the rest of the work.

Summary

There are no significant alterations from the Scroll text; omissions made do not seem to have any purpose other than simplification. The device of alternating between a narrator, soloists, and chorus effectively presents different points of view. When the chorus serves as narrator, it usually sings in unison, effectively imitating the sound of a single voice.

This is very subdued music. Emotional undercurrents are almost as hard to tease out as they are in the original Scroll. Subtle techniques like gradually ascending pitch or volume in the voice, sometimes over a long continuous section, are usually the only indication of increased excitement. Beecham depicts the shift from “Naomi” to “Mara” in Naomi’s aria “Call me not” with an unexpected flattening of the note sung at the end of “Mara” (p. 187). The use of “oriental” modes colors the work with a tinge of exoticism, and this seems to have been Beecham’s primary interest. Many sections end on open fifths rather than on more traditional tonic chords. A combination of adjacent perfect fifths in 20th century harmony generally denotes stability.


Ruth—mezzo: Naomi—soprano: Orpah—soprano: Boaz—tenor: Chorus
Lennox Berkeley (b. 1903, d. 1989), like his colleague Benjamin Britten, wrote a specific work with tenor Peter Pears in mind: the part of Boaz in *Ruth* was sung by Pears in the 1956 premiere. *Ruth* was performed again in 1983 (concert performance, not staged), at the Cheltenham Festival, when Berkeley was 80. More recently, as part of the Berkeley centenary celebrations, it was again performed at the Cheltenham Festival on July 20, 2003. This was billed as a “semi-staging,” but in reality the opera has not been fully staged since the 1950’s, when it was performed several times (Peter Reynolds, personal communication, 12/9/2003).

The small chamber orchestra in this work consists of two flutes, horn, piano, percussion and strings. My references to orchestration are based on an audio tape.

There is a complete break with older tradition of voice types: Naomi here is a soprano, Ruth a mezzo, Boaz a tenor; in keeping with the opera genre, there is no narrator.” In the libretto by Crozier (who was one of Britten’s librettists as well), modern text is interspersed with the biblical text (modified KJV).

Chapter 1 Scene 1

The opening trio begins with Naomi singing a theme that was heard in the orchestral introduction and becomes a leitmotif in the opera. This is to be sung “with fervor”:

Once more I see your green and golden hills, O Judah! (all repeat O Judah); Once again I stand, my journey done, within your promised land (Ruth and Orpah repeat O Judah).

O Bethlehem, my dear beloved home where the traveler finds rest.

There is no equivalent to this text in Naomi’s words in the Scroll. The only mention of Bethlehem and Judah there is in the narration (1.1-2). Naomi here is a flesh-and-blood woman with feelings of nostalgia, and relief at returning to her home. There is also a foregrounding of “Judah” over Bethlehem, which represents an important place and group identity (also found in Schumann, p. 160).

Ruth and then Orpah echo the last words of Naomi’s phrases. Naomi is definitely the strongest voice in this trio; she sings a melody line with only a high tremolo in the orchestra to accompany her, while the other two intone “O Judah” as a kind of wail, accompanied by heavy and dissonant chords. As the trio continues with “O Bethlehem” (p. 3, reh. #4), the three voices start together before going their own ways; they continue to all sing the same words, increasingly louder. The last few measures are sung a capella by all three voices (p. 6, top), ending finally on an open pianissimo fifth chord, B-F (reh. #7). Naomi continues (p. 6, measure after reh. #7):

But, ah, who will remember me? What friend will greet me? Who will laugh to see this broken hearted exile Naomi?

This text expresses Naomi’s sadness and tears while at the same time capturing some of the self-pity found in 1.11-13. It is very explicit gap-filling for both emotions and evaluation of those emotions.

She sings “Naomi” twice, like a wail (p. 6, last measure to p. 7, top), echoed by Ruth and then Orpah to a different and slower musical figure. “Turn back my daughters” (1.8) is sung as recitative (p. 7, 2nd staff, m.2), opening with an ascending fifth sung forte; only

In a 1968 BBC Radio 3 broadcast, each of the three “Scenes” opened with a spoken narration over orchestral background. This was a device used by the BBC for opera broadcasts at that time to “set the scene” for the listeners at home, without breaking the music’s continuity (Peter Reynolds, personal communication, 10/11/03).
sustained chords in the piano accompany this recitative. Ruth and Orpah protest (1.10: p. 8, top). Naomi repeats the line “Turn back, my daughters” (1.11) to the same ascending fifth, but starting a fourth higher and with a more frenzied and dramatic accompaniment under her g” (p. 9, measure after reh. =9).

The open fifth chord that closes the first part of this trio might musically represent (momentary) rest. The repetition of the name “Naomi” like a wail, ending with Ruth’s unaccompanied voice, is an effective musical representation of the biblical “they raised their voices and wept.” The pathos of the music comes closer to a weeping sound in this scene than any other score examined. Naomi’s repetition of her command in a louder and higher voice expresses the increased vehemence of her words.

Naomi now sings a prayer to God (p. 9, reh. =10):

Almighty Father, let my cry come unto thee! Be merciful in thy reply. O comfort me! Against me hast thou set thy face, in indignation, depriving me of thy sweet grace and consolation. My husband thou hast doomed to die, my sons hast taken. In widowhood and beggary I am forsaken...

O God of Judah, let my prayer to pity move thee.

When Naomi blames God for her misfortunes in the Scroll, she never addresses God in the second person as she does here. As bitter and hopeless as she sounds even in this text, there is an intimation of a relationship with a personal God that is not evident in the biblical passage.

The opening words are sung on two sets of repeated d’s, almost like a recitation, under high, repeated 16th note figures in the strings. After “Against me” the vocal line ascends and descends the scale, no longer a chant (p. 10, 2nd staff). Near the end, there is a reprise of the earlier recitation style on “O God of Judah.”

High strings are often used for an “ethereal” effect (Cooke 1959, 111: he offers Violetta’s death in Verdi’s La Traviata as the perfect example). A “religious” tone is achieved by the imitation of liturgical chant that opens and closes the aria.

Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to go back:

Orpah thou art very young. Return to thy mother who awaits thee (p. 14, last measure- p. 15, top).

The Scroll never hints at the age of any of the three women. This single line of text fills the gap of Orpah’s motivation: she is imagined here as much younger than Ruth and therefore not mature enough to leave her mother. It has always been assumed that both Ruth and Orpah were married for ten years; the Scroll actually only says Elimelech’s family stayed in Moab ten years. The precise year when the sons married is never stated.

Instead of departing at once (1.14), Orpah sings a long aria, ending on a sustained b”’. The range and quality of this vocal music suggest a very young woman. This is a complete innovation (Orpah does not have a solo aria in any other work discussed), and gives Orpah a reality she does not have elsewhere. It makes her departure into a dramatic moment, although the aria portrays sweetness rather than passion.

After the aria, Orpah departs, as indicated in Naomi’s singing “Behold thy sister” (1.15: p. 19, reh. =29). These words are sung to the leitmotif that opened the opera, which referred to Judah. Naomi ends on a d’” which then shifts enharmonically to e’ flat on which Ruth enters and responds (p. 19, 2nd staff):

Nay, entreat me not to leave thee! Forbid me not to follow after thee!

These decalamatory words are sung as a recitative, immediately followed by the aria “Whither thou goest” (1.16-17 KJV):
This melody has a steady pulse of 3/4 time and a suggestion of both F major and f minor; the home key is rarely evident. On “where thou diest” (p. 20, reh. #22), the orchestra plays a chord of G-C against the sung f’; the F functions as a suspension to E, the third of a C major chord, and the orchestra follows this. Such suspensions are found throughout the aria. The vocal line is characterized by chromatic complementarity, varying from whole to half step intervals.

The main theme is repeated three times on increasingly higher notes. The voice dips to its lowest note, c’, on the word “buried” (p. 20, measure before reh. #23). “Nothing but death” is repeated to the same melodic pattern but off the beat and in a dotted rhythm. The closing phrase “And thy God” (p. 21, m.2 after reh. #24) reprises the opening notes of the aria, with a small change in the final 16th-note phrase: the interval of a major second is flattened to a minor second.

The aria ends on a sustained b’ flat over a C7 chord (p. 21, 2nd staff). But when the voice stops, only a sustained middle C is heard in the orchestra, the closest to a resolution this music reaches; there is no C major in the orchestra independent of the voice.

There are subtle suggestions of Ruth’s emotional state, mostly in the small pitch and rhythm changes. The repetition of a theme in increasingly higher pitches musically depicts increased excitement or agitation. The rhythmic alteration in the words referring to death also illustrate greater agitation, and there is musical word-painting with the word “buried” on the lowest note in the aria.

At the end of the aria, Ruth has not found resolution. The tonality almost becomes C major, which is often associated with purity and has been used by Berkeley to that purpose (Dickinson, 179); but the presence of a B flat keeps the chord a C7. The flattening of Ruth’s a’ in the last little 16th-note run is a subtle musical signal of doubt or memory of past grief, both also reflected in the lack of tonal resolution.

After Ruth’s aria, Ruth and Naomi sing a short unaccompanied passage in which they agree to go on together to Bethlehem. The a capella setting effectively mimics speech (p. 21, reh. #25):

Come, daughter, (come, mother), come my well-beloved, Let us go on together, let us go hence to Bethlehem.

The major change from the Scroll here is the aspect of mutual consent.

On Naomi’s entrance into Bethlehem, the chorus sings (p. 22, 4th staff):

Is this that Naomi who was called beautiful?

Only the first half of this question is in the original (1.19); the people never refer to Naomi who was beautiful, but this idea is found in rabbinc midrash (ch. 3, p. 63).
This is sung contrapuntally with irregular placement of rhythmic patterns within the bar—for example, there is conflict between 3/4 and 6/8 meters (p. 26, top).

The effect produced by the meter conflict is one of great agitation and excitement. The tone of the chorus is one of mockery.

They stop abruptly; there is a suspended note in the horn (p. 26, 3rd staff, m.2), after which the tempo changes to lento and a solo cello plays a two-measure solo (p. 27, top). Then Naomi enters and sings an a capella recitative (p. 27, 1st-2nd staves):

No! Call me not Naomi! Call me Mara, for the Almighty hath humbled me, and filled my soul with bitterness.

This is a paraphrase of 1.20; a significant addition is “humbled me,” highlighting an aspect of Naomi’s personality, namely humility, present in this opera but not in the Scroll.

The word “Mara” is sung on an ascending fourth, a 'flat-d' flat (p. 27, 2nd staff). It is jarring because her earlier words seemed to be in G major. The word “bitterness” is sung to a chromatic phrase with dotted rhythm and small intervals such as diminished thirds and minor seconds.

The solo cello, with its mellow and poignant sound, was chosen to establish a mood for Naomi’s entrance. The final word “bitterness” sounds almost like a moan because of the small intervals and dotted rhythm, a reference to traditional funeral music.

After this recitative, a new allegro section in the orchestra leads directly to Naomi’s aria:

Figure 32. Berkeley, “Call me not Naomi.” p. 28, reh. #32

Ah, call me not Naomi, let Mara be my name (this line is sung several times). A woman full of misery, a widow filled with shame. Nay, why will ye mock at me! I beg ye to forget a name that calls to memory past sorrow, past regret.

Naomi never refers to herself as a widow or as feeling shame, in the Scroll. This opera’s portrayal is of a downtrodden, shamed, and humbled Naomi. The idea of the Bethlehemites mocking her is developed further in the next scene (see below).

This aria is in quick 3/4 time without an evident home key; for example, while Naomi starts on d''', there is an ostinato C in the bass. The word “Mara” is sung to a descending fourth, d''' flat to a' flat, the exact reversal of the pitches sung unaccompanied as an ascending fourth on “Mara” in the recitative just heard (p. 27, 2nd staff). The d''' flat here, however, is yet more dissonant against the C in the orchestra. This C against D-flat is heard again (p. 29, 2 measures before reh. #34; p. 31, where the interval is sustained throughout the 3rd-4th staves).
The pitch ascends to G on "shame" and then G″ on "Ah" (p. 29, 2nd-3rd staves), where the accompaniment changes into sharply dissonant chords marking the three beats of this bar. The second repetition of the opening phrase is found at the end (p. 31, 2nd staff), except the final word "name" this time goes up to G″ flat. The closing chord heard in the upper parts of the orchestra is an A-flat major triad in the second inversion, but the bass includes a dissonant D flat along with C, the first inversion of the A-flat chord.

**Subtle changes in pitch and volume in this aria offer clues to Naomi’s feelings.** The theme itself is a series of descending notes, which always stands for sadness or even despair. Dissonance is prevalent throughout this score, but in this aria one particular dissonance—C against D flat—comes to represent Naomi’s bitterness in particular. The two notes are first heard together on the word "Mara" and then continue to intrude, as a reminder of the meaning behind that name. Even when there is a tonic chord at the end that includes Naomi’s note, this dissonance is not resolved. In Berkeley’s musical language, there is no true resolution at this point in the story.

The scene closes with a women’s chorus softly singing “Where is Naomi?” while Naomi sings “Is there no end to my sorrows, O God” up to a″ (pp. 34-35).

**Chapter 2 Scene 2**

When the crowd sees Ruth, they turn against her, calling her an enemy and a Moabite, shouting:

> A stranger, a stranger. Drive her away, cast her out, stone her!

The words are hammered out, with a strong bass repetition of unison octaves and dissonant chords in the treble, and angry, syncopated rhythms. The music, punctuated by heavy drumbeats, vividly portrays an angry mob. Ruth pleads with them in a sustained line above their notes (pp. 64-68).

Boaz enters and says to the crowd:

> Is this how ye repay the blessings God has given ye? Shame upon you! Are ye like wolves to greet a stranger in this fashion! Have ye no mercy in your souls? Has Judah no compassion?

They respond:

> She is a witch, a Moabite, stone her! Have we not widows of our own? Why should we pity her? She has no claim upon our charity. She is a witch! (this last line is shouted, not sung)

The Head Reaper says:

> They fear her. Master, because she is a woman of another race (p. 73).

*The biblical injunction against Moabites (Lev. 23.4) could be considered the source of this xenophobia, but it is presented here in a modern guise.*

Boaz wants to punish the crowd, but Ruth pleads for them in a recitative (pp. 80-81):

> They are like children, they fear what they don’t know, hate what they cannot understand. Be merciful to them.

Then she continues (p. 81, reh. #29):

> Ah, let not anger fill your eyes! Have mercy, do not punish those who fear their ancient foes. Be merciful, I beg. be wise.

*Modern ideas like those expressed by Ruth are mingled in this scene with reference to biblical ideas like charity and forgiveness, possibly influenced by Berkeley’s devout*
Catholicism is known to have worked very closely with Crazier on the libretto. There is probably also a socio-political foundation to these words, written so soon after WWII.

Ruth’s words are sung softly to a simple melody in 3/4 time, accompanied by strings playing soft chords. The pleading tune is repeated several times, each time at a higher starting pitch. Boaz then enters singing the same melody:

How fair this maiden and how wise in understanding, she pleads for those who prove themselves her foes.

Ruth is never described in the Scroll either as fair or wise; qualities such as kindness and loyalty are ascribed to her here based on her actions towards Naomi, and the midrashists ascribed modesty to her based on her behavior in the field (chap. 3, pp. 64-66). But Boaz perceives a different Ruth because this entire scene places Ruth in a position to show qualities she had no chance to show in the original narrative.

After Boaz recapitulates the tune just sung by Ruth, the two voices weave in and out of each other contrapuntally and also blending (p. 82, 2nd staff). The tenor range is taken advantage of in this short section, reaching a' flat (3rd staff, m. 2). It is unusual to have Ruth and Boaz singing simultaneously in a true duet.

The fact that Ruth and Boaz sing together but to different tunes and words is a musical way of showing that both are lost in their own thoughts. The coming together of their voices indicates a closeness between them right from their first meeting. Yet at the same time, Boaz is singing about Ruth in the third person, while Ruth is singing directly to Boaz, so at this point the relationship is depicted as one-sided.

After another lengthy Ruth-Boaz duet (pp. 85-93), the scene closes with Boaz and the chorus of reapers singing together:

In Ruth and in her seed, shall Israel be blessed indeed.

This text seems out of place, and certainly seems to be jumping the gun in terms of plot development. Perhaps it is a way of reassuring the listener that the next scene will turn out well.

Chapter 3 Scene 3

In a departure from the Scroll, Naomi actually takes Ruth to the threshing floor. Ruth sings:

I am afraid lest any man should see me in these fine garments.

This fear is never expressed in the Scroll, where the reader is left to wonder how Ruth felt about following Naomi’s commands.

Naomi reassures Ruth (p. 106, 2nd staff):

Fear not, beloved Ruth! Thou shalt find rest within the heart of one who loves thee well. The sorrows of thy widowhood shall cease: thou shalt find happiness and peace within the house of Israel. Thy womb shall bring forth children to redeem my husband and my two dear sons from shame. Thou, my daughter shall preserve them from the darkness of oblivion. In thee the dead shall live again.

The only verse resembling a Scroll verse is "thou shalt find rest" (variant on 3:1). Otherwise there are several new ideas. Naomi refers to the sorrows of Ruth’s widowhood. Ruth’s function: to bear Boaz’s children-- is clearly stated. The notion that shame and oblivion would result if she failed to do this is new, although the danger of family “oblivion” is implicit in the biblical concept of “redeeming.” But the explicitness of the threat here makes the imperative to marry Boaz all the stronger.
The aria (reh. #6) begins calmly, with a gentle lullaby-like melody. The tone changes on “house of Israel” (p. 107, 3rd staff, m.2), where loud chords accompany the voice, which rises to a “6” before descending. On the words “Thy womb” (reh. #7), the aria resumes the tone of the opening section. The orchestra concludes with the melody heard to the words “Thy womb shall bring forth” (reh. #7).

The calm tone of this aria is meant to portray Naomi reassuring Ruth of her future. The sudden rise in pitch and volume significantly depict Naomi’s excitement at the prospect of Ruth’s entry into the house of Israel. The melody referring to Ruth’s womb is appropriately reprised in the orchestra on the reference to the dead living again in Ruth.

Following Naomi’s aria, a group of laborers approaches the threshing floor and Ruth and Naomi hide. Several harvest songs follow, including references to drinking and dancing. Boaz and the reapers sing hymns of praise to God.

This lengthy and complex choral interlude is radically different in mood from the rest of the opera. The rhythms are highly syncopated and there is a folk element in the tunes. It sets a mood of joyfulness and even drunkenness, contrasting greatly with the remainder of the scene (pp. 113-162).

After this choral interlude, Ruth sings a short prayer (p. 164, top):

To thee, beloved God, I do commend my spirit. In thee I trust: be thou mine aid. With thee beside to comfort me. I shall not falter. Thou art near. I shall not be afraid.

The opening verse is taken from the NT, specifically Luke 23.46, Jesus’ last words. There is also a similar sentiment expressed to that of Psalm 23.4. This solo certainly portrays a Ruth with far more religious sentiment than in the Scroll.

The opening melody seems to mimic Naomi’s previous aria (p. 106), but the fourth note becomes a half step interval instead of a major third. There is an octave leap on “in thee,” from “6” to “6” but otherwise the beginning is calm. The accompaniment seems to tell another story: each of the four beats in the measure is marked heavily in the bass. Later in the aria there are constantly fluctuating time signatures (from 2/4 to 3/4 to 4/4, back to 2/4, back to 3/4, all in the space of five measures: p. 165). Flutes play ornate melismas, derived from a scitzer pattern, over the voice, almost a descent with echoes of Bach. The closing measures in the orchestra calm down, playing a slow series of descending chromatic tones. An echo of the “Whither thou goest” leitmotif is heard in the orchestra (p. 165, 4th staff).

Ruth’s opening tune starts identically to Naomi’s melody in which she sang reassuring words (“Fear not”) but shifts to a chromatic interval instead of the expected major third. This is a subtle indicator of uncertainty or fear. The heavy beats at the opening of this aria seem to be sounding out Ruth’s heavy heartbeat. (Dickinson says of this passage, “Her heart is pounding,” 183). The flute sound is often associated with purity, and that is probably true in a passage like this. The musical flashback to Ruth’s “Whither thou goest” of the first scene shows how far Ruth will go to fulfill her pledge.

Naomi then encourages Ruth to approach Boaz, which she does as she sings (based on 3.9):

In the name of my dead husband, thy kinsman, Naomi’s son. I beseech thee o my Master. Spread thy cloak upon me.

Boaz asks:

Wherefore shall I do this thing?
She responds:
That I may be thy wife. Yea, verily, that I may bring up sons unto Naomi, lest her name perish from the land and be forgotten (p. 168, top).

This is changed from the original, where Ruth simply informed Boaz that he was a kinsman. Here she is much more direct in stating what she wants. In another deviation from the Scroll, where she never mentions Naomi’s name, she refers to Naomi twice. This text spells out the idea that Ruth’s purpose is to bring up sons for Naomi, which Naomi had stated earlier. This idea is never stated outright in the Scroll, where it is a result but not a stated aim. While Ruth sings this passage, the orchestra plays the leitmotif of Ruth’s “Whither thou goest,” a way of pointing to Ruth’s dedication to Naomi as her primary motive in approaching Boaz.

A sudden, loud dissonant chord introduces Boaz’s dramatic response; entering on a forte g♯’ (p. 168, 3rd staff, m.2):
Ah, Ruth! Thou comest in the stillness of the night, as once the angels came immeasurably bright to Jacob, father of our race. Lo here I see the clear enchanting vision of eternity that Jacob saw!

Boaz is given a more Jewish and patriarchal stamp by his reference to Jacob, and Ruth is elevated by his comparing of her to the angels seen by Jacob (Gen. 28.12). Ruth is also called lovely, innocent, graceful, and young, qualities not assigned to her in the Scroll.

The rhythm is a placid 4/4 and the calm accompaniment is played by piano. Boaz repeats the name “Ruth” twice, both times on descending fifths but the second time starting a sixth lower (p. 168, last measure, p. 169, m.2) and sung mf in contrast to the opening forte. The aria is a kind of passacaglia based on a twelve-note row, though the row is not treated consistently (Dickinson, 185).

Using the piano alone here adds an intimacy that the usual orchestral accompaniment would lack. Repeating “Ruth” twice is an effective way of portraying Boaz’s excitement as well as tenderness, in the way the name is repeated more softly the second time. The passacaglia at the end creates a change of atmosphere building up to resolution of the plot.

After further dialogue, and an aria for Ruth, a soft orchestral introduction leads to the love duet, marked espressivo (Fig. 42). This section opens as Boaz spreads his cloak over Ruth. Then they sing together:

Figure 33: Berkeley. “Lo my beloved,” p. 176, 2nd staff, m.3

Lo, my beloved, my soul’s delight, to thee I give my hand. Thine shall I be eternally. My children shall arise up and call thee blessed. The fruit of thy womb shall praise thee in the gates.
The third and fourth of these verses paraphrase Prov. 31:28, verses that praise a good wife. As in other works that also quote this proverb (Schumann, p. 162), or verses from Song of Songs, the “biblicized” text places the story in a different realm than an ordinary love story.

The opening differs significantly from most of the score, as it features triads of thirds. It opens with several measures of single sustained chords in the flute section, an ethereal sound, modulating to reach a C minor chord, the home key for this section. The tonality is not sustained, but it is an interesting attempt to ground these very traditional-sounding lyrics in more traditional-sounding tonality, even if only for a few measures. The first section is a kind of round, or passacaglia, as Ruth repeats exactly what Boaz has just sung while he continues. There is a nice musical touch on “arise,” which is sung on an ascending scale (p. 178, 2nd staff, m.2). Ruth and Boaz continue to sing separately and then come together in harmony, though not on the same lyrics until the final phrase, “shall praise thee,” which is sung in unison to a dotted rhythm with high tremolo accompaniment (p. 179, 3rd staff, m.2). They end on a unison G over a C major chord and rapid scale (p. 180).

This is a musical depiction of two people uniting, but its tone is gentle rather than passionate. Significantly, only when they are praising God do they sing the same words at the same moment.

Chapter 4

There is really no chapter 4, which means the conflict found in the Scroll is eliminated; instead it is a continuation of the opera’s Scene 3. In an interesting plot change, Boaz immediately calls his people from sleep, in words set to a very excited rhythm, and Naomi steps forward to embrace Ruth. A trio between the three follows. Then Boaz proclaims to the crowd:

Behold this maid. For love of Naomi she left her father’s home, forsook her gods, departed from the land where she did dwell. Hither she came, like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the land of Israel.

The legal issues about the proper redeemer are completely eliminated, simplifying the story. Some of the text sung by Boaz is spoken by the people in the Scroll (4.11), while some recalls the narrative of chapter 1, as if the people need reminding of Ruth’s whole story. This makes sense in light of their previous hostility to her. Presumably Boaz needs to tell the crowd Ruth’s story now to avoid any future hostility. The reference to “her father’s home” replaces Naomi’s reference to the “mother’s house” (1.8). It makes sense that a man like Boaz as portrayed here would refer to the father and not the mother. It implies that the crowd he is addressing would also be more understanding of the “father’s home” reference.

In a melodious, bright passage, Boaz announces to everyone that he will marry Ruth (p. 197, top). The theme is picked up by flutes, echoed by a women’s chorus, then the full chorus. The people all agree to be witnesses, singing:

Rejoice O Israel, thy womb shall bring forth kings.

In this phrase, the people’s blessing is extended from Ruth to all Israel. This is significant because it shows that the people have moved from rejecting Ruth to fully accepting her, as evidenced in the equation of her womb with that of all Israel.

This musical form was very popular in English 17th-century music (e.g. Purcell), and this might be a 20th-century reference to an emerging performance practice of pre-classical music (Rokus de Groot, personal communication). Dickinson mentions that the duct is “introduced over a Purcellian ground bass in e minor” (Dickinson, 1851).
The final chorus (pp. 200-223) praises God:
Sing His praise, praise His name!

This is a polyphonic piece of great excitement, sung quickly to staccato 16th note accompaniment and concluding in B major on a triumphant b\

There are major changes here, basically because all the judicial proceedings, and the birth and naming of Obed, are deleted in favor of a generalized conclusion and praise of God. This tendency to summarize chapter 4 has been seen elsewhere (Table 4. p. 206), but this work is exceptional in its lack of mention of even the names Obed, David, or the Messiah. The focus is more on the resolution of the conflict between rejection and acceptance, indicating that God had a role in the people’s final acceptance of Ruth.

Summary
This libretto is an interesting blend of biblical and non-biblical texts. Though the librettist creates a love interest between Boaz and Ruth, there is also emphasis on the importance of the Ruth-Naomi relationship. Ruth’s pledge is continually brought back, in musical terms, as the motivating force behind all her actions.

Musically, at this point in the 20th century it is pointless to refer to dissonant moments, because there are so few moments that are not dissonant. But within this harmonic structure, Berkeley creates various degrees of dissonance to highlight emotional moments. For example, a minor second or ninth is more dissonant than a major second or ninth. The minor ninth is used as the theme of Naomi’s bitterness (p. 193). Chromaticism is also predominant in this score, but because it is found in soft and understated passages, it seems to represent the supernatural world rather than passion, as was true earlier in the century where it was used in more dramatic musical moments. The work as a whole has an ethereal, almost otherworldly sound. Many of the messages about characters’ feelings are found “between the lines,” in the orchestra part rather than the vocal. For this reason, a first hearing of this work might not reveal all its riches, but deeper study brings out the more interesting connections.

Aminadav Aloni, Ruth, A Biblical Opera
Text from the Bible; 1986: Hebrew and his own English translation
Ruth mezzo: Naomi soprano: Boaz—baritone (no Orpah)
Chorus (male and female)

Aminadav Aloni (b. Tel Aviv 1928, d. Los Angeles 1999) moved to the U.S. in 1945, where he studied musical theory, composition and conducting at Los Angeles City College and Juilliard in New York.

Aloni’s setting of Ruth was commissioned in Sherman Oaks, California in 1986 and performed twice, in 1989 and 2002. Aloni set the text of each chapter to a different chanting tradition (trope, or ש畲: ch. 3 Excursus, p. 82): Babylonian-Sephardic for Chapter 1, Italian Persian for Chapter 2, Syrian Palestinian for Chapter 3, and Eastern European Ashkenazic for Chapter 4 (Cantor Aviva Rosenbloom, personal communication, 22.01.03). Aloni used only the biblical text, some parts in the original Hebrew, others in idiomatic English (his own translations). Aloni wanted to retain the Hebrew while also making his work accessible. There is an intricate dialogue throughout between the soloists (singing in English), the men’s chorus (singing in English) and the women’s chorus (singing mostly in Hebrew and mostly cantillation). Some of the Hebrew sections are translated into English and spoken. [As a general rule, no work called an opera would have any narration; but this work, though Aloni called it an opera, does not fit neatly into any category].
This very eclectic work is a different genre from all the others I have discussed. It interweaves traditional cantillation with musical theatre, folk, and jazz elements. It is scored for keyboards, flute, French horn, and two cellos. The keyboard part is not through-written, but meant to be improvised like jazz. Because of this, no two renditions of the score will ever be the same. This is true to some extent of any musical work, but in this case because the keyboard accompaniment must be improvised, it could potentially be totally different in each performance. There are no instrument notations in the piano score; the references I make are based on an audio tape (private recording, 1989).

Chapter 1 The work opens with the chorus (as narrator) singing the opening words of the Scroll (1.1) simultaneously with a spoken narration. The singing is done freely in a trope chant. The unusual element is the accompaniment: trope when used liturgically is always a capella.

Naomi continues with 1.8-9 (1.2-7 are omitted):

Figure 34: Aloni, “Go back my daughters,” p. I.2

Go back my daughters, go home. Return each to the home of her mother. May God show you kindness, for you have been kind, to the dead and to me.

Typically of most of Aloni’s translation, it stays quite close to the original text. Naomi does not address Ruth and Orpah as “daughters” here in the Scroll, but she does in a subsequent verse. The term “man” instead of “husband” is simply a more modern usage.

This aria is a syncopated, slightly jazzy tune, with rapid keyboard accompaniment. It starts in d minor and the word “home” is sung on d’, a note that continually returns. There is a single C major moment on “mother” (3rd staff, m.1).

The d’ seems to stand for the concept of home, as it sounds like the voice comes to rest briefly on it each time, even in the different tonalities. The single C major bar is significantly on “mother,” an even more positive ideal than “home.”

After this, a male chorus sings:

But they want to go with you, Go home to your people.

In an abrupt change of mood, the female chorus chants 1.10 in Hebrew. Then Naomi sings her song again, continuing on to 1.11-13; the female and then the male chorus echoes each of her lines as she concludes them. This effectively emphasizes everything Naomi sings: Go back my daughters, return. Why should you come back with me? Have I still more sons in me for you to marry? I’m too old to wed and even if I did tonight, and gave
birth to more sons, could you wait for them, wait till they grew up. Could you wait for
them and not marry before?
No my daughters more painful for me than for you. [Men’s chorus sings under
Naomi: It is painful, painful for her.] For God’s hand is against me.

The words “Could you wait” are sung to the theme of Naomi’s previous aria, but it is
sung now in D major (p. 1.4, top). On the words “No my daughters” (4th staff), the voice
ascends a fifth, “-e-“, a change from all the previous descending fifths.

These small changes in key and ascending/descending intervals alert the listener to
a subtle change in a character’s mood or attitude. In this case, the positive musical
changes seem to indicate a more assertive, if not necessarily more upbeat Naomi.

The female chorus chants 1.14 in trope (p. 1.5, 3rd staff); only the concluding phrase,
“Ruth clung to her” (רעה רעה דפש), is sung to what will soon become Ruth’s leitmotif, an
ascending minor sixth, the sixth preceded by a leading tone (p. 1.5, 5th staff).
Ruth now sings “Don’t ask me to leave you” (1.16-17):

Don’t ask me to leave you, don’t ask me to go back, I never want us to part. Where
you go I will go, where you stay I will stay, you people are my people, Your God is
mine. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Your people are my
people, your God is mine. For death alone shall part us you and me. Where you go I
will go, where you stay I will stay. Your people are my people, your God is mine.

There are only a few alterations in this text. “I never want us to part” is added,
making Ruth’s plea even stronger and supplying her with an explicit will of her own. The
words “Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you” are
replaced with the simpler “For death alone shall part us,” which is not in the form of an oath
as is the original text.

This simple melody in B-flat major is accompanied initially only by keyboard, in a
“crystal” sound. Ruth’s leitmotif appears on the words “Where you go” (p. 1.6, 3rd staff).

On the third reprise of the “Don’t ask me” phrase, Naomi briefly sings her earlier
song, “Go back my daughter,” over Ruth’s voice, doubled by a flute descant.

This could be heard as a final attempt at protest from Naomi, remaining unspoken.

On the final repeat of the “Where you go” g minor leitmotif phrase (p. 1.7, 2nd staff, m.3), the B flat becomes a B and the key is suddenly G major, with the melody doubled in
French horn. This sudden and unexpected shift to a major tonality is underlined by the horn’s
repetition of the theme three times at the conclusion (4th staff, m.4).
The sudden intrusion of a G major chord has the effect of a radiant ray of light and hope bursting in. As if to confirm that hope, the repetition in the horn sounds out an affirmation of Ruth's determination and hope.

The female chorus chants 1.19 in a mix of trope with jazz rhythms, accompanied on the final words by a flute descant. This is followed by spoken English narration, then Naomi's solo “Don't call me Naomi” (1.20-21). It is not an aria like Ruth's, rather more of a chant or recitative, echoed by the male chorus (p. 1.9):

Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara, for God has embittered me. I left full and God returned me empty. The Lord has tortured me, the Lord has hurt me. Don’t call me Naomi.

The sentiment is the same as the biblical text (1.20-21). Aloni translates some verbs in the final verse differently: he uses the more modern terms “tortured” and “hurt” for “dealt harshly” and “brought misfortune.”

Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara, to God has embittered me. I left full and God returned me empty. The Lord has tortured me, the Lord has hurt me. Don’t call me Naomi.

The sentiment is the same as the biblical text (1.20-21). Aloni translates some verbs in the final verse differently: he uses the more modern terms “tortured” and “hurt” for “dealt harshly” and “brought misfortune.”

Singing a melody that sounds like an earlier aria but in a higher key portrays a Naomi of greater intensity at this point. The lowering of pitch on “Mara” musically depicts bitterness, especially against the harshly dissonant D-flat against both her E-flat and the D she has just sung.

Chapter 2

A brief orchestral introduction opens the chapter, followed by the female chorus singing 2.1 in Hebrew, in a different trope mode than chapter 1.

The music to Ruth's “Why have I found favor” (2.10: p. II.4, 6th staff, m.5) is an echo of the “Where you go” motif (the flat marked in the key signature on the final three staves is an error).

These musical connections help to establish personality and also to link all the action back to Ruth's initial act of following Naomi.

When Ruth, speaking to Naomi, finally names Boaz (2.19: p. II.8, 6th staff), a harp is heard. When Ruth relates what Boaz said to her (2.21; the word “redeeming” is omitted from 2.20 and elsewhere), her leitmotif in the major key appears again, but with a higher starting note, g" (p. II.9, m.4), followed by Naomi singing two ascending octave leaps, c-e" (2nd-3rd) staves. The leitmotif is heard again in its original key in the male chorus's “It is good that you go with his maids” (2.22: p. II.9, 4th staff, m.3), which echoes Naomi's words.

The sudden appearance of the harp alerts the listener to a new element in the story: Boaz. The mention of Boaz leads to the repetition of a familiar theme in a higher key, along with heightened emotion expressed in ascending octave jumps. The musical references to Ruth's leitmotif serve as flashbacks and also predictions of the story's positive outcome.

Chapter 3

After a brief spoken narrative, Naomi sings an aria (3.1-4: p. III.1, top). Her opening note is f", though the rest of the aria lies in a lower range. The aria is in e aeolian.

The high starting note makes those opening words, “My daughter,” very dramatic.
When Ruth sings “Everything you say I will do” (3.5; p. III.2, m.4), the male chorus echoes Ruth’s words. “Everything Naomi says Ruth will do” (m.6). Then the female chorus chants verses 3.6 in a third trope variant (p. III.2, 3rd staff, m.3). The male chorus concludes the scene singing “Everything Naomi said Ruth has done” (p. III.3, top), thus skipping 3.7-8.

Boaz’s question “Who are you” (3.9; p. III.3, 2nd staff, m.3) is sung to an ascending seventh (a’-d’) followed by a descending fourth (to a’). Ruth sings “Will you spread” (p. III.3, 3rd staff) to a musical variant of her leitmotif: the second and third notes are reversed (becoming c’-e’-b’). The words “You are a kinsman” (“redeeming” is again omitted) are sung on an octave leap d’-d” which then ascends to e” (p. III.3, 4th staff). Boaz then sings verses 3.10-11, his last words “woman of valor” echoed by the male chorus (p. III.4, 2nd staff).

The unusual intervals in Boaz’s question create a sense of surprise. The variant of Ruth’s leitmotif sung here seems to show greater confidence, as the line goes straight to the sixth without a leading tone. Its presence here also recalls her pledge to Naomi. The octave leap in the voice indicates Ruth’s excitement as she tells Boaz of his relationship to her. The male chorus frequently echoes Boaz’s words throughout, musically showing his bond with other men.

The women sing the first part of 3.14 in trope, followed by Boaz, whose words are echoed by the male chorus (p. III.5). Boaz also sings 3.17, “Don’t go home to your mother-in-law empty.” a verse in the Scroll spoken by Ruth to Naomi, quoting Boaz’s words. After the female chorus chants 3.16 (p. III.5, 5th staff), Naomi sings verse 3.18. The words “my daughter” again start on f”#, as at the opening of this act, and the verse is sung to the same tune as that opening aria.

Chapter 4

The chapter opens with the female chorus narrating verses 4.1-2 to a fourth trope mode, the Ashkenazic, with a spoken English voice-over: this is interrupted twice by Boaz’s singing “Come sit here.” The music for 4.4-5 is quick and rhythmic, and on “Buy it” becomes more declamatory, emphasized by French horn (p. IV.2, 3rd staff). There are many major sixths in this section, a possible reference to Ruth’s leitmotif (p. IV.1, 5th-6th staves).

I am notifying you before the seated elders of my people. Buy it, redeem it, there’s no one to redeem it but you and I come after you.

When he speaks of Ruth and Naomi, the tempo slows and the tone of the music becomes gentler:

When you buy the land of Naomi you also buy from Ruth the widow and you will have to raise the name of the dead upon his land.

Only the male chorus sings verses 4.11-12, even though in the text it is “all the people.” The female chorus chants 4.13 (p. IV.4, 5th staff) and sings verse 4.14.

As in all other librettos, the reference to Perez and Tamar is deleted from 4.12, as is God’s role in Ruth’s conception.

The female chorus sustains the last word of 4.15, “sons,” on e” (p. IV.5, 4th staff, last measure), under which the male chorus sings 4.17 to Ruth’s leitmotif in the major key. They continue to repeat the leitmotif while the women sing out the names “Oved,” “Ishai,” and finally “David” on an open fifth a’-c” over the men’s voices. This creates a brief suspension between the B in the male chorus and the A in the female chorus, lasting only for an eighth note the first two times, but stretching to a quarter note on “David.” Only in this closing verse is the narration sung, rather than spoken, in English. Ruth’s leitmotif appears in the final
phrase in a much faster and rhythmic variation, ending in bright A major on the final word “David.”

This music creates a triumphant and upbeat conclusion. The sustained e’’ combined with the repetition of Ruth’s leitmotif and the almost shouted “Oved” and “Ishai” ending with “David” clearly shows the agenda of the composer to highlight David’s ancestry.

Summary

There is very little alteration to the biblical text. In a few places, Aloni substitutes words to modernize it or make it more relevant for modern listeners.

Aloni uses leitmotifs effectively, particularly that of Ruth. This leitmotif is first heard to the text “Ruth clung to her” (1.14; p. 200) and is woven throughout the remainder of the opera, often with the variant of a major rather than minor sixth interval, which is also the concluding passage of the whole work. This centers the story, through the musical leitmotif, on Ruth’s initial act of clinging to Naomi.

Using different musical styles for the choruses and the characters creates a dichotomy between the narration and the action: it is as if to say the story itself may be old, but the characters and dialogue are relevant for any age. In several scenes, the chorus echoes the words of the characters’ dialogues, a very effective dramatic device. The women’s chanting functions as a Greek chorus. It also grounds the story in its original context, by using Hebrew and traditional chant modes.
CONCLUSION

The librettos represented here re-fashion the Scroll in a variety of ways and degrees. These librettos are brought to life by the music to which they were meant to be sung. Just as the librettos are in several languages and styles, so too music is not a single language. Each composer represented here used a range of musical techniques to re-tell *Ruth*. The simplest devices—a drum roll, plangent clarinet call, sustained soft or loud high note, sudden key, meter, or tempo change, dissonance, resolved or unresolved chord—immediately establish a character’s feelings or the mood of a scene. Every technical musical device has a field of possible meanings, narrowed in each case by the libretto text, which determines which was the most likely intended effect. Each composer creates his own language with music’s tools, drawing on his cultural era’s use of those tools. While the music is playing and the characters are singing, the biblical book is brought to life, to a life it never had before. Characters love intensely, feel undercurrents of fear and anxiety, and ultimately praise God for bringing the story to a happy resolution.

The musical language sung by the characters is that of the composer, and there are vast differences among these composers. But in each work, the characters transcend their biblical source when they are singing, to become both intensely real and larger than reality. When they sing, their music tells us that Ruth, Naomi, Orpah, and Boaz had hopes and aspirations, they cried and laughed, they suffered and loved. They never really existed, but through music they will live forever.
Chapter 7  LIBRETTO S AND MUSI C AS MIDRASH OF THE SCROLL.

Overview
In this chapter I will compare the Scroll with the musical works, illustrating differences and similarities with tables and graphs. This comparison will highlight how the works can be considered musical midrash. The six elements to be discussed are:

A. Scene divisions (Table A and Appendix A).
B. Frequency of appearances (Table B, Graphs B, B1).
C. The number of speech and solos allotted to each character (Tables C1-3; Appendix B; Table C\).
D. The number of ensembles (excluding choruses) (Table D).
E. Openings and closures (Table E).
F. God’s name (Table F).

A. Scene division
On the basis of its four chapters, the Scroll can be divided into four acts, with two scenes in Acts I, II, and IV, and three scenes in Act III, making a total of 9 scenes, plus prelude and postlude. My division (ch. 2, p. 21) is recapped here.

Prelude (providing summary of background) 1.1-6
Act I
1: On the road to Bethlehem 1.7-19a
2: Arrival in Bethlehem 1.19b-22
Act II
1: In the fields 2.1-16
2: Evening at home 2.17-23
Act III
1: Naomi’s instructions 3.1-5
2: On the threshing floor 3.6-15
3: Going home 3.16-18
Act IV
1: At the city gate 4.1-12
2: Ruth conceives and gives birth 4.13-17
Postlude: 4.18-22 (genealogy)

This division is based mostly on change of location, as well as the presence and speech of different characters. The Prelude provides a summary of all action preceding the story to come, and the Postlude is a genealogy list, which does not advance the plot. Since the Postlude is omitted from every musical work I have studied, for my purposes I consider the Scroll to be composed of 10 scenes, 9 plus the Prelude.

The musical works treated here cannot be so neatly divided. The list of numbered scenes in each work (Appendix A) clarifies which scenes are additional to those found in the Scroll. I count only scenes that advance the action parallel to Ruth. Re-written or paraphrased scenes are considered biblical if they describe action found in the original plot. In many cases there is additional text or action, but if text from the Scroll is at the core of the scene, it is counted as a biblical scene. The Table indicates which biblical scenes are the most and least often reproduced in librettos, and which are lengthened or shortened. When a biblical scene is “omitted” by a librettist, it is generally replaced by an alternate equivalent scene; these substitutions, too, are indicated in Appendix A.
### TABLE A: SCENE DIVISION

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<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
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<th>I. 2</th>
<th>II. 1</th>
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Totals (a): 10 12 11 11 9 11 3 6 5

N: appears in the work in some form
I: noticeably lengthened
S: noticeably shortened
See Appendix A for detailed outlines.

Totals (a): total number of works containing these Scroll scenes.

Totals (b): total number of Scroll scenes contained in each work.
Discussion

The data will be analyzed from two perspectives: one based on Totals (a), and the other based on Totals (b).

The opening scene, "On the road to Bethlehem" (I.1), is never omitted, and in one case (Franck) it is lengthened. Found almost as frequently—in 11 of the 12 works—is I.2, "Arrival in Bethlehem," elaborated by Rumshinsky and omitted only by Cowen. These two scenes significantly contain the texts of the two most popular aria settings. Ruth's "Entreat me not Whither thou goest" (1.16-17) is found in every single work, and is probably the most familiar part of the story to the general public. Naomi's "Call me not Naomi (1.20-21), is absent only from Cowen, because he omitted I.2 altogether.

Two other scenes found in 11 out of the 12 works are II.1, "In the fields," and III.2, "On the threshing floor." II.1 is elaborated by Goldschmidt and Schumann, and completely rewritten by Fino. The biblical scene introduces Boaz, as essential to the plot development as the introduction of Ruth and Naomi found in the previous two scenes. III.2 is shortened by Damrosch and omitted only by Gaul. In many works, it is expanded by a love duet of varying lengths.

Three works (Franck, Mellers, and Berkeley) omit II.2, "Evening at home" (Damrosch shortens it). Three works (Gaul, Cowen, and Franck) omit III.1, "Naomi's instructions" (Damrosch shortens it). In III.2, Ruth recounts her meeting with Boaz to Naomi, and in III.1, Naomi tells Ruth how to approach Boaz.

Six works (Damrosch, Gaul, Fino, Schumann, Mellers, and Berkeley) omit IV.1, "At the city gate." This scene highlights Boaz's role in the drama and was omitted equally in 19th and 20th century works. Seven works (Gaul, Franck, Fino, Schumann, Mellers, Beecham, and Berkeley; Damrosch shortens it) omit IV.2, "Ruth conceives and gives birth." Significantly, Beecham cut the scene; even though his libretto is a literal rendering of the Scroll, its text concludes with 4.12, which comes before IV.2. As mentioned earlier, no libretto includes 4.18-22, the genealogy, possibly because even those librettos that include later verses of chapter 4 treat the birth of Obed, David's grandfather, as the climactic moment (Table A, p. 206, and Appendix to this chapter, pp. 235-242).

The scene most often omitted is III.3, "Going home," where Ruth returns to Naomi from the threshing floor. This scene was eliminated in 9 works: Damrosch, Gaul, Cowen, Fino, Schumann, Rumshinsky, Mellers, Beecham, and Berkeley. This could indicate a lack of interest in the Ruth-Naomi relationship as well as a desire to expand the Ruth-Boaz scene.

A second way of analyzing these results is by composer: who left in the largest and smallest number of Scroll scenes? Only Goldschmidt and Aloni, whose works include virtually all the Scroll text, retained every scene. Damrosch's libretto is also based on the Scroll, and retains 8 of the 10 scenes, though many are very abridged. Beecham's libretto is entirely based on the Scroll, yet he eliminated two scenes. Rumshinsky, whose libretto was newly-written, nonetheless retained the essence of 8 Scroll scenes. Cowen, Franck, and Mellers retained 7 Scroll scenes; Schumann retained 6; Gaul, Fino, and Berkeley retained only 5, half of the original Scroll scenes.

Gaul, Fino, Schumann, and Berkeley cut all Scroll scenes subsequent to III.2, the threshing floor scene, replacing them with a variety of different conclusions. In general, newly-written librettos (of which these four are examples; Preface to ch. 6, p. 101) contain fewer of the original Scroll scenes: Rumshinsky is the major exception, while Cowen and Franck also retained a surprising number of the original scenes in their original librettos. The choice to write
a new libretto is a more creative one than simply using the Scroll and other biblical texts. Within that creative re-telling, librettists vary widely in how much of the original story and text they retain.

The relative value placed on faithfulness to the Scroll’s story and message can be inferred from the variously altered librettos. By omitting, expanding, or altering the scenes found in the Scroll, each librettist reflected his own preconceptions and agenda. In some cases the libretto may foreground the Ruth-Boaz relationship, in others, the Ruth-Naomi friendship. This is one factor in the choice of included scenes. For example, two scenes between Naomi and Ruth (II.2, III.1) are omitted or shortened in three librettos, and the most-often omitted scene, III.3, is also between Naomi and Ruth. It was replaced in many cases by a lengthy love duet, which also replaced IV.1 and IV.2 (where III.3 is omitted, in most cases most of IV is also: Damrosch, Gaul, Fino, Schumann, Rumshinsky, Mellers, Beecham, Berkeley). The removal of the Naomi-Ruth scene (III.3) allows the expansion of III.2 into a Boaz-Ruth love duet, followed immediately by a public proclamation of their love. Affirming a love interest that is hardly suggested in the Scroll inspired love duets, as appealing to composers to write as they would be to the listener to hear.

B. Frequency of appearance in scenes

A character’s importance to the librettist and composer can be indicated by the frequency of that character’s appearance, and by the number of solos he sings. Table B and Graph B1 indicate the percentage of Scroll scenes (this chapter, p. 207) in which each character appears. For a fuller picture of a character’s importance, these numbers must be placed alongside the numbers of solos (Tables C1-3).

Graph B2 indicates the presence of the Narrator relative to the Scroll. The part of the Narrator can be filled by individual voices or the chorus (when the chorus serves the role of Narrator, it is not counted as a chorus). The choruses are differentiated here based on their different roles in the Scroll: i.e., reapers, Bethlehemites, or women. In many cases the chorus’s role is a non-dramatic one, i.e., they sing lengthy praises of God without taking part either actively or passively in the action around them (this chapter, Table F). Both kinds of chorus are counted here.

1 There are more technical ways of measuring a character’s importance musically, by the number of pages of solos alongside total pages in the score, as well as types of solos (recitative or aria) and tempo markings. The most accurate measurement is the actual timing of solos, but this could only be done with the three audio tapes available to me. All these musical analyses are found in Appendix B to this chapter.
### TABLE B: FREQUENCY OF APPEARANCE IN SCENES

#### 19th Century

| Character   | Scroll No. | Scroll % | Goldschmidt % | Goldschmidt % | Danneel % | Danneel % | Gold % | Gold % | Covenant % | Covenant % | Frank % | Frank % | Hunk % | Hunk % | Finch % | Finch % | Flask % | Flask % | Lace % | Lace % |
|-------------|------------|----------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|--------|--------|-------------|-------------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Narrator    | 10         | 100.0    | 66.0          | 66.0          | 88.9      | 88.9      | 80.0   | 80.0   | 0           | 0           | 14.3    | 14.3    | 0.0    | 0.0    | 0.0    | 0.0    |
| Ruth        | 6          | 60.0     | 40.0          | 40.0          | 33.3      | 33.3      | 60.0   | 60.0   | 7           | 100         | 4       | 57.1    | 4      | 80.0   |
| Naomi       | 7          | 70.0     | 50.0          | 50.0          | 33.3      | 33.3      | 80.0   | 80.0   | 5           | 7           | 7       | 42.9    | 5      | 100.0  |
| Orpah       | 1          | 10.0     | 0             | 0             | 11.1      | 11.1      | 20.0   | 20.0   | 2           | 28          | 2       | 28.6    | 0      | 0.0    |
| Bezab       | 3          | 30.0     | 28.0          | 28.0          | 44.4      | 44.4      | 40.0   | 40.0   | 5           | 7           | 3       | 42.9    | 1      | 20.0   |
| "women"     | 2          | 20.0     | 18.0          | 18.0          | 0         | 0         | 0      | 0      | 0           | 0           | 0       | 0       | 0      | 0      |
| "reapers"   | 1          | 10.0     | 10.0          | 10.0          | 11.1      | 11.1      | 0      | 0      | 3           | 3           | 1       | 14.3    | 1      | 20.0   |
| "people of elders" | 1 | 10.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 11.1 | 11.1 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 28 | 1 | 14.3 | 2 | 40.0 |
| "servant"   | 1          | 10.0     | 10.0          | 10.0          | 11.1      | 11.1      | 0      | 0      | 1           | 1           | 0       | 0       | 0      | 0      |
| "redeemer"  | 1          | 10.0     | 10.0          | 10.0          | 0         | 0         | 0      | 0      | 0           | 0           | 0       | 0       | 0      | 0      |
| Total n:s   | 10         | 10       | 9             | 5             | 7          | 7         | 5      | 5      |              |              |         |         |        |        |        |        |

209
### 20th Century

| Character      | Scroll No. | Scroll % | Narrants | Narrants | Ranburns | Ranburns | Mellers | Mellers | Beizham | Beizham | Beizam | Beizam | Vince% | Vince% | Mill % | Mill % |
|----------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Narrator       | 10         | 100.0    | 0        | 0        | 1        | 12.5     | 3       | 65.7    | 100.0   | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |
| Ruth           | 6          | 60.0     | 5        | 71       | 7        | 87.5     | 3       | 80.0    | 100.0   | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |
| Naomi          | 7          | 70.0     | 4        | 57       | 5        | 62.5     | 3       | 60.0    | 100.0   | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |
| Orpah          | 1          | 10.0     | 0        | 0        | 1        | 12.5     | 0       | 0.0     | 10.0    | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |
| Boaz           | 3          | 30.0     | 2        | 28       | 3        | 37.5     | 3       | 20.0    | 100.0   | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |
| "women"        | 2          | 20.0     | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 2       | 12.5    | 100.0   | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |
| "reapers"      | 1          | 10.0     | 1        | 14       | 1        | 12.5     | 0       | 0.0     | 100.0   | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |
| "people elders"| 1          | 10.0     | 1        | 14       | 2        | 25.0     | 0       | 0.0     | 100.0   | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |
| "servant"      | 1          | 10.0     | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0       | 12.5    | 100.0   | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |
| "redeemer"     | 1          | 10.0     | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0       | 12.5    | 100.0   | 0.0     | 10.0   | 100.0  |        |        |        |        |

The "total # of scenes" refers to Scroll scenes that appear in these works; the number is the same as found in the column "totals (th)" in Table A.

The percentages in this table show the relationship between the number of scenes in which a character appears versus the number of scenes in the work, hence, the relative frequency.
GRAPH B1 (based on the data in Table B, above):

19th Century

20th Century
Discussion

Two comparisons can be made based on Table B and Graphs B1 and B2: first, the number of a character’s appearances in a musical work compared with the Scroll; second, the number of appearances of characters vis-à-vis one another.

In the 19th century works, Ruth appears in 100% of the scenes in Cowen, and in 80% (compared to 60% in the Scroll) of the scenes in Fino. She appears in 50-60% twice (Gaul and Franck), and 30-40% twice (Goldschmidt and Damrosch). So the numbers of works in which Ruth appears the same as, more than, or less than in the Scroll are equal.

This picture changes in the 20th century works, where Ruth appears in over 70% of the scenes four times (Schumann, Rumshinsky, Mellers, Berkeley), and the same 60% of the Scroll or very close to it twice, in Aloni and Beecham. Therefore in no 20th century works does Ruth appear in fewer scenes than in the Scroll. Even though Ruth’s name is part of the title in both the Scroll and all works except Fino’s Noemi e Ruth, in terms of frequency of appearance she does not predominate either in the Scroll or in half the 19th century works. Her appearance is more prominent in 20th century works.

The picture is different for Naomi. In the 19th century works, compared to her 70% of scenes in the Scroll, she appears in 100% of the scenes once (Fino), and once in 80% (Gaul). Since Fino’s work is entitled Noemi e Ruth, Naomi would be expected to predominate. This is the only title in which her name appears first. Naomi appears in less than 70% of the scenes—from 33% (Damrosch) to 50% (Goldschmidt)—in three works, and about the same as in the Scroll in Cowen (71%). Therefore her appearance is more frequent in 19th century works only twice, less frequent three times, and the same once.
This is almost the same in the 20th-century works, where Naomi appears the same percentage of time or slightly more (70% in Aloni, 71.5% in Mellers) than in the Scroll only twice, and less (from 50% to 66.7%) four times. Naomi’s presence is reduced in more than half the works, both 19th and 20th century.

Boaz’s frequency of appearance in 19th-century works generally increases from his 30% in the Scroll, comprising over 71% in one work (Cowan), and 40-60% in three works (Damrosch, Gaul, Franck); only in two works (Goldschmidt and Fino) does he appear in just 20% of scenes. Therefore, his appearance is increased in four works and decreased in two—the exact reversal of Naomi’s figures.

In the 20th century, Boaz’s appearance is either the same as the Scroll (28% in Schumann) or somewhat higher, ranging from 30% (the Scroll and Aloni) to 42.9% (Mellers). Though the percentage is not dramatically higher, it is still significant that Boaz’s presence in 20th-century works is never reduced from what it is in the Scroll, which was also found to be true for Ruth.

The range of percentages for each character’s appearance is: for Ruth, from 33.3% (Damrosch) to 100% (Cowan), versus 60% in the Scroll; for Naomi, it is the same (33.3% in Damrosch, 100% in Fino), versus 70% in the Scroll; while for Boaz it is 20% (Goldschmidt) to 71% (Cowan) versus 30% in the Scroll. So in the broader picture, Boaz’s presence is slightly less variable than Ruth’s and Naomi’s. This shows a greater degree of difference in the librettists’ and composers’ interest in Ruth and Naomi than in Boaz, but it is only one of many factors.

Comparing the characters’ appearances relative to one another, Ruth appears in 60% versus Naomi’s 70% of Scroll scenes. This proportionate relationship is maintained in all but two 19th-century works: in Cowen and Franck, Ruth’s presence exceeds Naomi’s, and in Damrosch, they are equal. In the latter case, this may reflect the title of Damrosch’s work: Ruth and Naomi.

In the 20th century, Ruth’s presence exceeds Naomi’s in Schumann, Ramshinsky, and Berkeley: while in Mellers and Beecham, their numbers are the same (Aloni’s figures virtually always match the Scroll’s). Since Beecham’s libretto is entirely Scroll text, he obviously made certain choices that altered the proportionality of the Ruth-Naomi presence. Ruth’s presence exceeds Naomi’s in two 19th-century works and in three 20th-century, the latter of which are mostly original librettos.

Boaz appears in only 30% of Scroll scenes, versus Ruth’s 60% and Naomi’s 70%. The percentage of his scenes exceeds both Ruth and Naomi in only one 19th-century work, Damrosch (44% vs. 33%). Elsewhere, his percentage is always smaller than Ruth’s, but in two works it is equal to Naomi’s, Cowen (71%) and Franck (42.9%).

In the 20th century, Boaz’s appearances are always a smaller percentage of the total scenes than either Ruth or Naomi, reflecting the same proportionate relationship as in the Scroll. The 20th-century works discussed here showed a tendency to return to the Scroll text (two works, Beecham and Aloni, used exclusively Scroll text).

The most extreme variability is found in the presence or absence of the Narrator, present in 100% of the Scroll scenes (Graph B2). In the 19th-century works, the percentage ranges from the extremes of 0 (Cowan and Fino) up to 80% and 88.9% (Gaul and Damrosch), with Goldschmidt in the middle at 60% and Franck at only 14.3%, a minimal presence. In the 20th century, the Narrator is again absent from two works (Schumann and Berkeley), minimally present in one (12.5% in Ramshinsky), and up to 85.7% (Mellers) and 100% in the two works using Scroll text exclusively, Beecham and Aloni.
C.1-3 Number of solos

Table C 1-3 indicates the number of solos assigned to each character, when the character has the spotlight and is singing alone. There is wide disparity in the length and tempo of these arias and recitatives, as seen on Table C in Appendix B to this chapter, where these musical markers are discussed.

Importance can also be measured, more subjectively, by the style, tone, and intensity of the character’s music. How they appear is at least as significant as how often and for how long. This aspect was the subject of chapter 6, but I will give several examples here to illustrate why caution must be exercised when using these numbers for comparison.

Based on these tables, Boaz seems to have a limited presence in Schumann. Yet his music is very solemn, loud, even bombastic, limiting the significance of his reduced number of solos. On the other hand, Boaz’s six solos in Goldschmidt seem a high number, yet the majority are very quick recitatives, not arias. So though in both works Boaz has the spotlight at those moments, it is a very different kind of light.

Naomi has three solos in several works, yet those solos in Franck, for example, are mostly very short and subdued, while in Fino they are highly dramatic and lengthy. Tables C1-3 indicate how much of the Scroll text is retained for the different characters, compared to other biblical or newly-written text.

Because the number of arias tells a limited story, I have placed in bold those arias I consider a highlight of that character’s appearances. The basis for this judgment can be found in Table C in Appendix B.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>19th Century</th>
<th>20th Century</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not/Whither thou goest</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:5-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Let me find favour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:2-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>I will tell thee all that the man hath done</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damrosch</td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ps. 23</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Lord is my Shepherd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaul</td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Let me lie unto the field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Past all knowledge is the kindness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowen</td>
<td>Isa. 42 Ps. 34</td>
<td></td>
<td>Be of good comfort</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>My Father, thou are the guide of my youth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ps. 28</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Lord is my strength</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moi, je vous suis (&quot;I. I follow you&quot;)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Et je veux, (&quot;...and I want...&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Soyez bénie, ô ma mere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fino</td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ma l'orma (&quot;But the path&quot;)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gleaner's song</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schuman</td>
<td>1:16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Whither thou goest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Naomi, now my Mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ps. 23</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Lord is my shepherd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ah, How still; Lord, thou alone knowest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumihoiskyi</td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Atl Tîg'i vi (&quot;Entreat me not&quot;)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ana Eli (&quot;Please, God&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Why have I found grace?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Glad is the heart of Ruth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blessed be the Lord</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecham</td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Whither thou goest</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Luke 23:46</td>
<td></td>
<td>Almighty look down/To thee beloved God</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>I weep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
<td>1:16-17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't ask me to leave you</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE C1: NUMBER OF SOLOS**

*Ruth solos* (The Scroll references may include paraphrased verses that are the same in meaning)
### TABLE C2: NUMBER OF SOLOS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>19th Century</th>
<th>20th Century</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
<td>18.91</td>
<td>Job, Lament, Ps. 12, 3.4</td>
<td>Go, return each</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.21</td>
<td></td>
<td>Call me not Naomi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.18, Ps. 37</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sit still: Commit thy Way</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damroschi</td>
<td>18.91</td>
<td>1.11-13, 1.20-21</td>
<td>My dear daughters, go, return</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Luke 1.28-32</td>
<td>My daughter shall I not seek?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hail, hail, the Lord</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaul</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Ps. 103.84</td>
<td>O gracious Lord</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.20-21</td>
<td>Ps. 30</td>
<td>Call me not Naomi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Like as a father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I have been young</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>1.20-21</td>
<td>Adieu (&quot;Farewell&quot;)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ah, desormais (&quot;Call me not&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honneur à Dieu (&quot;Honor to God&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fino</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>1.20-21</td>
<td>O nuora (&quot;O daughter-in-law&quot;)</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ah! Non dite omai (&quot;Call me not&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E. per il bene (&quot;I direct your days&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>Job, Lament, Ps. 12, 3.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lament: O my God</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Know that Boaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramshinsky</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>1.11-13, 1.20-21</td>
<td>Bachalomi (&quot;In my dream&quot;)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kakamoni (&quot;I am like the sycamore&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Al Tikrana Li Naom (&quot;Call me not&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Odeh (&quot;Still to you, God&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
<td>1.11-13</td>
<td>1.20-21, 3.1</td>
<td>Let each depart</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Call me not Naomi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blessed be the Lord</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecham</td>
<td>1.8-9</td>
<td>1.11-13, 1.20-21, 3.1</td>
<td>Go, return</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turn again, my daughters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Call me not Naomi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>And now is not Boaz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>1.20-21</td>
<td>Almighty Father</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Call me not Naomi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fear not, beloved Ruth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amoni</td>
<td>1.8-9</td>
<td>1.20-21, 3.1-2</td>
<td>Go back my daughters</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't call me Naomi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My daughter, what I wish for you</td>
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### Table C3: Number of Solos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>19th Century</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
<td>Ps. 65</td>
<td>Thou visitest the earth; O that men</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ps. 107</td>
<td>I will lay me down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ps. 4</td>
<td>Ye elders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>If thou wilt redeem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Ye are witnesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damrosch</td>
<td>2.8-9</td>
<td>Hearest thou not?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>Blessed be thou</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaul</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Go not from hence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Glory be to Thee, O Lord</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowen</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Not my daughter</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ps. 36</td>
<td>How excellent is thy loving-kindness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matt. 5</td>
<td>The meek shall inherit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Que Dieu protège tous les vœux (“May God protect all my wishes”)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Dans mon cœur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fino</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>E l’acqua gaia (“You share joyous water”)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>20th Century</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Daughter, go not...Let her glean</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rumshinsky</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Ra’rītī ma’al‘āch (“I saw an angel”)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Go not from hence</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.10-12</td>
<td>Blessed be Ruth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td>And of his seed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecham</td>
<td>2.8-9</td>
<td>Hearest thou not</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.11-12</td>
<td>It hath been fully showed me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>Blessed be thou</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1-6</td>
<td>Naomi, who has returned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Ah Ruth!</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Behold this maid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
<td>2.8-9</td>
<td>Have you not heard</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.10-12</td>
<td>God bless you my daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Keeping in mind the previously discussed qualifiers for “number of solos,” and its somewhat limited value, it is still a useful marker for gauging the importance of a character in a particular libretto. Ruth has the largest number of solos in only three works, two in the 19th and the other in the 20th century (Gaul, Cowen, and Schumann). Naomi has the largest number of solos in four works, half in each century (Damrosch, Fino, Rumshinsky, Aloni). Boaz has the largest number of solos in only one work, Goldschmidt’s. Ruth and Naomi are given the same number of solos three times (Franck, Mellers, Berkeley), while Boaz and Ruth are given the same number in Beecham. But there is little variability in the number of solos, ranging between one and four, exceeding that number only twice (Schumann and Goldschmidt). The larger numbers usually indicate several short solos, often just recitatives. Generally a character has either one or two extended arias. Of greater interest here is which text was chosen for those major arias.

In the Preface to Chapter 6 (p. 101), I outlined the four classifications of librettos found here. An interesting finding seen on Tables C1-3 is how even in newly-written librettos, the most
well-known verses of the Scroll. “Entreat me not” (1.16-17), always appear in paraphrased or even original form. The same is true in several instances for Naomi’s “Call me not Naomi” (1.20-21). These are often one of the only moments in an original libretto that are not newly-written text. Even in works that mix Scroll text with new or other biblical texts, the climactic solos are virtually always these well-known verses.

Table C1: Ruth

When Ruth sings a second major aria in addition to “Entreat me not,” it tends to be a prayer of some kind, for example in Berkeley “To thee beloved God” (based on text from Luke) and Rumshinsky “Please, my God” (Table C1). In Schumann she sings a second lengthy aria relating her and Naomi’s story, which is based on the Scroll. In Goldschmidt, Damrosch, and Cowen, Ruth’s other solos are all either biblical texts (psalms in Damrosch and Cowen) or religious in tone (“My Father…” in Cowen). In the two works based entirely on the Scroll (Beecham and Aloni), Ruth’s only aria is “Entreat me not.”

Apparently a work based on the story of Ruth simply could not be conceived without her pledge to Naomi. Even librettos that veer quite far from the original narrative, such as Fino and Rumshinsky, retain a setting of those words because they were apparently regarded universally as the core of the story, and were probably also the most well-known to the general public.

In the majority of works, 19th and 20th century alike, there is an effort to make Ruth more pious than her original portrayal. This does not rule out lengthy or even passionate love duets with Boaz. But her numerous prayers, psalms, other invocations of God prior to the threshing floor scene serve to establish her piety.

Table C2: Naomi

The only text of Naomi’s that was seen as comparable in importance to Ruth’s “Entreat me not” is “Call me not Naomi” (1.20-21), which was set as an aria by 9 of these 12 composers (omitted by Damrosch and Cowen: set as a short recitative by Schumann). Yet I do not consider this aria to be Naomi’s most significant one in all these works, as discussed below. These words are set to a major aria only by Fino and Berkeley. They are set movingly in the other works, but are too short in duration to be considered highlights (Appendix B). In original librettos, Naomi’s more important arias tend to be God-centered, like Ruth’s (for Naomi, Gaul’s “O gracious God,” Franck’s “Honor to God;” also in Rumshinsky and Berkeley).

Mellers’ Naomi sings exclusively Scroll text. In Schumann, her major aria is a lengthy lament that opens the oratorio, with text from Lamentations, Job and Ecclesiastes. No completely original text is given to Naomi, ensuring that the “biblical” nature of her character is retained.

“Call me not” is a major aria in Beecham, Naomi’s major arias in Goldschmidt and Cowen are psalm settings, and in Damrosch, a setting from Luke, one of the rare New Testament texts found in these Ruth works (another Luke setting is found in a Berkeley aria for Ruth; Table C1).

Table C3: Boaz

No Scroll verses are particularly associated in popular culture with Boaz, giving librettists more license to place original text in his mouth. Boaz’s major arias are not based on the Scroll in original librettos. The only exception is one of Boaz’s two arias in Gaul, a setting of 2.8, “Go not from hence.” Original texts sung by Boaz are widely divergent, from glorification
of God (Gaul) to a peasant song (Fino), a love song to Ruth (Berkeley) and an account of a dream (Rumshinsky).

In general, 19th-century librettists pulled Boaz further away from his Scroll context, though he still sings many biblical verses; while in the 20th-century works Boaz seems much more grounded in the original text.

D. Number of ensembles

Ensembles—primarily duets and trios—indicate the relative importance each librettist gave to relationships between specific characters. This table does not include choruses because they are far too numerous and often extraneous to the plot. They are all listed in Appendix A.

Apart from Ruth and Orpah’s “duet,” where they speak together (1.10), all other true “ensembles” in the Scroll are choruses (ch. 2, pp. 30-31). 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE D: ENSEMBLES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>19th Century</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damrosch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20th Century</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumshinsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Of the total 37 ensembles, 25 are duets: 9 Ruth-Naomi, 12 Ruth-Boaz, 3 Ruth-Orpah, one Naomi-Boaz duet. There are 11 trios and one quartet. Looking at all works, in both centuries, Ruth-Boaz duets slightly exceed the number of Ruth-Naomi duets. But in the 19th-century works, Ruth-Naomi duets slightly exceed Ruth-Boaz duets (6 versus 5), while the picture in the 20th-century works is very different. There, Ruth-Boaz duets exceed Ruth-Naomi duets (7 versus 5). Mellers, Beecham and Aloni set no duets for these characters.

In addition to her duets with Naomi and Boaz, Ruth also has a total of 3 duets with Orpah, bringing the total of her appearances in all duets to 24. Naomi sings only one duet with

2 These choruses are: the women of Bethlehem (1.19); the reapers (2.4); the people and elders (4.11-12); the women (4.14-15); and the women neighbors (4.4). There are several dialogues among the main characters, though they are scenes rather than true “duets”: Ruth and Naomi have 4 dialogues (1.15-18, 2.2, 2.19-22, 3.1-5); Boaz and Ruth have 3 dialogues (2.8-13, 3.9-13, 3.16-18).
Boaz, appearing as a "veiled woman," her former self, in Fino. This is the furthest any libretto deviates from the Scroll, in which Naomi never meets Boaz. Naomi's total participation is 10 duets, and Boaz's is 13. Ruth also sings in 10 trios and one quartet, versus Naomi's participation in 8 trios and a quartet. Boaz's in 3 trios and a quartet, and Orpah's in 3 duets with Ruth and 7 trios. When these numbers are combined and totaled, Ruth is predominant in all featured ensembles, with a total of 37, close to Naomi's total of 29 and more than double Boaz's 17, versus Orpah's 10.

Every work except the two with no ensembles at all (Mellers and Aloni) includes at least one duet or trio with two or three of the women. Even Beecham includes a Ruth-Orpah duet as his only featured ensemble. There is no work featuring ensembles where Ruth and Naomi do not sing together, if not in a duet (Coven, Franck) then in a trio (Beecham is the only exception).

Boaz-Ruth duets, on the other hand, were seen as more expendable, though they are more predominant in the 19th than the 19th-century works. Boaz-Ruth duets are absent from two 19th-century works (Damrosch, Gaul) and only Franck offers more than one such duet. In the 20th-century works (three of which have no ensembles or only one), there are two Ruth-Boaz duets each in Schumann and Rumshinsky, and three in Berkeley. In addition, Boaz is part of a trio in Berkeley and two trios in Rumshinsky. These figures show an increased interest in Boaz's relationship to Ruth in the 20th century, derived not only from the greater number of their duets, but also from Boaz's increased presence in trios, most of which include Ruth. Ruth's presence predominates throughout, as she is part of almost every ensemble.

E. Openings and closures

There is greater uniformity in this aspect of the librettos than others, but the differences are notable. As seen in Table E, all works but two (Schumann and Berkeley) open with either the Narrator or Chorus; and all but one work (Fino) conclude with the chorus, usually singing praises of God or Scroll verses. This may be indicative of the composers' agenda and or audience expectations of a biblically-based work.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opens:</th>
<th>Closes:</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<td>Narrator:</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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<td>19th Century</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
<td>Narrator:</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damrosch</td>
<td>Narrator:</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaul</td>
<td>Narrator (Chorus):</td>
<td></td>
<td>A grievous famine...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coven</td>
<td>Chorus (Hebrews):</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lord, thou hast been... (Ps. 90, Is. 33)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
<td>Chorus (Moabites):</td>
<td></td>
<td>She is leaving...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fino</td>
<td>Chorus (Reapers):</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stars are scattered...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th Century</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>Naomi:</td>
<td>Chorus (Moabites):</td>
<td>O my God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumshinsky</td>
<td>Chorus (Moabites):</td>
<td></td>
<td>Praise Chemosh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
<td>Narrator (Chorus):</td>
<td></td>
<td>The women mourn...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecham</td>
<td>Narrator:</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Naomi:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Once more I see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
<td>Narrator (Chorus):</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
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TABLE E: OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

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<th>Closes:</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<td>Gaul</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coven</td>
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<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fino</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th Century</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
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</table>
Discussion

Three 19th-century works open with the narrator, and three with a chorus; in the 20th century, discounting the two works that are entirely based on the Scroll (Beecham and Aloni), of the other four works, two open with Naomi, one with a chorus and the other with narrator. The five most unusual openings include either a chorus of Moabites (Franck and Rumshinsky), Naomi (Schumann and Berkeley), or a chorus of reapers (Fino). In a sense these serve as a kind of “flashback,” opening up and dramatizing the first verses of the Scroll (the Prelude). Fino’s chorus of reapers sets the stage for Act II (chapter 2).

The closing has much less variation: all works close with a chorus, many times including the soloists (called Tutti); most are conventional choral praises of God. The only exception is Fino, whose opening reapers’ chorus was also unique. His closing chorus refers obliquely to Ruth the bride. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Psalms texts are used, while original librettos contain new but biblical-sounding praises, such as Gaul’s “Songs of praise.” Schumann’s “O give thanks.” or Berkeley’s “Sing His praise.” Rumshinsky’s closing chorus, “A new light will shine,” is not precisely a chorus of praise but does include praises of God; the same could be said for Franck’s closing chorus.

TABLE F: MENTION OF GOD’S NAME

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scroll</td>
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<td>7, 1, 8, 9, 13,</td>
<td>3, 1, 16</td>
<td>(2X), 17</td>
<td></td>
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<td>19th Century:</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danrosh</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Gaul</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Cowen</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 - 4</td>
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<td>Elder: 1 - 0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td></td>
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<td>High priest: 2</td>
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<td>Meilers</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Beecham</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Berkeley</td>
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<td>Aloni</td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>
### II. 1. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scroll</th>
<th>Narrator</th>
<th>Chorus</th>
<th>Naomi</th>
<th>Ruth</th>
<th>Boaz</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1: 24</td>
<td>1: 2:20</td>
<td>4: 2:4</td>
<td>2:12 (3X)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Table F1: TOTAL MENTIONS OF GOD BY MAIN CHARACTERS

First and last word in the opera

223
Discussion

God intervenes directly in the Scroll only once (ch. 2.32-33), in Ruth's pregnancy (4.13), a verse omitted from every libretto. God is believed to intervene in 1.6, where Naomi "heard that the Lord had taken note of His people and given them food." But Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, and the "people" in the Scroll do invoke God's name (not always the same name in Hebrew), and the purpose of this table and analysis is to determine to what degree the different librettos increased or decreased those mentions.

There are three approaches to these data:

1. In which scenes of the different works is God's name most least invoked, compared to the Scroll?
2. How much more or less often does each character mention God in the different works, compared to the Scroll?
3. How do the total mentions of God in each libretto compare to the Scroll?

By scene

In the entire Scroll, God is mentioned 23 times. This total is exceeded in six works, four in the 19th century and two in the 20th. Cowen's and Ramshinsky's 59 mentions are the highest number, double the Scroll's. In Cowen's case, this seems to have been a matter of trying to satisfy public expectations (Appendix 1, p. 269), while in Ramshinsky's, it may have been due to personal religious sentiment (Appendix 1, p. 269). There are fewer mentions of God in two 19th- and three 20th-century works (the lowest number is 13, found in Mellers; see Appendix 1, p. 269 for possible motivation). Aloni's work matches the Scroll's number, though distributed differently. An interesting finding is Beecham's total of 17, indicating that he omitted verses containing God's name in six cases, since his libretto is entirely Scroll text. Another interesting result is Fino's total of 22 mentions, almost the same as the Scroll's 23, but distributed very differently. Most mentions in Fino's work occur in Acts II and III, in dialogues between Boaz and the "veiled woman" or with Ruth. Perhaps Fino felt that more frequent mentions of God would somehow highlight the "mystical" aspect of these scenes.

There seems to be no clear tendency to either expand or reduce the characters' references to God in the Prelude and Act I.

In Act II (Scroll's chapter 2), there is far more mention of God in the 19th century works, probably because of several choral numbers that repeat God's name many times. This kind of chorus, common in 19th century oratorios, is no longer found in the 20th century works.

In Act III (Scroll's chapter 3), Boaz mentions God more often, and Ruth and Naomi also mention God in several librettos, possibly to inject more pietiness during and after the sexually suggestive threshing floor scene.

In Act IV (Scroll's chapter 4), most of the increases are in the chorus.

The most often used name is מִלְךָ, invoked 6 times by Naomi (1.8-9, 1.13, 3.21 twice, 2.20), 5 times by Boaz (2.4, 2.12 twice, 3.10, 3.13) once by Ruth (4.14), once by the reapers (2.4), twice by the people (4.11-12) and once by the women (4.14). The name מִלְךָ is used twice by Ruth (1.16) and once by Boaz (4.12). The term מַעֲשֵׂה is used twice, only by Naomi (1.20-21).

In a musical setting, when an aria is "strophic" and repeats the same text twice or more, I do not count each repetition of God's name as a separate mention. This is also true for numerous repetitions found in choruses.

224
By character

The Narrator mentions God twice in the Scroll (1.6 and 4.13). Goldschmidt is the only composer to retain the narrator’s mention of God in I, and Damrosch puts a mention in the narrator’s mouth in II. The narrator’s account of God’s role in Ruth’s pregnancy is eliminated from every work (Preface to ch. 6, p. 103).

- Chorus

The greatest increase of God’s mention by far is in the choruses, because the texts they sing are mostly biblical (particularly psalms), filled with God’s name. In the Scroll, choruses mention God once in II and three times in IV. In the 19th century works this is generally increased: for example, the highest total is 22 mentions each by Cowen and Gaul, with 9 of these in Cowen’s first scene alone, and 8 in Gaul’s second scene. The totals for Goldschmidt and Damrosch are 14 and 13 respectively, with the greatest proportion in Goldschmidt’s fourth scene and Damrosch’s second. Fino’s chorus, at the other end of the spectrum, never intones God’s name at all, because the operatic chorus takes part in the action without pausing to sing God’s praises. Franck’s chorus utters God’s name 4 times in II and once in IV, the closest match to the Scroll, even though this is a newly-written libretto which in most other respects strays quite far from the Scroll text.

In the 20th-century choruses, because most of these do not insert so many God-centered biblical texts, the numbers are far lower. The highest number, 10, is by Schumann, with the bulk of these in II. Rumshinsky, who greatly increases the mention of God by his characters, does not do so for his chorus, which only says God’s name 5 times. Beecham and Aloni use only Scroll for their libretto, yet Beecham reduces the chorus’s references to God in IV from 3 down to one, by eliminating certain verses. Aloni, on the other hand, increases the chorus’s mention of God to 4, by repeating a verse.

- Ruth

There is wide disparity in the number of times Ruth mentions God, versus the 3 times in the Scroll, which are all in chapter I (1.1), in “Entreat me not” (1.16-17). Since this text is always included, Ruth’s mentions of God at least in Act I would be expected to match or exceed the Scroll’s number. The same number is found in Goldschmidt, Damrosch, Gaul, Franck, Mellers, and Beecham. Only two are found in Fino, Berkeley and Aloni, because of modifications of the text. (For example, Aloni’s rendering of “Your God will be my God” is “Your God is mine,” eliminating one mention). Ruth in Cowen and Schumann mentions God 5 times in I, in verses other than 1.16-17, and Rumshinsky’s Ruth invokes God’s name a total of 14 times in this scene, establishing her piety from the outset and reflecting Rumshinsky’s background and personal beliefs (Appendix I, p. 269).

Ruth’s total mentions of God in all the scenes are the lowest in Aloni and Berkeley, in whose librettos she never mentions God again after I.1. In Franck and Beecham, she mentions God three times in Act I but never again. The only works in which Ruth mentions God in every scene are Rumshinsky (total of 26 mentions) and Cowen (total of 10). In Mellers she mentions God in all but the second scene, but only a total of seven times, similar to Schumann, where her mentions total eight but exclude the last scene. Since she usually does not appear, or at least does not speak, in IV, it is not surprising that her mentions of God there are zero in all works except Cowen, Rumshinsky and Mellers. Her total mentions of God in the other works, in all scenes, range between four and six.

Though there is wide disparity in these numbers, the picture that emerges is of a Ruth who mentions God equally or more than in the Scroll in 10 out of 12 works, though only in two
works is the number noticeably higher. This indicates a tendency to create greater piety in Ruth, even though this depiction is extreme in only two cases.

- Naomi

The picture is quite different for Naomi. Her mentions of God in the Scroll total 8, with 7 in chapter 1 (1:2) and one in chapter 2 (1:2), so in the Scroll Naomi seems a more God-centered character than Ruth. This number is exceeded in only four works. The largest number of Naomi's mentions of God is 16, in Rumshinsky; there are 12 mentions in Cowen, 10 in Schumann, and 9 in Gaul. The lowest number is in Berkeley, with only 2; Aloni's numbers match the Scroll, and all other works range between 5 and 7 mentions. Naomi is included in IV singing God's praises in Damrosch, Cowen, Rumshinsky, and Mellers. But the total picture shows a reduction of Naomi's mentions of God in seven works, so there appears to have been less interest in increasing Naomi's piety than Ruth's. Where such an increase exists, it is part of the overall pious atmosphere of works that increase mentions of God throughout (Cowan, Schumann, Rumshinsky).

- Boaz

The picture is very similar for Boaz. He mentions God 6 times in the Scroll, and this number is exceeded, like Naomi's, in only four works, and never by a large amount. In Cowen and Fino, Boaz mentions God 9 times, in Goldschmidt, 8, and in Rumshinsky, 7. This is a surprising figure, considering the extreme numbers found for other characters in Rumshinsky, who focused more on increasing the appearance of piety in the women. Berkeley has Boaz mention God 6 times (same as the Scroll), also an unexpected finding, since this libretto allocates few mentions of God to Ruth and Naomi. His agenda—increasing Boaz's piety while decreasing that of Ruth and Naomi—was apparently the reverse of Rumshinsky's. Otherwise, the numbers range from one (Franck and Mellers) to 5 (Beecham and Aloni, who both cut one Boaz reference from the Scroll). In seven works Boaz mentions God less, the same exact figure as Naomi's. These figures seem to reflect a similar lack of interest in ascribing greater piety to Boaz than to Naomi.

By libretto (Table F1)

In the Scroll, Naomi mentions God 8 times, Boaz 6, Ruth 3. In the librettos, the same proportionate relationship between the three characters is found in Damrosch, Gaul, Cowen, Franck, Schumann, Beecham, and Aloni. Ruth mentions God more than the other characters only in Rumshinsky and Mellers. Boaz mentions God most in Goldschmidt, Cowen, and Fino. There is less disparity throughout in the chorus's mentions.

SYNTHESIS AND SUMMARY

Three markers illustrate the degree of alteration that has occurred in a libretto: character centrality, overall similarity to the Scroll, and piety of characters. These can be synthesized by combining the tables and graphs in this chapter, which makes it possible to move from the small individual picture of each work to the larger picture. I am listing the results in the form of a ranking; in each example, #1 represents the highest degree of change

- Character centrality: based on Tables B, C, and D;
- Similarity of libretto to Scroll: based on Tables A, E, B2, and C1;
- Piety of characters relative to the Scroll: based on Tables F and Fi.
Character centrality

Ruth—19th century
Based on Table B (percentage of scenes)
1. Cowen
2. Fino
3. Gaul
4. Franck
5. Goldschmidt
6. Damrosch
Based on Table C (number of solos: little variability)
1. Cowen
2. Goldschmidt, Gaul and Franck
3. Damrosch and Fino
Based on Table D (presence in any ensembles: little variability)
1. Franck
2. Goldschmidt, Damrosch, Cowen, Fino
3. Gaul

As seen in these rankings, the only work in which Ruth is in the highest number of scenes and also has the greatest number of solos is Cowen's. Though she is in a small percentage of scenes in Franck, she is in the largest number of ensembles, highlighting the focus on relationships in that work. Her presence based on all three criteria is smallest in Damrosch.

Ruth—20th century
Based on Table B
1. Rumshinsky
2. Berkeley
3. Schumann and Mellers
4. Beecham
5. Aloni
Based on Table C
1. Schumann
2. Mellers
3. Berkeley
4. Rumshinsky
5. Beecham and Aloni
Based on Table D
1. Rumshinsky
2. Berkeley
3. Schumann
4. Beecham
5. Mellers and Aloni

The above lists show that Ruth is in the highest percentage of scenes and the most ensembles in Rumshinsky, where she has among the fewest solos, indicating that she is usually onstage as part
of a large ensemble. She has the most solos in Schumann, but is in fewer scenes and ensembles there, the reverse of Rumshinsky. Her overall presence is smallest in Aloni.

**Naomi—19th century**

Based on Table B
1. Fino
2. Gaul
3. Cowen
4. Goldschmidt
5. Franck
6. Damrosch

Based on Table C
1. Goldschmidt, Damrosch, Franck, Fino
2. Gaul, Cowen

Based on Table D
1. Fino
2. Goldschmidt, Damrosch, Gaul, Cowen, Franck

These numbers show that Naomi appears most often in Fino, where she also appears in the largest number of ensembles and has among the highest number of solos. She is present in almost as high a percentage of scenes in Gaul, but has fewer solos or parts in ensembles, so her participation in those scenes is minimal.

**Naomi—20th century**

Based on Table B
1. Mellers
2. Aloni
3. Rumshinsky and Beecham
4. Berkeley
5. Schumann

Based on Table C
1. Rumshinsky, Mellers, Beecham
2. Berkeley and Aloni
3. Schumann

Based on Table D
1. Rumshinsky
2. Berkeley
3. Schumann
4. Mellers, Beecham, Aloni

These numbers show that Naomi has among the highest number of solos and ensembles in Rumshinsky, but is not in a high percentage of scenes. She has the greatest presence in Mellers, except for ensembles, while in Berkeley she has a relatively large presence in solos and ensembles, but not in scenes. Naomi has among the lowest numbers in all three categories in Schumann. Though she opens that work with a lengthy aria, she gradually disappears from later scenes.
Boaz—19th century
Based on Table B
1. Cowen
2. Damrosch
3. Franck
4. Gaul
5. Goldschmidt and Fino
Based on Table C
1. Goldschmidt
2. Cowen
3. Damrosch, Gaul, Franck
4. Fino
Based on Table D
1. Cowen, Franck, Fino
2. Goldschmidt
3. Damrosch, Gaul

Boaz, as illustrated here, consistently has greater presence in Cowen. In Fino he is present in the smallest percentage of the work and has the fewest solos, yet among the largest appearance in ensembles. In Goldschmidt he is in the fewest scenes, yet has the largest number of solos and a moderate number of ensembles. His smallest presence throughout is in Gaul.

Boaz—20th century
Based on Table B
1. Mellers
2. Berkeley
3. Beecham and Rumshinsky
4. Aloni
5. Schumann
Based on Table C
1. Beecham
2. Mellers
3. Berkeley and Aloni
4. Schumann and Rumshinsky
Based on Table D
1. Rumshinsky and Berkeley
2. Schumann
3. Mellers, Beecham, Aloni

As seen here, Boaz is in a high percentage of scenes and solos in Mellers, but no ensembles. In Berkeley he is in a high percentage of scenes and ensembles, but only a moderate number of solos. He has the smallest presence in Schumann.
**Similarity to Scroll**

**19th century**
Based on Table A (number of Scroll scenes)
1. Goldschmidt (10)
2. Damrosch (8)
3. Cowen, Franck (7)
4. Gaul, Fino (5)

Based on Table E (opens with Scroll text or Narrator)
1. Goldschmidt, Damrosch
2. Gaul

Based on Table B2 (percentage of Narrator's appearance)
1. Damrosch
2. Gaul
3. Goldschmidt
4. Franck
5. Cowen, Fino (0)

Based on Table C1 (number of solos based on Scroll)
1. Goldschmidt
2. Damrosch
3. Gaul
4. Franck
5. Fino
6. Cowen

These rankings show that Goldschmidt is closest to the Scroll in three of the four criteria: Damrosch is first in two of the criteria and second in the other two. Gaul has the fewest Scroll scenes, but is relatively close to the Scroll based on other criteria.

**20th century**
Based on Table A
1. Aloni (10)
2. Rumshinsky, Beecham (8)
3. Schumann, Mellers (7)
4. Berkeley (5)

Based on Table E
1. Beecham, Aloni
2. Mellers

Based on Table B2
1. Beecham and Aloni
2. Mellers
3. Rumshinsky
4. Schumann and Berkeley

Based on Table C1
1. Beecham and Aloni
2. Mellers
3. Schumann
4. Rumshinsky and Berkeley
Aloni and Beecham, whose librettos are exclusively Scroll text, obviously come closest to the Scroll based on all the criteria. Mellers, whose libretto is also closely based on the Scroll, is next.
Boaz
1. Fino (10)
2. Cowen (9)
3. Goldschmidt (8)

Chorus
1. Cowen (22)
2. Gaul and Goldschmidt (14)
3. Damrosch (13)

Based on Tables E and F, Cowen’s mentions of God are consistently the highest, for all the characters except Boaz. In Damrosch’s work, most mentions of God are by the Chorus, not the characters. Fino’s Boaz mentions God more than in any other work, even though this work is the furthest from the Scroll and has among the fewest mentions of God overall. So Cowen’s interest was in creating a general atmosphere of piety, also true to a smaller degree for Gaul and Goldschmidt. Fino’s interest was in creating a more pious Boaz, in a work that is generally secular.

Ruth is made to seem more pious than in the Scroll in all but one 19th-century work (Franck). Boaz is painted as more pious in three 19th-century works (Goldschmidt, Cowen, and Fino), and he is the most pious character in Fino. Naomi is more pious than in the Scroll in two 19th-century works (Gaul and Cowen). She is the most pious (as she is in the Scroll) in four 19th-century works (Damrosch, Gaul, Cowen, Franck).

20th century

Ruth
1. Rumshinsky (26)
2. Schumann (8)
3. Mellers (7)

Naomi
1. Rumshinsky (16)
2. Schumann (10)

Boaz
1. Rumshinsky (7)

Based on Tables E and F, Rumshinsky and Schumann have the highest number of mentions of God in their works, as well as in the mouths of Ruth and Naomi. They are the only 20th-century librettos in which God is mentioned more often than in the Scroll. Only Rumshinsky has a more pious Boaz, and the number of Ruth’s and Naomi’s mentions of God exceed any in the 19th century. Ruth is made to seem more pious than in the Scroll in three 20th-century works (Schumann, Rumshinsky and Mellers). She is portrayed as the most pious of the three main characters by a wide margin in Rumshinsky and marginally in Mellers.

Boaz is painted as more pious only in Rumshinsky. Naomi is more pious than in the Scroll in two 20th-century works (Schumann and Rumshinsky). She is the most pious (as she is in the Scroll) in four 20th-century works (Schumann, Mellers, Beecham, Aloni).
Ruth has the greatest presence in Cowen in the 19th and Ramshinsky in the 20th century. These two works have other features in common: both are quite distant from the Scroll, and they have the highest number of mentions of God. It would seem that by increasing both the importance and piety of Ruth, they also raised the level of piety in the work, though they did not consider it important to remain faithful to the Scroll.

Naomi has the greatest presence in Fino in the 19th. Mellers in the 20th century. Fino's libretto is one of the furthest from the Scroll, while Mellers is among the closest. Both works are among the least pious, implying that Naomi's greater presence did not require an increased piety in the works.

Boaz has the largest presence in Cowen (like Ruth) in the 19th and Mellers (like Naomi) in the 20th century works. Cowen's is the most pious work in his century but furthest from the Scroll; Mellers is the least pious 19th-century work but one of the closest to the Scroll.

To sum up, certain trends can be seen but there is no clear pattern. In the end, the choices of which character to highlight, how close to remain to the Scroll, and how much piety to inject in the text were the individual librettist's. That choice could have been made based on personal preference, audience expectation, or a combination of these. Further research, for example into social settings of the composers, might reveal more definitive answers. While important, this aspect was not the focus of this thesis. I have explored the results rather than the motivations. The more interesting point for me, which I have tried to highlight throughout, is what the librettist and composer did with their choice, and how their re-tellings bring new dimensions to an old story.
Appendix A: Detailed outlines of Table A figures

The Scroll

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prelude (providing summary of background): 1.1-6</td>
<td>Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: On the road to Bethlehem: 1.7-19a</td>
<td>Naomi, Ruth, Orpah, Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II: In the fields: 2.1-16</td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi, “reapers,” Boaz, “servant,” Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Evening at home: 2.17-23</td>
<td>Naomi, Ruth, Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Naomi, Ruth, Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Naomi’s instructions: 3.1-6</td>
<td>Boaz, Ruth, Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: On the threshing floor: 3.7-15</td>
<td>Naomi, Ruth, Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Going home: 3.16-18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Boaz, “redeemer,” “people and elders,” Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postlude: 4.18-22 (genealogy)</td>
<td>Narrator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Divisions in operas/oratorios
#### 19th Century

**Goldschmidt: Ruth, A Sacred Pastoral (1868)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His #</th>
<th>Scroll #</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: orchestra</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: 1.1-7</td>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td>Naomi, Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Chorus—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Naomi, chorus (&quot;people&quot;), Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: 1.8-17</td>
<td>I. 1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Chorus—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7: 1.19b-21</td>
<td>I. 2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8: Chorus—Matthew quote</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10: 2, 1-2</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Narrator, Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: Chorus trio: Psalm</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: 2, 4</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Boaz, chorus (reapers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13: Boaz—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14: Reapers—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15: Chorus—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16: Boaz—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17: Chorus—hymn</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18: 2, 5-8, 10-13</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Boaz, Ruth, servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19: 2, 12</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Boaz, Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20: Chorale</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-22: 2.19-23 (&amp; Psalm)</td>
<td>II.2</td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23: 3, 1-3a, 4b-6</td>
<td>III.1</td>
<td>Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24: Chorus—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25: Boaz—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26: Chorus—Matthew</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27: 3, 7-17 (opens w. 3.16)</td>
<td>III. 2 and 3.</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[changed to 1st person account conflating scenes 2&amp;3 into a single narrative section]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28: 3.18</td>
<td>III.3</td>
<td>Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29: Naomi—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30: Chorus—Psalms</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31: 4.1-11</td>
<td>IV.1</td>
<td>Narrator, Boaz, chorus (&quot;People&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32: Choral cantilena</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33-34-35: 4.13-17</td>
<td>IV.2</td>
<td>Narrator, chorus (&quot;women&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36: Solo, Chorus—Prophets</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**10 scenes of biblical narrative, 13 Additional choruses.**
### Damrosch, *Ruth and Naomi: A Scriptural Idyll* (1875)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His #</th>
<th>Scroll #</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Orchestra</td>
<td></td>
<td>Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 1.1-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Naomi, Ruth, Orph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4.1.1-19a</td>
<td>I.1</td>
<td>Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chorus of praise</td>
<td></td>
<td>Narrator, Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 1.19, 22b</td>
<td>I.2.</td>
<td>Chorus (“reapers”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Chorus: Psalm</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>“Female Reaper,” functions as “servant.” Boaz, Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 2.5-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ruth, 3 Reapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 2.13 plus other text</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Narrator, Chorus (sings praise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. 2.23</td>
<td>II.2</td>
<td>Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. ch. 3.1-7</td>
<td>III.1</td>
<td>Narrator, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Orchestra, “Notturno”</td>
<td>III.2</td>
<td>Narrator, Boaz, Ruth, chorus (men, then all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. 3. 8-11, 18</td>
<td>(most of scene cut)</td>
<td>Narrator, Naomi, chorus (praise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Ruth &amp; Chorus: Psalm 23</td>
<td>IV.1</td>
<td>Narrator, Boaz, Ruth, chorus (men, then all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. 4.1. 9-11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Narrator, Naomi, chorus (praise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. 4.13 plus other text</td>
<td>IV.2</td>
<td>Narrator, Boaz, Ruth, chorus (men, then all)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 scenes of biblical narrative. 3 additional choruses.

### Gaul, *Ruth, A Sacred Cantata* (1880)

[1 have based the breaks on the paraphrased verses.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His #</th>
<th>Scroll #</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part I: Sorrow</td>
<td></td>
<td>Narrator (chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 1.1-7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 1.8-9 plus additional</td>
<td>I.1</td>
<td>Narrator (chorus). Naomi, Ruth, Orph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 1.14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 1.16-17</td>
<td>I.1</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 1.19b-21</td>
<td>I.2</td>
<td>Chorus (“people”). Naomi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part II: Joy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His #</th>
<th>Scroll #</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Reapers chorus</td>
<td></td>
<td>Narrator (chorus). Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 2.1-2 plus additional</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 2.8-9</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 2.10-12</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Narrator (chorus). Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. 2.17-18 (very altered)</td>
<td>II.2</td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. Chorale, "Nightfall"
12. Orchestra, "Daybreak; wedding chorus"
13. Boaz sings hymns of praise
14. Chorus sings hymns of praise

[Note, his #11-14 completely replace both Acts III and IV. and Postlude]

5 scenes of biblical narrative. 4 additional choruses.

Cowen, Ruth, A Dramatic Oratorio (1887)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His #</th>
<th>Scroll #</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dramatization of Prelude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Hebrews&quot; chorus (&quot;the neighbors&quot;), Naomi, &quot;Elder&quot;, Orpah, Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Naomi, Ruth, Orpah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1. 8-10, 15-17</td>
<td>II.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chorus of Hebrews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Reaper,&quot; (functions as &quot;servant&quot;), chorus (reapers and gleaners), Ruth, Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 2. 4-16 plus additional</td>
<td>II.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chorus (reapers and gleaners), Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 2.19-22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Replaces III.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boaz, chorus (reapers and gleaners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Replaces III.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boaz, chorus (reapers and gleaners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Elder, reapers, gleaners&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Reapers, gleaners&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. 3. 9-13 plus additional</td>
<td>III.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Naomi, Boaz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 scenes of biblical narrative. 5 additional choruses, 1 with Boaz.
**Franck, *Ruth, Eglogue Biblique* (1844/1872)**

[The breaks are based on the paraphrased verses.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His #</th>
<th>Scroll #</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Orchestra</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Moabite chorus (1.6-7)</td>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td>Chorus (Moabites)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 1.8-17</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi, Ophah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>Narrator (&quot;Greek chorus&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi, Ophah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>Narrator (&quot;Greek chorus&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 1.20-21</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Chorus (Bethlehemites), Naomi, Ophah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Part II |         |              |
| 9. Chorus of reapers | -- | Ruth, Boaz, Chorus (reapers) |
| 10. 2.8-13 | II.1 |              |
| 11. Chorus | -- |              |
| There is no scene 2. | | |

| Part III |         |              |
| 12. 3.9-13 | III.2 | Ruth, Boaz |
| 13. Ruth to Naomi—altered | III.3 | Ruth, Naomi |
| 14. 4.1-11—altered | IV.1 | Boaz, Chorus ("people") |
| There is no scene 2. | | |
| 15. “Prophetic conclusion” (chorus) | | (replaces scene 2) |

7 scenes of biblical narrative, 3 additional choruses.

**Fino, *Noemi e Ruth, Poema Biblico* (1908)**

[Fino does not designate or musical numbers. He only divides the work into three parts.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His #</th>
<th>Scroll #</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Chorus of Bethlehemite reapers</td>
<td>(replaces Prelude)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 1.1-17 rewritten or paraphrased</td>
<td>I.1</td>
<td>Chorus (Bethlehemite men, female reapers, Naomi, Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 1.20-21 paraphrased</td>
<td>I.2</td>
<td>Chorus (&quot;people&quot;), Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With much additional text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Part II |         |              |
| 4. 2.1-16 totally rewritten | -- | "veiled woman," Boaz |
| 5. 2.19 paraphrased | II.2: | Ruth, Naomi, Boaz |
| 6. 3.1-4 paraphrased | III.1 | these two are conflated |

| Part III |         |              |
| 7. 3.6-7 replaced with chorus | III.2 | Chorus ("people"), Naomi |
| 8. 5.9-11 paraphrased, then expanded | III.2 | Ruth, Naomi, Boaz |
| There is no scene 3. | | |
9. IV is replaced with a continuation and opening up of III. 2: Boaz has a vision of the future Messiah; Naomi, then a chorus of shepherds, join in a prophecy.

5 scenes of biblical narrative. 2 additional choruses. 1 with Boaz and Naomi.

20th Century

Schumann. *Ruth (oratorio) (1910)*

[Schumann divides his work into 6 parts.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His #</th>
<th>Scroll #</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1. “Naomi’s Lament”</td>
<td>(replaces Prelude)</td>
<td>Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2. 1.8-17 mostly paraphrased</td>
<td>I.1</td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.19-22 plus much additional</td>
<td>I.2</td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi, chorus (Bethlehemites)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3. “In the Harvest Field”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus of Reapers</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz, chorus (reapers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 (altered)</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz, chorus (reapers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus of peasants</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 5-16 paraphrased</td>
<td>II.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus of Reapers</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 4. “Naomi’s Counsel”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.19-20 plus additional</td>
<td>II.2</td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>III.1</td>
<td>Ruth, Naomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 5. Threshing Floor, nightfall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priest and keepers of the Temple</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus: “Nocturnal Spirits”</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth’s prayer</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>III.2</td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love duet: Song of Songs</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priest hymns to God</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14 (Ruth, not Boaz, says)</td>
<td>III.2</td>
<td>Ruth, Boaz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no III.3

There is no real IV.1 or 2; they are replaced by:

Part 6. Morning Dawn

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chorus of priests and people</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boaz and Ruth: love duet</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 scenes of biblical narrative. 6 additional choruses.
Rumshinsky, *Ruth, Biblical Opera in Two acts and Seven scenes* (1949)

### His # | Scroll # | Participants
---|---|---
1. “Birthday celebration for Elimelech”
Precedes events related in Prelude | -- | “Two servants” serve Narrator’s function
2. “On the road to Bethlehem”

#### Scroll 1.1
1.1-5 paraphrased | Prelude | Ruth, Naomi, Orpah
1.8-13, 16-17, and 21 altered | I.1 | Naomi, Ruth, chorus (Bethlehemites), Tov
3. “In Bethlehem”

#### Scroll 1.2
1.20 expanded; additions | I.2 | Naomi, Ruth, chorus (Bethlehemites), Tov

4. “In Boaz’s Field”

#### Scroll 1.3
Chorus of gleaners | -- | Boaz, Ruth, chorus (gleaners), “Gidon”
Gidon sings aria | -- |

#### Scroll 2.8
2.8.0 | II.1 | Boaz, Ruth, chorus (gleaners), “Gidon”

5. “Lone tent”

#### Scroll 3.1
1-4 plus additional | III.1 | Naomi, Ruth
3. 1-4 plus additional | III.2 | Naomi, Ruth

6. “Threshing Floor”

#### Scroll 3.1
Boaz soliloquy opens | -- |
Angel proclaims *halacha* | -- |
3.11 and love duet | III.2 | Ruth, Boaz

There is no III.3

7. “At the City Gate”

#### Scroll 4.9
Dispute between Tov and Boaz | -- |

8. “At the City Gate”

#### Scroll 4.11
Boaz, Ruth, Naomi, Chorus (“Elders”), “Gidon”

Chorus et al conclude. There is no IV.2.

### Scenic choral scenes

#### 8 scenes of biblical narrative. 3 additional choruses.

Mellers, *The Song of Ruth, cantata* (1950)

[Mellers divides his work into 4 scenes, based on the Scroll chapters.]

### His # | Scroll # | Participants
---|---|---
1. “The Road to Bethlehem”

#### Scroll 1.1
1.1-7 paraphrased | Prelude | Narrator (chorus)
1.8-19 | I.1 | Ruth, Naomi, chorus (“women”)
1.19-22 | I.2 | Naomi, chorus (women), Narrator (chorus)

2. “The Harvest Field”

#### Scroll 2.4
Narrator Chorus opens | -- |
2.4-16 altered | II.1 | Boaz, Ruth, Naomi, Narrator

240
There is no II.2
3. “The Threshing Floor”  
3.1-5 III.1 Naomi, Ruth, Narrator  
3. 6-13 paraphrased III.2 Narrator (chorus), Boaz, Ruth

There is no III.3  
4. “The Seed of Israel”  
There is no IV.1  
4.13-15 (Naomi sings v. 15) IV.2 Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Chorus (people)

7 scenes of biblical narrative. 2 additional choruses.

Beecham, Ruth Cantata (1957)  
Beecham divides his work into 2 parts; the first includes Chapter 1 of Ruth, and the second includes Chapter 2 and parts of 3 and 4.  
Because the “libretto” is the same text as the Scroll, there is no difference in the characters who appear in the different scenes.

Part I.  
1.1-7 Prelude  
1.10-19 I.1  
1.19-22 I.2

Part II.  
2.1-16 II.1  
2.17-18 II.2  
3. 2-3 III.1  
3. 7-13 III.2

There is no III.3  
4. 1, 3, 6-11 IV.1

There is no IV.2.  

8 scenes of biblical narrative.

Berkeley, Ruth: An Opera in Three scenes (1956)  
His # Scroll # Participants
1. Naomi opens --  
1. 8-19 paraphrased I.1 Naomi, Ruth, Orpah  
1.19-22 plus additional text I.2 Naomi, chorus (women)

2. Harvest Field: Chorus of praise --  
2.1-16 (replaced by dramatic confrontation between Ruth and gleaners reapers) (II.1) Ruth, Boaz, chorus (gleaners and reapers)

There is no II.2  
3. Threshing Floor, night  
3. 1-6 paraphrased III.1 Naomi, Ruth

Harvest songs, hymns --
3. 9 altered, love verses added  III.2  Ruth, Boaz
There is no III.3
Boaz relates rest of story  --
Chorus et al sing praises  --
There is no IV.
5 scenes of biblical narrative, 3 additional choruses.

Aloni has organized his setting strictly to the biblical text and chapter arrangement. As with Beecham, because the "libretto" is the same text as the Scroll, there is no difference in the characters who appear in the different scenes.

1. Prelude  I.1-2
2. II.1-2
3. III.1-3
4. IV.1-2
Appendix B: Tables C and C.5

This table indicates the lengths of solos in pages, compared with the total pages in each score. These numbers can be deceptive or skewed because other factors are involved, such as print and page size, measures of music, and tempo. All of these combined indicate the performance time of a given aria. All scores analyzed here have between three and six staves per page. I have included the duration of each solo and its relation to the total duration of the work, based on taped performances, for three works.

The results both depend on, and are skewed by, the different lengths of these works. As seen on Table C, four works are 60-100 pages (Damrosch, Gaul, Mellers, Beecham). Another four are 160-200 pages (Goldschmidt, Cowen, Fino, Schumann). Of the remaining four, Franck’s is 117 pages, Berkeley’s 224, Rumshinsky’s 376 (unpublished manuscript with fewer measures per page), and Aloni’s 30 pages long (no accompaniment, so more measures per page).

A page of music bears little or no relationship to the amount of text or verses found there. Words and whole verses are often repeated a number of times, and in some cases few words can be sung to many notes. This table is an indication of how much of all the music, not the text, is allotted to each soloist as aria or recitative, rather than as part of an ensemble.

### TABLE C: SOLO PAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>19th Century</th>
<th>Total pages</th>
<th>Ruth solo pages</th>
<th>Naomi solo pages</th>
<th>Boaz solo pages</th>
<th>Orpha solo pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damrosch</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaul</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowen</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linfo</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th Century</td>
<td>Total pages</td>
<td>Ruth solo pages</td>
<td>Naomi solo pages</td>
<td>Boaz solo pages</td>
<td>Orpha solo pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumshinsky</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecham</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Timed works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>19th Century</th>
<th>Total pages</th>
<th>Ruth solo % of total</th>
<th>Naomi solo % of total</th>
<th>Boaz solo % of total</th>
<th>Orpha solo % of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>Duration: 106’</td>
<td>Time: 13' 8”</td>
<td>Time: 13' 8”</td>
<td>Time: 2' 1”</td>
<td>Time: 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Duration: 80’</td>
<td>Time: 1' 1”</td>
<td>Time: 6' 13”</td>
<td>Time: 3' 5”</td>
<td>Time: 4' 13”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
<td>Duration: 30’</td>
<td>Time: 3' 10”</td>
<td>Time: 4' 13”</td>
<td>Time: 3' 5”</td>
<td>Time: 12”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

243
Ruth sings more solo pages than Naomi in four of the 19th century works (Goldschmidt, Damrosch, Gaul, Cowen), while Naomi's solo pages surpass Ruth's in four of the 20th century works (Rumshinsky, Beecham, Berkeley, Aloni), possibly indicative of the general tendency later in the 20th century to use the Scroll itself as the libretto (e.g. Beecham and Aloni), where Naomi's number of words exceeds Ruth's (ch. 2, p. 23).

Boaz has fewer solo pages than Ruth in every 19th century work, while in the 20th century he has more pages than Ruth in two works (Beecham and Aloni). This is a particularly interesting result, since these are the only two works based entirely on the Scroll. From within that framework, the composers chose to give Boaz more solo moments than he would appear to have in the Scroll, where he does in fact speak the most words (ch. 2, p. 23).

In the 19th-century works, Boaz's solo pages exceed Naomi's in half the works, though not by much, while when his pages are fewer than Naomi there is sometimes a larger gap (e.g., Boaz's 3 vs. Naomi's 11 pages in Finot). In the 20th-century works, Boaz has fewer solo pages than Naomi in all but one case (Mellers). In several of these, there is a wide differential: 2 vs. 11 pages in Schumann, 4 vs. 11 pages in Berkeley.

Table C offers a more complete picture of the precise length or duration of these pages.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Pages tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>19th Century</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
<td>Entreat me not. Whither thou goest. Let me find favour. I will tell thee all that the man hath done</td>
<td>1 p. Recit. (1-104)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 pp. allegro con moto (1-124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p. Andante non troppo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp. Recit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 pp. allegro animato (1-108)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damrosch</td>
<td>Entreat me not. The Lord is my Shepherd</td>
<td>3 pp. allegro molto con moto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 pp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaul</td>
<td>Entreat me not. Let me live unto the field. Past all knowledge is the kindness</td>
<td>3 pp. (. = 56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 pp. allegretto (. = 80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 pp. allegretto con moto (. = 88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowen</td>
<td>Be of good comfort. Entreat me not. My Father, thou are the guide of my youth. The Lord is my strength</td>
<td>4 pp. lento con moto (. = 52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5 pp. adagio molto sostenuto (. = 46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp. molto andante (. = 63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p. andantino (. = 52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
<td>Moi, je vous sui. Et je veux... Soyez bénie, o ma mere</td>
<td>1 p. Recit. Animé (. = 168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 pp. animé (. = 96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p. Recit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fino</td>
<td>Occhi di madre (&quot;The eye of a mother&quot;) Gleaner's song</td>
<td>2.5 pp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20th Century</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>Entreat me not. Whither thou goest. Naomi, now my Mother. The Lord is my shepherd. Ah. How still; Lord, thou alone knowest</td>
<td>2 pp. allegro moderato (. = 100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp. andante (. = 52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 pp. allegro moderato (. = 112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 pp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
<td>Entreat me not. Why have I found grace? Glad is the heart of Ruth. Blessed be the Lord.</td>
<td>2 pp. andantino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p. con moto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5 pp. molto calmo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp. con molto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumshinsky</td>
<td>Al Tifg'iti. Ana Ilî.</td>
<td>3 pp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 pp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecham</td>
<td>Entreat me not.</td>
<td>3.5 pp. andante (. = 72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Whither thou goest. Almighty look down. To thee beloved God. I weep.</td>
<td>2 pp. allegretto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp. lento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 pp. allegro moderato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
<td>Don't ask me to leave you</td>
<td>2 pp.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are no pure solos in Aloni, since other voices always echo the soloist.
The Scroll references also include paraphrased verses that are the same in meaning.

*Symbol explanations: . quarter-note; . dotted quarter-note; . sixteenth-note.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Pages, tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>19th Century</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
<td>Go, return each; Call me not Naomi; Sit still; Commit thy Way.</td>
<td>2.5 pp. <strong>Recit. adagio</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 pp. <strong>Recit. 1.5 p.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 pp. <strong>Recit. 3 p.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danrosch</td>
<td>My dear daughters, go, return; My daughter shall I not seek? Hail, hail, the Lord</td>
<td>2 pp. <strong>Lento</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 pp. <strong>Recit. 1 p.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Allegro</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5 pp. <strong>Largo</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>O gracious Lord; Call me not Naomi</td>
<td>4.5 pp. <strong>Andante sostenuto</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 pp. <strong>Recit.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowen</td>
<td>Like as a father; I have been young</td>
<td>4 pp. <strong>Andante non troppo</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 pp. <strong>Andantino</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franck</td>
<td>Adieu; Ah, dors-mais (Call me not); Honneur à Dieu (&quot;Honour to God&quot;);</td>
<td>1 pp. <strong>Lento non troppo</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 pp. <strong>Quasi andante</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fini</td>
<td>O mère... (&quot;O daughter-in-law&quot;); Ah! Non dite maman (Call me not Naomi); I pour il bene (&quot;I direct your days&quot;);</td>
<td>3 pp. <strong>.</strong> 84 (9/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 pp. <strong>.</strong> 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 pp. <strong>.</strong> 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20th Century</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>Lament; O my God; Know that Boaz</td>
<td>7.5 pp. <strong>Allegro agitato</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5 pp. <strong>Impetuoso andante</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp. <strong>.</strong> 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
<td>I let each depart; Call me not Naomi; My daughter; Blessed by the Lord</td>
<td>1.5 pp. <strong>Lento</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 pp. <strong>andante</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 pp. <strong>Recit. Adagio</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p. <strong>con moto</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecham</td>
<td>Go, return; Turn again, my daughters; Call me not Naomi; And now is not Boaz</td>
<td>2 pp. <strong>andante</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5 pp. <strong>Allegro moderato</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5 pp. <strong>Meno mosso</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p. <strong>Lento</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Almighty Father; Call me not Naomi; Fear not, beloved Ruth</td>
<td>4 pp. <strong>Allegro moderato</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 pp. <strong>Recit.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 pp. <strong>Allegro</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp. <strong>andante</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumshinsky</td>
<td>Bachaloni (Oh my dream); Kakamani (I am like the clematis); At Hakena Li Naomi (Call me not); Ode ha (Still to you God);</td>
<td>1 p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp. <strong>marcato</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p. <strong>andante</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7 pp. <strong>andante</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
<td>Go back my daughters; Don t call me Naomi; My daughter, what I wish for you</td>
<td>3 pp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 p.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE C.5: BOAZ SOLOS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>19th Century</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
<td>Thou visitest the earth. &amp; O that men</td>
<td>2 pp.</td>
<td>Andante con moto (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I will lay me down &amp; Ye elders</td>
<td>4 pp.</td>
<td>Allegro con brio (120)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If thou wilt redeem &amp; Ye are witnesses</td>
<td>1 p.</td>
<td>Allegro tranquillo (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damrosch</td>
<td>Hearest thou not! &amp; Blessed be thou</td>
<td>1 p.</td>
<td>Recit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaul</td>
<td>Go not from hence &amp; Glory be to Thee, o Lord</td>
<td>2 pp.</td>
<td>andante (56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowen</td>
<td>Hearest not my daughter &amp; How excellent is thy loving-kindness &amp; The meek shall inherit</td>
<td>2.5 pp.</td>
<td>Recit. (84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Que Dieu protège (Let God protect) &amp; Dans mon cœur (In my heart)</td>
<td>3 pp.</td>
<td>andante (104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fino</td>
<td><em>F'Acqua gara</em> (You share joyous water)</td>
<td>3 pp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20th Century</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>Daughter, go not...Let her glean</td>
<td>2 pp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellers</td>
<td>Go not from hence &amp; Blessed be Ruth &amp; And of his seed</td>
<td>2 pp.</td>
<td>andante tranquillo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp.</td>
<td>Recit. con moto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 p.</td>
<td>largamente</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecham</td>
<td>Hearest thou not &amp; It hath been fully showed me &amp; Blessed be thou</td>
<td>2 pp.</td>
<td>allegro moderato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naomi, who has returned</td>
<td>3 pp.</td>
<td>allegro moderato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 pp.</td>
<td>piu mosso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 p.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Ah Ruth! &amp; Behold this maid</td>
<td>3 pp.</td>
<td>kanto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 pp.</td>
<td>kanto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramshinsky</td>
<td>Rain'm ma'ach (I saw an angel in my dream)</td>
<td>4 pp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloni</td>
<td>Have you not heard &amp; God bless you my daughter</td>
<td>2 pp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 p.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From a musical perspective, “number of pages” is a very relative term when comparing these various solos. Metronome markings are the most reliable measure for comparison, but only certain composers include them; and the duration of solos without time indications cannot be measured accurately. Therefore, I suggest that these markings are useful not for determining precise lengths of solos (ch. 5, p. 99), but rather for the insight they offer into the composer’s intentions for the general mood or impression of a solo.
Chapter 8  BEYOND RUTH: FUTURE PATHWAYS

Each librettist represented in this thesis reflected his own preconceptions and agenda by omitting, expanding, or altering scenes found in the Scroll. Some librettos foreground the Ruth-Boaz relationship, others, the Ruth-Naomi friendship. The composers reinforced these choices with a range of musical techniques.

Ruth would have been expected to predominate in all the works, yet she appears in a smaller percentage of scenes than in the Scroll in half the 19th century works. There seems to be a trend to diminish Naomi’s presence, though not dramatically, rather than to expand it, in over half of all the works. Very few works greatly increase Boaz’s presence, but virtually none reduces it.

The greatest change from the Scroll is the decreased role of the Narrator. In general, the more “dramatic” a work aspires to be, the less evident the narrator. This is true for Schumann, Fino, Berkeley, and Rumshinsky; the last three are operas, which would not be expected to utilize a narrator, and Schumann’s style is operatic. Cowen’s is the only 19th century oratorio without a narrator. Based on some of his writings (Appendix 1, pp. 260-1), Cowen may have been trying to tweak the conventions of his day deliberately. Conversely, the presence of a narrator lends a tone of “authenticity” to a musical setting because the part of the narrator is closely linked to the Scroll itself, the Bible in general, and oratorio tradition (ch. 4, p. 85). This probably explains why the narrator predominates in Gaul and Damrosch, whose works were very conventional. Use of a narrator also adheres closely to the narrative style of the Scroll, which is why it is found in Mellers, Beecham and Aloni.

Ruth’s predominance varies between these works, yet her words of 1.16-17, “Entreat me not,” are found in each one, set to vastly contrasted music. Some settings are very fast and dramatic (e.g., Damrosch, Franck, and Schumann) while others are slower and softer (e.g., Goldschmidt and Gaul). Ruth’s attachment to Naomi is re-imagined in multiple ways by the kind of music chosen for her declaration of allegiance. My analysis in chapter 6 of how those exact same words were set to music by each composer provides a good example of musical midrash applied to a single aria; this concept can be traced throughout all the analyses in chapter 6.

Finding more Ruth-Boaz duets in the 20th-century than the 19th-century works (Table D, Ensembles) was a surprise. I had a preconception that in the earlier period, the “romance” would be of greater interest than in a later period, while in fact, the interest in the Ruth-Naomi relationship is virtually equal to the Ruth-Boaz one in the 19th century. In the 20th-century works, there is a love duet in all but in Beecham and Aloni, while in the 19th century, such a duet is only found in two works, Cowen and Fino. In spite of the label “Romantic” for the late 19th-century, the reluctance in that era to create a love story might stem from a traditionalist view of, and respect for, biblical writings. This is only speculation; understanding the social settings of these different composers is important, but such sociological aspects are beyond the scope of this thesis.

As a feminist scholar, I have been aware of increased interest in Ruth in the past few decades because of the Scroll’s story of a relationship between women. Brenner states in her Introduction to A Feminist Companion to Ruth that “The fact that the Ruth scroll is a ‘woman’s story’ makes it particularly attractive for feminist interpreters” (Brenner 1993, 10). A manifestation of greater interest even outside the academic community is the book Rattling Ruth, where in the Introduction the editors describe the Scroll as “a story of woman caring and women plotting, women mourning and women rejoicing” in which “Daughter-in-law and mother-in-law,
two women who care for each other, displace the more common Western love story of older man marrying younger woman” (Kates and Reiner, pp. six-xxi). Ruth’s relationships with both Naomi and Orpah were of interest to librettists and composers in both the 19th and 20th centuries, as verified by the presence of at least one ensemble (and often more) between two or three of the women in every work containing ensembles (ch. 7, p. 219).

The absence of a proactive God in the Scroll was dealt with in a variety of ways by the librettists and composers. Many choral praises of God were inserted, possibly indicating perceived audience expectations or the librettist’s and composer’s agenda, or both. Whether the librettists and composers thought that was the point of the Scroll, or wanted to satisfy people who came with that preconception, is a question that warrants future study.

As seen in Table F1, there was interest in making the characters more pious. The librettists and composers had a particular vision of the Scroll and of its characters, and placed references to God in their mouths for purposes that can only be guessed until further research is done.

Gaps in the original narrative left room for librettists and composers to create works which offer new keys for hearing and understanding the Scroll. Librettists and composers who set the Scroll all engaged in a creative gap-filling exercise of “what if...” and their answers to this question became a musical midrash.

What if... Ruth and Naomi pledged love or at least friendship to each other prior to Ruth’s marriage to Mahlon? That would explain the powerful bond between the women: Schumann suggests this possibility in a single line (ch. 6, pp. 159-160). That bond could also explain why Ruth never had children; she could have married Mahlon merely to stay close to Naomi. Ruth and Naomi could have also pledged faithfulness to one another at any point during their sojourn in Moab. Orpah never formed this alliance with Naomi, so it made no sense for her to follow the two women to their new life.

What if... Ruth and Orpah had only been married a matter of months or a year or two, out of the ten years that Elimelch’s family was in Moab? Then Ruth’s infertility would not really be an issue. The only hint in the text that it was an issue for the writer is in God’s involvement in Ruth’s pregnancy, recalling similar involvement in pregnancies of other biblical women (i.e., Sarah in Gen. 12.1, Rachel in Gen. 30.22).

What if... Orpah was a child bride, married off to an Israelite for some perceived economic or social benefit? If so, she was too young to follow Naomi to a strange land. That is what Berkeley suggests (p. 190).

What if... Orpah was so attached to Naomi and Ruth that she followed them all the way to Bethlehem, unable to face returning to a possibly hostile family reception in Moab? She would then have had to find her own way back there, which is suggested in Franck’s work (p. 137).

What if... Naomi and Boaz had known each other, even had a relationship, before Naomi married Elimelch and left Bethlehem? This intriguing possibility is raised by Fino (p. 145). It would explain Naomi’s reluctance to turn to Boaz when she returned. It might even explain why Naomi decided to play matchmaker: it would bring her close to Boaz again, in a non-threatening way.

What if... Ruth and Boaz felt a powerful attraction to each other? Or what if only one of the two felt this attraction? Could their meeting on the threshing floor have been chaste? Would Naomi have known of this attraction and suggested the encounter either because of, or in spite of, this factor? The deliberate ambiguity of the Scroll’s author becomes a gap filled with passionate declarations of love between Ruth and Boaz, or scenes in which Ruth tells Naomi
about her feelings for Boaz (Schumann, Rumshinsky). Several works feature a lengthy love duet (Fino, Schumann, Rumshinsky, Berkeley) between Ruth and Boaz, but half the works feature no such duet. Two works end with a wedding scene (Gaul, Rumshinsky), clearly indicating what the librettist or composer considered to be the point of the story.

What if...Ruth and Naomi were part of the crowd in the final scenes? In the Scroll, when a character does not speak in a scene and is not mentioned by the narrator, it is assumed she is not there. Yet Ruth and Naomi participate in ensembles in Act IV in several works, suggesting that they were present during Boaz’s legal proceedings. Visualizing their presence alters the feeling of the scene, which in the Scroll could be imagined to be populated entirely by men. There is no reason not to assume that Naomi might have even encountered Boaz in a public setting, either on her arrival in Bethlehem or later. This possibility is reflected in various ensembles featuring both Naomi and Boaz (Table D). No meeting between Naomi and Boaz is depicted in the Scroll, and this is perceived as a gap in need of filling; dramatically the whole story seems to make less sense without such a meeting.

What if...the Bethlehemites were furious at Naomi for leaving in bad times and returning when the famine was over? Their accusations give an opening to Naomi and Ruth to reveal their character by the way they respond. It also presents an opportunity for Naomi and Ruth to publicly show their loyalty to one another. This idea is found in Schumann (p. 158) and Berkeley (p. 193).

These possibilities are raised in the librettos, offering unexpected and diverse perspectives on the story. Such perspectives are facilitated by the numerous gaps in the original narrative (ch. 2, pp. 45ff). The addition of music offers the listener a different level of understanding. Music externalizes emotion according to set conventions, which can be understood and experienced on a purely emotional level.

In the final analysis, the impression left by characters in a literary, dramatic, or musical work may not precisely match the percentage of time that character is “on stage.” Many readers of the Scroll, when asked to talk about its plot, might focus on the story of Ruth and Naomi; yet my analysis (ch. 2, p. 23) showed that Boaz speaks more than double the words of the two women. Readers are aware of Boaz’s role, but do not necessarily see him as the focus of the work. The musical works either reflect or magnify the impression of Boaz’s insignificance.

Biblical scholars can now recognize music that is a new kind of “focalizer,” one which not only shifts the spotlight but also alters its color. The focalizer in these musical works is the combination of the librettist and composer (in a few instances these are the same person), working together to create a re-imagined Scroll. This thesis has articulated this double perspective in depth for the Scroll. Many other musical settings of biblical texts, scholars will discover, would benefit from discussion in this double perspective.

Illustrating the Paradigm

The analysis of the Scroll in this thesis is intended to be a paradigmatic model for analysis of musical settings of biblical narratives. The ideas and techniques found here can be applied to the large repertoire of musical works based on biblical texts that have not yet been examined from this double perspective. I am going to offer two examples which would benefit from this kind of analysis. The advantage of using examples such as these is their accessibility, which facilitates attaining stages three and four of research (Thesis Introduction, p. 3).
All the works discussed below are performed relatively frequently, and their scores and or librettos can be found in libraries or purchased. The first example is a comparison between two settings of the biblical story of Samson, the second between two settings of Salome. Following the model of this thesis, the discussion moves from text analysis to mids and from there to librettos and music.

Samson

Delilah is the only woman named in Samson's story, and is arguably the most famous woman in the Book of Judges (Jud. 16:4-31), her name a synonym for the mature seductive woman. Though not identified as a prostitute, she was obviously a woman available outside marriage, overtly using sexual attraction to entice Samson. Delilah was often assumed to have

Handel's *Samson* was performed at De Nederlandse Opera in Dec. 2003, with John Mark Ainsley, Charlotte Hellekant, and Judith Howarth, with the orchestra Concerto Köln under Christopher Moulds.
Sam-Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Delila* was performed in 1999 in Madrid and Los Angeles featuring Plácido Domingo. Also in the cast in Madrid was Carolyn Sebolen, with the orchestra Symfonica de Madrid under Garcia Navarro. In Los Angeles the Dalia was Denyce Graves. Graves sang the role with Jose Cura at the Royal Opera House of Covent Garden in London in March-April 2004.
Massenet's *Hérodiade* was performed with Plácido Domingo in the tenor role at the Vienna State Opera in 1995 and the San Francisco Opera in 1994. The conductor in Vienna was Antonio Viesti, in San Francisco the Salome was Rene Fleming and the conductor Valery Gergeriev. The opera was more recently performed at the Wexford Festival in Dublin in 2000, with Berndette Groeisy, Griselle Allen, and Janes de Jong, conducted by Franz-Paul Decker.
Strauss's *Salome* was most recently performed at the Metropolitan Opera in 2004 with Karita Mattila in the lead role, Valery Gergiev conducting. It was broadcast live on the Metropolitan Opera International Broadcast on 27 March 2004.


For Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Delila*, the 1998 Erato release features Jose Cura, Olga Borodina, Jean Philippe Lafont, the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Colin Davis. The 1992 Deutsche Grammophon release features Plácido Domingo, Elena Obraztsova, Renato Bruson, the Orchestre de Paris conducted by Daniel Barenboim. A 2001 historical re-release on EMI Classics features Jon Vickers, Rita Gorr, Ernest Blane, the Paris Opera Orchestra conducted by Georges Prêtre.

For Massenet's *Hérodiade*, the 1995 Sony release features Plácido Domingo and Rene Fleming, the San Francisco Orchestra and Chorus, under Valery Geigeriev. The 2001 EMI Classics release features Cheryl Studer, Ben Heppner, Thomas Hampson, the Toulouse Capitole Orchestre under Michel Plasson. The 2002 Opera d'Oro release features Nadine Danze, Ernest Blane, Jean Brazzi, the ORTF Orchestre under David Hord-Jones.

For Strauss's *Salome*, the 1999 EMI release features Hildegard Behrens and Jose van Dam, the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Herbert von Karajan. The 1991 Deutsche Grammophon release features Cheryl Studer and Bryan Hertel, conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli. The 1991 Sony Classical release features Lara Martin and Bernd Weikl, the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta. The 2002 RCA Victor re-release features Monserrat Caballe and Sherrill Milnes, the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sirach Feniort. The 2003 Opera d'Oro re-release features Lucine Rysand and Berhard Waechter, the Vienna State Opera Orchestra under Karl Bohm.

Handel's *Samson* was published in Paris: Herry Lemonce & Cie., 1911; and New York: G. Schirmer, 1901.


All of these can be found at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
been a Philistine in order to make the lesson of the story one of a warning against foreign women. Part of the androcentric agenda of biblical writers was to portray women as powerful and dangerous, yet still subject to control by men. The narrator of this story seems to attach the blame for Samson’s downfall to women, who are themselves victims of exploitation, since the Philistine men act through Delilah, rather than the usual reverse (Leneman, 141).

Whoever was the guiltier party in the story of Samson and Delilah, both paid a price in the end. Samson dies as a hero, destroying himself along with the Temple of Dagon (Jud. 16:30). Delilah dies a textual death, vanishing from the story with her fate unknown to the reader (Leneman, 143).

Delilah’s motives are never stated. Her primary motive could have been patriotism. The fact is, she betrays Samson for a price. If she loved him, this would show a lack of ethics and morality; yet nowhere in the text does she ever claim to love him. So Delilah is not in dire need of money; she simply engages in a business transaction, either out of patriotism or simple practicality. To call it greed would be an unwarranted value judgment. Once she has agreed to do the job, Delilah is not devious: she says exactly what she wants. She never says she loves Samson: she uses his emotions without compromising her own. Delilah’s point of view is never given (Leneman, 144-5).

A close reading of the story of Samson and Delilah still leaves obvious gaps. Mieke Bal highlights three unanswered questions: Why doesn’t Samson reproach Delilah for her betrayal? Why does he accept her reproaches without giving his own view? And most vital of all, why does he finally give her the crucial information? (Bal 1987, 40)

Two opposing viewpoints have been offered to explain most of these gaps. Samson was either incredibly stupid, in which case the story could be read as an indictment against the institution of both Judges and Nazirites (since he was considered a Judge and a Nazirite), or he was too smart for his own good, and thought he could play games with Delilah and still come out ahead (Leneman, 148).

Later interpreters generally chose to keep Samson as a hero by in some way denigrating Delilah. Pseudo-Philo (1st century C.E.) was one of the first to retell the Samson and Delilah story. He combined the first four verses of chapter 16 with the subsequent verses:

Then Samson went down to Gerar, a city of the Philistines, and he saw there a harlot whose name was Delilah, and he was led astray after her and took her to himself for a wife. And God said, ‘Behold now Samson has been led astray through his eyes...Samson’s last will be a stumbling block for him, and his mingling a sin. And his wife was pressuring him and kept saying to him, ‘Show me your power and in what your strength lies, and so I will know that you love me.’ ...the fourth time he he revealed to her his heart. And she got him drunk, and while he slept, she called a barber and he cut the seven locks of his head (Pseudo-Phil. 43, 5-7, in Charlesworth, 357).

The notion of making Delilah a respectable woman by marrying her off to Samson actually probably was motivated more by a need to make Samson, not Delilah, more respectable and settled. This idea, plus that of getting Samson drunk, was picked up by later writers who might have been familiar with this text.

In a much later period and different place, Baroque Europe, Milton wrote an epic poem in 1671, Samson Agonistes (Samson the Fighter), in which Delilah claims to have acted out of patriotism when she tries to be reconciled with Samson. In this work Delilah is depicted as “a full-blown enchantress, seductive, using all her charm for ignoble ends” (Phillips, 32).

open s in the prison, that is, near the end of the biblical story. Samson refers to Delilah as “that precious monster, my accomplished snare” (line 230, p. 53). Delilah appears only at line 710 (p. 65):

But who is this, what thing of sea or land?
Female of sex it seems...

Some rich Philistian matron she may seem:
And now, at nearer view, no other certain
Than Dalila thy wife (lines 722-724).

Samson Agonistes opens in the prison, that is, near the end of the biblical story. Samson refers to Delilah as “that precious monster, my accomplished snare” (line 230, p. 53). Delilah appears only at line 710 (p. 65):

But who is this, what thing of sea or land?
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Than Dalila thy wife (lines 722-724).

The two most famous musical renditions of the story of Samson and Delilah are by Handel (1685-1759) and Saint-Saëns (1835-1921). Handel had the idea of setting Samson’s story to music when he heard a reading of Milton’s Samson Agonistes in 1739. During the pauses, Handel improvised movements on the harpsichord (Hicks in New Grove vol. 10, 758). Newburgh Hamilton converted the poem into an oratorio libretto, using verses from Milton’s minor poems for some of the arias and choruses (Hicks. 758). The dramatic oratorio (text 4, p. 86) was completed in 1742 and first performed in London in 1743.

Most of the action takes place in the prison, and Delilah, “Samson’s wife,” appears only briefly in Act II to sing two successive arias (one is traditionally cut) in which she pretends to be penitent and submissive. Handel used two contrasting styles of choral writing, “exuberant and homophonic for the Philistines, solemn and polyphonic for the Israelites” (Hicks. 759). The solo arias convey different moods, from Samson’s bleak despair in “Total eclipse” to Delilah’s seductive “With plaintive notes.” This oratorio has occasionally been staged; it was staged in Falmouth, England, at which performance cuts were made, but the staging showed the work to be dramatic rather than devotional (Hicks. 777). It was also staged in a church performance at Guildford Holy Trinity Church, England (which I attended, 25 I 2002).

The libretto for the Saint Saëns opera of 1877 is by Ferdinand Lemaire; the composer originally intended to write an oratorio but Lemaire persuaded him to turn it into an opera (James Harding, CD liner notes, Samson et Dalila, Erato 1998, 17). It was nevertheless performed as an oratorio in 1893 at Covent Garden because the English censor vetoed biblical topics in operas (Ratner in New Grove vol. 22, 125). Delilah is a cold, calculating seductress in this re-telling, a portrayal that has probably molded modern views of Delilah’s character far more than the biblical account ever did.

The story has been altered somewhat. In her first appearance, Delilah, in the company of other Philistine women, greets Samson in a public place. In the first of her three arias, “Printemps Qui Commence” (Act I, scene 6), she reminds Samson of their earlier liaison as she compatriots dance sinuously. Praising spring, she sings to Samson of how eagerly she awaits the renewal of their relationship. The listener is hard pressed not to feel some empathy for her. The music paints a softer portrait of Delilah than the librettist probably intended! However, in her second aria, “Amour, Viens Aider Ma Faiblesse” (Act II, scene 1), the only one not sung for Samson’s benefit, Delilah shows her true colors. In this aria she invokes love to further her revenge. The music is a mixture of steely determination mingled with the voluptuous quality of her earlier aria (Earl of Harewood, in New Kobbe’s, 69%). Such is the power of music to move the listener that even in Delilah’s famous seduction aria, “Mon Coeur S’ouvre a Ta Voix” (Act II, scene 3), the music is so lush and seductive that the listener simply has to empathize with poor Samson. Who could resist such music? The fact that the biblical Delilah nags and cajoles rather
than seducing is immaterial to composers: seduction music is far more appealing than nagging music, so Delilah became imprinted in all opera lovers' minds—and thereby in popular culture—as the temptress par excellence.

Saint-Saëns used varied styles in this opera, from the great religious chorus of Act I, to the Italianate love duet filled with chromaticisms in Act II, and the pseudo-orientalism (eh. 5, p. 97) of the ballet music in Act III (Benoit Dateur, CD liner notes, Samson et Dalila, Frato, 1998, 20). Samson, a dramatic tenor, is portrayed through his music as an appealing hero and victim. The embellished story includes a scene depicting the blinded Samson grinding grain while he sings movingly of his agony at God's abandonment. His aria "Voi si ma misère" (Act III, scene 1) mingles with the plaintive voices of the captive Hebrews, who blame him for their plight. Delilah appears with the crowd in the final scene, mocking Samson just before he pulls the temple down. So her fate is clearly depicted, another alteration from the biblical narrative.

Samson is a dramatic tenor in both works, which was more unusual in a Handel work than one of the French Romantic period. Delilah is a soprano in the Handel and a mezzo in Saint-Saëns. Neither work is based on the biblical text. The most striking difference between the two works is in their focus. Delilah plays a major role in the Saint-Saëns, appearing in all three acts, whereas she only appears in the middle of the second act of the Handel. The main interest in the earlier work is on Samson, while in the later work it is on the relationship. This is also indicated in the titles of the two works.

An analysis of these Samson settings could be expanded upon, from this starting point, utilizing the tools and methodologies employed in this thesis. The final step in this analysis would be a comparison between particular elements in both librettos and scores, and the original biblical text, along with more detailed analyses of text and music.

**Salome, Hérodiade**

The story about the death of John the Baptist is found in two gospels: Mark 6:14-29, and Matthew 14:1-12. The main difference between the two is that in Matthew, it is Herod, not Herodias, who wants to kill John. In both gospels Herod has John killed in response to Herodias' (unnamed) daughter's request for John's head, which comes after Herod has promised to give her whatever she wishes.

The end of the story leaves an ambiguous impression of Herod because, notwithstanding his initial appreciation for John, he has him put to death. Herodias, on the other hand, appears as a more consistent albeit flat character, whose sole purpose seems to be John's death. Her daughter's actions, though not explicitly motivated, are judged by the reader in that light as she helps realize her mother's interests. Although mentioned only in passing, the daughter's dance plays a pivotal role in the story as the necessary condition and dramatic event that moves the plot to its fatal conclusion (Vander Stichele, 4).

The two most well-known operatic settings of this story are Hérodiade by Jules Massenet (1842-1912) and Salome by Richard Strauss (1864-1949). In an analysis similar in structure to what I am proposing here, Caroline Vander Stichele (lecito difficilior, 2001) discusses both of these works. The first impression one gets from these operas, she points out, is how different they are from the biblical narratives. To explain those differences, she first analyzes the gospel stories in question, then takes a closer look at Flaubert's story Herodias, which served as source text for the opera of Massenet. Lastly, Vander Stichele analyzes Massenet's opera Hérodiade and Salome by Strauss. In these analyses, she summarizes the story, discusses the representation of
the main female characters, Herodias and her daughter; and, finally, their presumed involvement in John’s death.

Some of these topics are also covered in Bach’s article “Directing Salome’s dance of death” (Bach, 210-262), in which she asks the general question, “How did the *fin de siècle* Salomania begin?” (Bach, 217) Bach also points out the differences in later interpretations of the story, calling them “cultural appropriations” found in later literary, musical, and visual interpretations of the figure of Salome (Bach, 224).

Massenet was the most prolific and successful French composer of opera at the turn of the 20th century (Hugh MacDonald in *New Grove*, vol.16, 89). He based his opera Herodiade on a Flaubert story. An agent for Ricordi publishers called in a librettist, Paul Millet, to help Massenet with his adaptation of the story. The vocal score was completed in 1879 but the director of the Paris Opéra refused to consider staging it because of the “biblical-amorous subject” (Macdonald, 90), similar to Saint-Saëns' experience with *Samson et Dalila* (p. 253). It was premiered two years later in Brussels.

After her discussion of the biblical story, Vander Stichels outlines both the Flaubert story and Massenet’s libretto based on it. She notes the changes in focus both in plot and character, between Flaubert and Massenet’s adaptations and the changes from the gospel version found in both. The plot is changed more dramatically in the Massenet, where Salome does not dance for Herod nor ask for John’s head. These actions form the climactic moments of the Strauss opera.

The addition of musical elements would move this discussion to another level. For instance, the fact that John the Baptist is a tenor in the Massenet opera, and in love with Salome, immediately establishes him as a romantic and virile figure and creates a love interest. Vander Stichels focuses her attention on the female characters, yet it would be worth noting that the most well-known aria in the Massenet opera, “Vision Fugitive,” is sung by Herod, a baritone. This aria, in which Herod sings of his obsessive love for Salome, is considered by some to be “one of the great baritone solos of French opera” (Harewood, 434).

Massenet depicts a “contrast between sensuality and asceticism” in the opera, along with much “exotic local color” (MacDonald, 94). The instrumentation is “heavily perfumed, with pseudo-orientalisms delicately sketched in” (Rodney Milnes, in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* vol. 2, 703). Massenet’s word-setting was his most important contribution to French opera. He described in his autobiography how he would memorize his librettos and mull over them for weeks before setting them (Milnes, CD liner notes. Massenet, *Thais*, Decca 1998, 14).

Richard Strauss’s *Salome* is based on an Oscar Wilde “stage poem” written in French and first performed, in 1896, by the Théâtre de l’Oeuvre in Paris (Ross, vol. II, 2). It was a failure there, and was subsequently banned in England by Lord Chamberlain because of its inflammatory content. The German version was well received in Breslau in 1901 (David Murray, in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* vol. 4, 146).

This work took many liberties with the original New Testament narrative. Yet Wilde’s retelling is probably much more well known than the original story, and the opera lover cannot hear the name Salome without visualizing and hearing the sensuous, “orientalizing” music of the Dance of the Seven Veils. The narrative has been transformed and almost appropriated by its operatic adaptation.

Strauss first became interested in the Wilde play in 1902. After seeing a production in Berlin in 1903, he decided to set it to music. Not satisfied with the German versified version, he set the play directly, in Hedwig Lachmann’s translation, making his own cuts and alterations (Bryan Gillham in *New Grove* vol. 24, 511). Wilde was apparently irritated by the “docility” of
the biblical Salome, who demands John’s head in obedience to her mother. He found this characterization inadequate, lacking in imagination and passion, which drove him to create an excessive heroine (Bach, 239). The biblical figure of an unnamed dancing daughter of Herodias plays a minor role in the biblical text, and is dramatically transformed into the protagonist of a “visually horrific and exotic tale” which “challenges the drear biblical telling” (Bach, 219).

Utilizing the methodologies and paradigm expounded in this thesis would entail adding music to this analysis. The similarities Vander Stichele suggests between the operas of Massenet and Strauss would soon vanish, since Massenet’s melodic style belongs to the period of French Romanticism, while Strauss’s is Late Romantic German, usually considered early modern in style. Though fundamentally tonal, it has numerous bi-tonal passages (Murray, 149). Strauss found “a new, modernist voice for the stage” with Salome, which “resonated throughout a Europe preoccupied with the image of the sensual femme fatale” (Gilliam, 500). Within a year of the 1905 Dresden premiere, this succès de scandale was being performed throughout Europe and the U.S.A. (Gilliam, 500).

An interesting similarity between the two operas is that both end in Salome’s death, not found in the gospel account, where the focus was the death of John the Baptist. The mother-daughter relationship is emphasized in both operas much more than in the gospel, with the result that blame for John’s death is shifted to one or both female characters (Vander Stichele, 20). The interest in the two women, and the shift of blame, is apparent from the librettos, but approaching the operas from a musical perspective might yield different results.

Vander Stichele finds that both women are to some extent demonized. It would be very interesting to point out musical elements that accentuate this demonization. The part of Salome is taken by a soprano in both operas, but in Strauss it is a far more dramatic voice. John is a bass-baritone in the Strauss opera, but a tenor in Massenet’s. His completely unromantic demeanor and music in the Strauss highlight the irrationality of Salome’s attraction to him.

It is hardly surprising that librettists and composers from different eras and cultures chose to emphasize different aspects of these stories and their characters (Thesis Introduction, p. 5). Samson the questionable biblical hero becomes a hero of tragic proportions in oratorio and opera; and an unnamed daughter in a gospel account of the death of John the Baptist becomes romantically involved with John, or an obsessive necrophile kissing his severed head.

Transformations in the Scroll of Ruth retold are less vivid and dramatic, because the story itself is a simpler one. Yet each musical depiction of Ruth presents us with a different character: pious and sweet, passionate and determined, or anything between these extremes. Naomi is presented through her music as despairing and bleak, or trusting and steady. Boaz is anything from a pompous older man to a fervent younger lover. The librettists and composers worked together to create convincing and consistent portraits of these characters, however they may differ from the listener’s preconception. Acknowledging the variety in these representations prevents the listener from harmonizing or universalizing characterization. The process of characterization is continual, not linear (Bach, 249, 262). The listener is free to reject any particular musical Ruth, but an encounter with this character in any of these works will forever alter that listener’s reading of the Scroll. The music offers a new way to read the words. For example, the music suggests how Ruth feels as she swears her loyalty to Naomi, which the text alone never does. This is more than reading between the lines or in the margins: the spaces are filled with music, wordlessly but effectively filling the gaps.
RETURNING TO CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO

We saw a glimmer of these possibilities at the beginning of this thesis, in the discussion of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's short cantata *Naomi and Ruth* based on the first chapter of the Scroll (p. xii). The story is taken out of context because the remaining three chapters are not included. It differs in many respects from the works discussed in this thesis, primarily in its brevity and inclusion of only a partial text. There is a principle behind inclusion or exclusion: the choice of a partial libretto is also a choice. In Castelnuovo-Tedesco's version, Ruth and Naomi are together forever; they never meet Boaz, and this different story is told through the music.

The composer's choice of a soprano voice for Naomi and a female chorus for Ruth also differentiates this work from most other settings. This device in a sense de-personalizes the character of Ruth, or in the composer's words, universalizes it. That unusual and fascinating choice suggests the vast range of possibilities available to the composer who sets biblical narratives.

To return to an earlier metaphor, that of the literary archaeologist (Introduction, p. 6; ch. 2, p. 52), Castelnuovo-Tedesco has built and decorated an unusual and beautiful room, but my interest in this thesis has been to explain how generations of readers have built an interpretive "home" for *Ruth* in which to comfortably dwell. Castelnuovo-Tedesco has given us only the entrance room. But that room served as an invitation to imagine, explore, and eventually inhabit the other "rooms," or chapters, of the Scroll of Ruth.

CONCLUSION

The final result--the transformation of a biblical narrative into a different medium--will challenge many of our conscious and unconscious presumptions about the story. My hope is that this challenge will spark a new interest in both biblical scholars and musicians, spurring specialists in both fields to utilize this new key to biblical interpretation. This is a rich mine only waiting to be tapped by the curious biblical scholar with an interest in music, or by musicians drawn to the study of biblical texts. Musical works, both well-known and obscure, will benefit equally from this new approach. Collaborations should be encouraged, and this exciting research will hopefully lead not only to a new and different appreciation of works already in the repertoire, but also to the discovery and performances of unjustly neglected musical works based on the Bible. Such joint efforts will surely lead to greater public understanding of both the Bible and music.
Otto Goldschmidt (1829-1907)

At the age of fourteen, Goldschmidt was one of the first students at the newly founded Leipzig Conservatory in 1843. When he moved to London, he heard the famous soprano Jenny Lind sing, in 1848 (Graynor Jones in *New Grove*, vol. 10, 107). He was introduced to her and she gave him the chance to appear in a benefit concert with her. Thus at the age of 19, he made his debut playing two piano solos in a Jenny Lind concert.

The friendship they had both had with Mendelssohn was a powerful bond between them. After Mendelssohn died in 1847, Lind was unable to sing his music until persuaded to by Goldschmidt (Holland and Rockstro, vol. 2, 357). Between 1848 and 1851 they performed together frequently. In 1851 Lind invited Goldschmidt to accompany her on a triumphant American tour. Lind was apparently very demanding of her accompanists, yet she wrote of Goldschmidt that “whether he accompanies me or I accompany myself, it is absolutely the same thing” (Holland and Rockstro, vol. 2, 322).

Lind’s mother died in 1851 and she became more religious as a result, writing that “my newly-found Lord...first taught me to shed genuine tears,” and “...my Bible was never more necessary to me than now” (Holland and Rockstro, vol. 2, 396). A few months later, she and Goldschmidt were married in an Episcopalian service. They lived in Dresden and performed together throughout Europe before settling in England in 1858, where they had three children. Goldschmidt became interested in church music, and this interest led to a collaboration with Sterndale Bennett on “The Choral Book of England,” compiled in 1862-64 (Jones, 106-7).

In 1875, Goldschmidt founded the London Bach Choir, which he conducted for ten years. Under his direction, this choir grew in size and gave the first complete performance in England of Bach’s B minor Mass, in 1876. He also revived some of Handel’s works.

Articles about Goldschmidt do not mention his Jewish given name, Moritz David, though his deep involvement in the church and church music makes it clear that if he was Jewish, he certainly converted at some point. His motive for writing a major work based on *Ruth* is clearly spelled out in his own remarks, and is a totally Christian perspective. Whether he converted for professional reasons, or under the influence of Jenny Lind, whose religion clearly played an important part in her life when he married her, is conjectural. Biographers in that era were very reticent about revealing personal details about their subjects’ lives.

Goldschmidt provides more information about biblical citations in the libretto, and about his motivations for writing the work, than any other composer. The oratorio includes virtually all the biblical text, and all additional text is from other sections of the Bible (mostly Psalms). The chorus has a very amplified role, and its function is primarily to proclaim God’s praises, making the work a true sacred opera (*A Sacred Pastoral* in his words) and reflecting Goldschmidt’s intentions.

The full libretto is printed before the score, and in it Goldschmidt lists all attributions. He remarks on the libretto:

The narrative of the Bible has been followed implicitly, with such omissions as seemed allowable to bring the story into a convenient compass, and to fit it for the requirements of musical composition. The only liberty taken has been the slight change in tense or person necessary to put the account of Ruth’s visit to the threshing-floor into her own mouth, instead of that of the author of the book, and the occasional introduction of a verse from other portions of the Bible to point the
allusions of the narrative, or strengthen the action. In two instances only have words been drawn from other sources, namely, the Chorale, which forms part of the scene between Boaz and the reapers, and is again introduced in the concluding number of the same scene. The words to which the Chorale is set are taken from two German hymns, one a harvest hymn. The tune of one dates from the latter part of 17th century. The prominent melody in the final numbers is a Hebrew tune, as given in the Ancient Melodies of the Liturgy of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, by the Rev. D.C. De Sola and Mr. Aguilar. [He gives precise citations] In the passages extracted from the Psalms, the prayerbook and Bible versions have been used indiscriminately.

Leopold Damrosch (1832-1885)

Damrosch had a degree in medicine, but he abandoned medicine for music. After some years of concertizing, he was appointed leading violinist in the court orchestra at Weimar by Liszt in 1857. He moved to New York for an appointment as conductor in 1871, and in 1873 founded the Oratorio Society, a choir devoted to the performance of oratorios and other works. Primarily known as a conductor, he was instrumental in establishing German opera at the Metropolitan Opera, in the year before his death (H. Krehbiel in New Grove, vol. 6, 876). In addition, Damrosch served as Choral Director at Temple Emanu-El in New York in the 1870's ("Exodus to America: a Jewish Time Line," in Online Jewish Encyclopedia). This does not necessarily imply that Damrosch was Jewish. In addition to Ruth, he also wrote a cantata called Sukamith (Krechbiel, 876).

Damrosch wrote in his Preface:
The great impression produced on reading the book of Ruth depends not merely upon the poetic charm which pervades this Idyll, but rather upon its own deep meaning. The Israelitish law commanded the nearest relative of a widow to become her protector, and to marry her if she insisted upon her right. Only the Israelitish woman, not the widow of foreign race, could plead this law. In the fulfillment of this law by Boaz, he shows that only love and respect for Ruth, the Moabitess...led him to choose her as wife. Prejudice against the stranger was conquered by love. The history of Ruth has moreover an especial significance through her relation to Christ...The author of this work believes that this connection ought not to be lost, and makes use of it at the close of the Idyll to connect the narrative proper with its especial religious importance in a far-extended, historic perspective.

Alfred Gaul (1837-1913)

Gaul served as a chorister in Norwich cathedral and other churches as early as 1846. He earned a degree in Music from Cambridge in 1863, then taught harmony and counterpoint at various Schools of Music throughout England. His compositions "whose superficial fluency won them a wide popularity" (J. Fuller Maitland in New Grove, vol. 9, 577), include oratorios, a dozen cantatas, many psalm settings, anthems, and hymns. Ruth, considered among his most important cantatas, was published in London in 1881. His most known work is The Holy City (1882); he also wrote Israel in the Wilderness (1892) (Maitland, 577).

In Gaul's obituary in “Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review” (November 1913), Sydney Grew (who knew and studied with Gaul) writes:
In Mr. Gaul was accumulated the artistic mentality of Handelian times...the beginnings of modern British music were...between 1875 and 1885, when innumerable choral societies needed a supply of simple, singable cantatas...Gaul, by training, temperament and position, was the man for the task...There has been no English composer whose music was more loved wherever English folk sang together...Gaul’s technical equipment was the scantiest. He invariably wrote with close attention to the capabilities of those who were to sing his music, and he was thus cut out from the use of striking rhythms, daringly expressive harmonies, novel forms or thought-provoking melodies (Grew. Obituary).

Frederic Cowen (1852-1935)

Cowen was known primarily as a pianist and conductor until one of his early symphonies was performed in 1880 and highly praised. He continued to be more known as a conductor, however, though he was dubbed “the English Schubert” in 1898 based on his output of songs (Jeremy Dribble in New Grove, vol. 6, 630).

In an interview for “The Etude” (Philadelphia, February, 1903), Cowen briefly discusses oratorio and public taste:

The days of absolute oratorio are gone. People want the dramatic form on scriptural or other subjects. Now modern oratorio, but oratorio as we know it, ended with ‘Elijah’ [Mendelssohn]. I never look on that work as an oratorio, but a biblical opera...In the repetition of subjects for oratorio, there is one great exception. No matter how often the story of the Saviour has been written, it will always be acceptable to the world at large... (“The Etude,” vol. XXI, 47).

Cowen is listed as a Jewish composer in the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia (Cowen is a variant of Cohen; Hymen is most certainly a Jewish name), and is said to be “of Jewish descent” in a much later article on his life in “Musical Times” (“Musical Times” vol. XCIV, 351). But based on Cowen’s comments, it is obvious that he converted at some point, like Goldschmidt. In his autobiography, My Art and My Friends, Cowen talks about his setting of Ruth:

Although its reception both by the public and the press was very flattering, I am afraid the character of the work was not quite what the clergy of the city had expected. The simple Biblical story had taken my fancy, and the different scenes...gave me plenty of scope for varied musical treatment, pastoral and devotional, as well as some massive choral writing at times...But with real oratorio, in the sense of fugues, chorales, and detached airs, the work had little in common. This the ecclesiastical authorities might have pardoned, but I had introduced a dance of reapers into the harvest scene which shocked their feelings of religious propriety beyond forgiveness. A ‘pastoral idyll’ in a cathedral might be allowable at an emergency, but a dance—never! One of the themes of my dance was founded on what was supposed to be an authentic old Hebrew melody, so the local colour was as appropriate as I could make it. It availed nothing. Pious Worcester never recovered from the mental vision of my poor reapers’
innocent revelry after their day's labour, and my name has never since appeared in any festival programme of that city (Cowen, 140-142).

Cowen's sense of humor comes through delightfully in these remarks. He goes on to comment that Ruth continued to be performed successfully elsewhere in subsequent years (Cowen, 143).

César Franck (1822-1890)

Franck showed early talent for the piano, and won many prizes at the Conservatoire in Paris at age 15 both for playing and composition. He settled in Paris in 1844, working as a teacher and organist, and also composing. Franck's greatest inspirations were Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner, putting him out of sync with the music popular in Paris in his day. In 1844, the year he wrote Ruth, Franck showed signs of declining mental health. In addition to the concert tours prepared by his father, Franck had to teach in order to support his family. His commitments included the city's boarding schools and a variety of religious institutions, but almost all of his hard-earned money (which was a pitifully small amount) went to his father's extravagant concert propagandizing for his son. One of these concerts was the disastrous performance of his oratorio Ruth. Meyerbeer praised it, but Franck's professors and the public did not. Franck, unable to handle all the performances and his father's bullying, eventually had a small nervous breakdown in 1848. Thirty years later he wrote Rebecca, a "biblical idyll." Hidda and several other works based on the Hebrew Bible. In 1871, success came unexpectedly with the resurrection of his revised version of Ruth. It is believed that Franck may have destroyed many of his earlier works; most of the music he is known for was written after he was 50 (John Warrack in New Grove, vol. 9, 177).

Giocondo Fino (1867-1950)

All biographical information available can be found in chapter 6, Pt. 1, p. 140. I am reproducing here a few extended passages from the libretto not found in chapter 6.

(Scene between Boaz and “Veiled Woman” from Parte Seconda, pp. 10-13 in the libretto):

The Veiled Woman:

O true praise of God is in joy; He reciprocates with bread eternally; thus it is bestowed as God bestows it.

Boaz (surprised):

As God's creatures should recollect God, thus your words recall a beehive of honey or a mature olive tree!

The Woman (with a tender impulse):

For me destiny (luck, chance), which has descended into your heart and smiles at you from within, for only from the heart does joy come for you, if the good, done for others, was good. [Her words seem intentionally vague and indecipherable].

Boaz (startled by the words revealed to him, he hesitates a moment, then turns to the veiled woman with the sound of someone who wants to change the direction of the conversation):

Who knows the origins of the spring (source)? And of the heart?

The Woman:

Not an ark (or tomb), thus it is a garden; it closes but doesn't conceal flesh-colored roses; and sweet things you seek there and pursue...
Boaz (increasingly surprised at the insinuating words):

The clear sky is sweet and fills the evening. And it is sweet to have the pole (around which haystacks are built) pointing to the sky, and the happiest one is who goes to the threshing-floor most often.

Woman (suggestively):

Of course: and you have more in your heart than poles and sky: you are holding in a passing wave of laughter: and you feel a song, an indelible echo, like one day...which has already become a shadow, in your thoughts, vague and distant.

Boaz (increasingly more surprised and as though captivated by a spell):

Cunningly and furtively you penetrate a surprised soul, o woman, and you ferret out, and dig, and pull out with a sure hand and the eyes of a lynx...

Woman (approaching, and increasingly more suggestive):

And I ferret and I pull out things lost to you: the adolescent who rejoiced in sweet new things: and there was the well and the shadow and the sea of unmoving ears of corn, and a song that rose, died, alone in the sultrines, of a gleaner...

Suddenly the song of Ruth reaches them, breaking off the woman's words; and for both her and Boaz it is like a revelation. They are both quiet before the song; and Boaz sharpens his eyes and his spirit leans towards the singer.

Ruth:

The golden stalk thrown among the stalks, and the reapers waving in long rows and not finding the golden stalk...

Boaz (as if transported by the song):

Thus says the little lark that flies through the sky...and memories break their sleep, and blossom into the flower of dawn...

The Woman (impetuously):

Memories are the flower of flowers, for, when they are faded, every corolla in them is colored anew...

Boaz (staring at her): And you have joy from that in your heart?

Woman (barely restraining her joy): Oh yes!

Boaz asks her why and she says she doesn't know.

Boaz: Your words entwine me in mystery.

Woman (in a voice that goes to the heart):

And the mystery is like a blue shell that feels compassion.

Boaz is quiet a long time. Indolent memories awaken in him. He looks at that place with surprise, and looks in the distance at the fields where work is bustling with alternating songs, while the day folds into solemn dusk.

Workers sing about their work.

Female reapers say (with bitter jealousy motioning towards Ruth):

And if she sings, we don't know how to sing, the Moabite...

Ruth's song passes a second time, awakening sweetness, tenderness, and memories in Boaz's heart.

Boaz (overcome with great emotion):

Dead days that arise again! They rested in the heart as in a grave, mute, serene, oblivious! And a girl also slept, so many years, her heart filled with young dreams: ah! The girl, my spouse in love, to whom I called to God all night with my outreached soul...and the sky was alive with
stars and without a breeze, and the girl, married in another place. God on his throne didn’t hear me crying...

After the Veiled Woman reveals herself as Naomi:
Naomi has revealed herself and keeps her eyes lowered. Boaz looks at her and almost extends his arms to her, but Ruth’s song once again passes between them almost like a summons and a reproof: Naomi gets up and silently withdraws, while Boaz looks in the distance for the singer. Naomi sees that look, quickly grasps as the will of God the separation from Boaz for the creation of new paths, and trembles at this realization. They leave each other thus, with not another word, only with a look filled with intimate significance. Within their hearts there is intense emotion.

(Description of the scene’s opening, Parte Terza, p. 16):
On the hills of Bethlehem, Boaz’s shepherds are standing as night guards. There is a marvelously brilliant moonlight. In the star-studded sky from time to time falling stars pass quickly. The shepherds sing of the beauty of the night, but softly, almost afraid to disturb the mystery of the hour.

(Conclusion of Ruth Boaz love duet, p. 19):
A force, almost a spell, has now taken hold of and linked these two souls. They have met in the purity of dreams and ideals, and they see nature almost transformed before their eyes, creating around them the joy of an earthly paradise. In this ascent of their souls towards simplicity and love, they are accompanied by the mysterious smiles of all the forces that live in universal nature, and in that smile of the universe they completely abandon themselves as in a marvelous vision.

20th Century
Georg Schumann (1866-1952)
Schumann’s work has been discussed in articles, program notes, performance reviews, and a biography. Sydney Grew wrote a commentary on Schumann’s work for “Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review” in 1911. Ruth was performed at the Leeds Festival that year, but this is more a review of the score than of a performance (in the body of the article, Grew includes musical examples and mentions “hours of reading of the score” on p. 43). Grew writes:

The new Naomi is in almost a raging frenzy of despair and grief…filled with the utter blank hopelessness of her outlook…the librettist places in Naomi’s mouth some of the most poignant utterances of the prophets. Naomi sings of the houses she had built, of the vineyards, gardens and orchards she had laid out and planted…This move brings us a long way from the original Naomi, who certainly built her no houses in the land of the Moabites. But an opportunity is offered for expressive music…The chaste simplicity of the story of Ruth offers little scope for dramatic treatment and therefore certain additions may well be made to it…in order to secure variety, the character of Naomi has been strangely developed…(Sydney Grew, in “Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review,” vol. 40, 1911, p. 543).

Grew never cites which prophets are quoted, nor does he seem to recognize the extensive quotes from Lamentations. Grew’s reference to Naomi’s character being “strangely developed” is not clear; either he found it strange that her character would be developed at all, or he found the development strange. In addition, Grew believes the changes Schumann has made for the role of
the chorus were made “in order to provide good work for the chorus” (Grew. 544), an egregious example of making unfair assumptions. He is referring here to the hostile reaction of the Bethlehemites to Naomi’s arrival, and he objects to this rewriting because, in his words:

...the keynote of the story of Ruth is kindly human sympathy; its plot the actions growing out of that quality; the atmosphere is unbrokenly delicate and pure; the coloring immortal in its natural fitness. This new episode...is at once crude and jarring (Grew. 544).

He sees the violent response of the chorus as a logical outcome of the conception of Naomi as a “violent and ragingly passionate woman” (Grew. 543). Grew also criticizes Schumann’s portrayal of the Ruth-Boaz relationship:

The idea of the mutual love of Ruth and Boaz, unwarranted by the original, where the great beauty of the story lies in the generosity and unselfishness of Boaz to the women of his kinsman...is familiar to us from our childhood...

He complains that:
A love duet of per fervidly passionate nature fills the greater part of the scene, reminding one of the palmy days of opera...[with the concluding passage of the work] “Love is strong unto death.” the Book of Ruth thus suffering hopeless distortion...[the work] debases what in the Book of Ruth was most elevated (Grew. 544).

While Grew praises the quality of Schumann’s music, he feels its force is inconsistent with the story of Ruth:
Whatever the musico-dramatic gain, the loss here of the original is deplorable. The music throughout...is very harmonic...The general effect is often strained and restless... (Grew. 543-4).

In conclusion, Grew believes such works should not be imported, because:
We do not want to import what is far more invertebrate than our own creations (Grew. 544).

More positive comments can be found in program notes and reviews of performances of Ruth in the U.S. The first of these was at Chicago’s Apollo Musical Club in 1910. In his program notes for this concert, Wilhelm Weber says:
We can hardly censure Georg Schumann for having made a lyric drama out of the original story. So rich is his presentation of the characters, so does he draw upon our imagination, that we willingly pardon his poetical license in bringing into the action the scene of the “Nocturnal spirits.”

This commentator had no problem with Schumann’s presentation of a love scene or with Naomi singing verses from Ecclesiastes.
I now offer excerpts from two reviews that appeared after this performance. In the Record Herald, February 8, 1910, Felix Borowski wrote:
...[Schumann] is one of the most gifted of the modern German school...he is not of the advanced wing of the writers who are convinced that it is pleasant to hear music played in three different keys at the same time. Complex polyphony and not less complex harmonic progression are the characteristics of Schuman’s music in general and of his
"Ruth" in particular...the creator of the piece is clearly a believer in melody...the intervals are throughout extraordinarily difficult...

The reviewer for the *Inter-Ocean*, Glenn Dillard Gunn, had slightly more mixed reactions:

After hearing "Ruth" one is tempted to...proclaim [Schumann] Richard Strauss' superior in all that makes for artistic sincerity and nobility of intention and of ideals...Wagner is surely the Nemesis of the German composer of today. His spirit and his voice overtake Schumann in the very beginning of the oratorio...one is rarely free from a haunting reminiscence from some of his late music-dramas, usually from "Tristan..." [There are] long, nonmelodic, recitative-like sections written in the most unlyric style of Wagner, with Straussian exaggerations in the vocal parts...

I pointed out the Wagnerian echoes in several passages when discussing this work (ch. 6, p. 159). The Strauss influence is also strongly felt. But in my view, these are not negative factors. Schumann’s work was performed in the U.S. again in 1913, this time by the Oratorio Society of New York at Carnegie Music Hall. In his program notes for this concert, W. H. Humiston says:

...perhaps some of the love music suggests "Tristan and Isolde," but on the whole this work is more than usually free from "reminiscences." The composer takes a middle ground between "conservatism" and "modernism..." While there is little French delicacy and airiness in the score, and there is a deal of German solidity and massiveness, it must not be supposed that the score is not effective from the standpoint of sheer orchestral beauty, for there are many charming effects...the Chorus...the "prima-donna" of an oratorio performance, has much attractive music to sing...And the solo parts are on a par with the rest: melodious, richly harmonized, and effective without ever being cheap or banal.

Another source for extensive comments on this work is the biography of Schumann written in German by Herbert Stehle in 1925. The following are excerpts, paraphrased in translation:

If one follows the development of the oratorio in the recent past, it is noticeable that more and more new and foreign elements have penetrated it. The term 'oratorio' has been subjugated to transformations and even faltered. The separation between the spiritual and secular has not been easily implemented. Like grand opera, the oratorio is dependent on the text for its value and success. Well-known poets were unable to write a text for the oratorio 'Ruth' as Schumann imagined it. To express his intentions even only to some extent, he had to write the text himself, after extensive historical research. By doing so, he created the Bible Oratorio, since the book *Ruth* of the Old Testament forms the basis for plot and text. It differs immensely from numerous, mainly English 'Ruth' oratorios in that the content is not perceived here as an idyll, but as a succession of impressions of a lofty spiritual life' (Kretschmar).

Schumann expanded and deepened the story in two different ways. First, mostly through the music, he uncovers the inner feelings between the characters. The dramatic line in the
oratorio, primarily in the dramatic climaxes of the biblical lyrics, is reminiscent of grand opera—an innovation for the oratorio form.

Ruth’s leitmotif is entrusted to the cor anglais (English horn) throughout the whole work. Her music is tender, with the vocal climaxes reserved. Naomi’s part, whose motif characterizes her agitation and restlessness, is rich in great vocal music. The first scene, Naomi’s Lament, immediately shows Schumann’s confident new compositional technique. Throughout the motif-dependent construction, the vocal part stays in very close touch with the accompaniment despite having great independence. The accompaniment always creates clever relationships and references. Boaz’s music is simple and dignified: his fatherly tone gradually develops greater warmth.

The main value of the oratorio lies in the chorus, for whom it was vital to create effective scenes. The first opportunity to do so presented itself in the return of the women to Bethlehem. And straightaway here “for German literature, a unique masterpiece was created” (Kretzschmar). The characterization of the people behaving excitedly and the muddle created by the people’s puzzled questioning, escalates to a peak.

Happy singing accompanies the work in the fields. The prelude had already presented a general picture of the countryside, which is colorfully created in the chorus of the field workers. The employment of the augmented second (frequently found in the Phrygian mode of much Jewish music) and of an old Hebrew tune, musically create a national color.

In the chorus of the Night-Spirits, Schumann creates a kind of vision, by vividly and fantastically describing the thoughts of Ruth on her way to the threshing floor. (Schumann uses unknown lyrics by Knatz especially written for this scene). Even finer than the poetic effect, is the musical one, for which Schumann has summoned up all his rich talent for melodious choral characterizations. At the break of dawn, when, according to the national customs of the music [supposedly] played in the ancient Temple, woodwinds and harps play, the chorus takes up a Hebrew melody, which then leads to a passionate and euphoric final scene. Schumann’s new and unusual choral sound (Chorsatz), has been described as a valuable advance into new musical territory.

Schumann’s oratorio had immense and long-lasting success. After the Hamburg premiere, the work was extraordinarily well received at the Berlin Singakademie in March 1909. Apart from Germany and Holland, it experienced real triumphs in England and America (the English text was written by John Bernhoff).

Georg Schumann isn’t modern because he lives in the 20th Century, but because his musical creation, which is rooted in Wagner’s, Robert Schumann’s and Brahms’ works, has gone beyond the works of those three and has also adopted the newer musical developments. Georg Schumann is not fashion.

This oratorio has an unusual history. It was popular and frequently performed in Germany until 1936. When Schumann scheduled a performance in 1942, the Nazis refused to
allow it. Schumann saved the music by altering the libretto (the new setting is China) and renaming the work *Lied der Träne* (Song of the Faithful One), and the altered work was performed three times. The original *Ruth* was subsequently reconstructed and performed for the last time until now in 1946, with Schumann conducting on his 80th birthday. The work was revived and performed in Berlin, in November 2003, a performance I attended.

I offer examples from the libretto that were not included in chapter 6.

(From conclusion of Part I, No. 2, Bethlehem chorus):

Let her suffer, pursue her, and drive her away, even as smoke is driven away, even as wax is melted before the fire. Let her suffer, expel her, pursue her, and let her suffer. Over her, O Lord, pour out thy wrath. Let her suffer, God hath chastised her, he hath punished her acts. Smite her with the fire of thy rage! So shall she perish in the waters, the floods shall go over her! Lord, hear not her cry, so may her weary voice grow hoarse with wailing, her eyes red with weeping and waiting for thee. Let her suffer, and show thou forth thy power!

Ruth responds:

O fret not thyself because of wicked, neither envy thou the evildoers: as the grass shall they soon be cut down and die, as the green herb shall they be withered. Yea, tho I walk thro the valley of the shadow of death. He delighteth my heart. He doth show the way to life everlasting, and leadeth me away from the snares of the wicked: he enlighteneth our eyes, and rejoiceth the heart. He leadeth us thro darkness and doth bear us to the light!

(From Part II, No. 5, Chorus of “Nocturnal Spirits”):

When the moths are flitting in the evening shade, when the owls are hooting where the dead are laid, when the shimmering moon beams tremble o'er the lake, when the live are dreaming, then the ghosts awake. Wandering vapours flicker and glance, ghostly their capers and noiseless their dance! From meadow and forest, from valley and hill, from moor and from mountain they silently steal. Still softly awittering the hedgerow doth fill; it stops, all is quiet, silent, and still. Ah, here comes a maiden! Who is she, canst tell? I gibbered at her from the open well. Fly, o maiden, turn and go. Wake no sleeper, oh no, no. Love might wake, and that were woe! Waterfish and forest doe, cat and owllet, hart and roe, birds that rule the upper air, frogs and crickets in their lair, live and love all free from care, meet and mate, happily they preen, and pair. But ye mortals love will thrash and he whips you with his lash, whacks you, cracks you good and sound in a circle drives you round. Ha ha ho ho. Still softly awittering the hedgerow doth fill; it stops, all is quiet and silent and still. We'll tell you tomorrow, we'll teach you today; of days that are past we have naught to say. Play with us upon the wind, join our airy revelry. Turn thee, one two three. We know neither longing, we know neither love, we are the spirits with whom God strove. And since the Fall Shreds of the whole. Who to our glorious freedom clove! Hush! The time has come, ghosts must now once more be dumb.

Ruth:

Ah, how still all the place is; the bolts of the Night are rusting. I hear the ghosts of the night as they rush by me. I hear them whisper and feel that they are listening. The nights presseth in upon me and I know not what it will bring to me!
Boaz sings (marked *adagio con molta passione*):

How shall I forsake thee? For neither flood can quench nor many waters drown the tender love I bear thee! Then come, beloved, enter into my father’s house: thy shepherd I: build thou me up a goodly home (Song of Songs 8.7)

Ruth:

Since thou dost now thy face radiant and full of grace, with smiles to me uncover, hailing my sun I cry: henceforth, ‘tis day for aye. night is for ever over. Ah, would that a thousand tongues had told thee! Ah had I a thousand arms to enfold thee, I’m drawn unto thee, as a ship to the ocean, I’m borne unto thee as the arrow speedeth to thee.

As Ruth and Boaz sing these rapturous love verses, the chorus continues singing psalms to God under them.

Boaz:

Pour now thy goodness on me, and bring into my dwelling place the ray of thy resplendent light.

Ruth:

When in that paradise I shall have found me, then may the sun for ever shine on thee! And if with glory his radiance surround me, I’ll walk in the light henceforth from darkness free. For love is strong as death (the chorus joins in on this last verse).

Joseph Rumshinsky (1881-1956)

Rumshinsky traveled around Eastern Europe from 1890-1894, accompanying a number of cantors and studying music, with noted composer Rimsky-Korsakov among others (Obituary, New York Herald, 2.6.56). On this trip, he first encountered Yiddish theater, and in 1896 wrote his first composition, “Mizrekh Klangen” (Eastern Sounds), a waltz. In 1897, he became the choirmaster in Borisov’s Opera and Operetta Troupe, and also at this time he joined Hazamir, a Jewish musicians union, which he directed until 1902. At this time, he familiarized himself with the work of Haydn, Handel and Mendelssohn and other, lesser-known composers. These early influences—cantorial and Romantic music—would become important for Rumshinsky’s later work. In 1903 he moved to London to study music, and was brought to the United States in 1904 by Yiddish actor Jacob P. Adler. Within a few years Rumshinsky had revolutionized the Yiddish musical stage in New York (New York Herald, 2.6.1956).

During the 1910’s Rumshinsky was amazingly productive, averaging over 20 compositions per year. He wrote a setting of *Shir HaShirim* in 1913, the same year he also wrote a musical revue called *Di Amerikanein*. He worked with virtually everyone in the community of Yiddish theater, and by 1920, Rumshinsky had established himself as the preeminent composer of the Yiddish theater, becoming the composer and conductor of the Second Avenue Theater (Rumshinsky archives, UCLA Music Library). In the course of his long career, he wrote about 250 musicals (New York Herald), and introduced a major change in these musicals by placing them in a full symphonic setting (Obituary, New York Times, 2.7.56).

Despite the beginning of the Depression in 1929, Rumshinsky continued his prolific musical production throughout 1930’s. In addition to his ongoing theater work, he often appeared on the radio, conducting studio orchestras. In 1938 he wrote an album of Yiddish songs “as introduced by the inimitable Molly Picon.” He wrote a book, *Klangen fun mein lebn in
1944, reminiscences of his life. He died in the midst of negotiating for a production of *Ruth* in Israel; the production never took place (New York Times).

Rumshinsky was "very proud of his Jewish heritage... and was a truly religious man," according to his daughter (personal communication, Betty Fox, 4.3.2004). He was certainly a great believer, and observed Jewish holidays (Betty Fox, 4.3.2004). A tutor came to their house to teach Rumshinsky Hebrew to help him with the libretto for his *Ruth* opera, which was "his lifelong dream" (Betty Fox).

I offer examples from the libretto that were not included in chapter 6.

From Scene 1 (Prologue), Naomi’s aria “In my dream”:

In my dream [I saw] a sycamore with a wide trunk...[the small bird] prophesied that in a very short while the sycamore would crack open with no chance of help. And the most beautiful part of the crown, in all its glory, will disappear as if it never was. Half of the remaining trunk still standing in its name alone will cry bitterly over its fate. Thus the bird was brooding with the sad song, the miraculous bird suddenly ("tif tif") flew into the high heavens; I awoke...

From Chapter 2, Scene Four, Gidon’s Serenade:

In truth and not in dreams I have come to you... everything I say to [the reapers] is a command. Even in my city Bethlehem they will work for me... Tomorrow among the female reapers in the field a charming girl will be brought to me, and with her Gidon will build a house and a nest in Israel. And behold I saw you shaking a handkerchief, and my soul said to me, this is the one. Come, Ruth...

**Wilfrid Mellers (1914--)**

Mellers has written a vast number of articles for leading periodicals, particularly on English and French music of the 20th century. He was also very interested in the social background of music. Mellers’ chief concern was to understand the nature of artistic creation, particularly how it is affected by the interrelationship of music, poetry and drama. He wrote books on music as recently as 1997 and 2001: *Between the Old World and the New: Writings on Music*; and *Music and Ecology in the 20th Century* (Leslie East in New Grove, vol. 16, p. 349).

For Mellers, like other composers of his generation, the English Baroque was an important inspiration. His early musical language is essentially diatonic but with a particular character created by a “delicate use of chromaticism and dissonance” (New Grove, vol. III, 109). This use of dissonance was sharpened by his studies with Egon Wellesz, a pupil of Schoenberg, who had great influence on Mellers’ creative development (Robert Henderson, “The Music of Wilfrid Mellers,” in Musical Times vol. civ, 1963, 178). Mellers wrote two motets based on texts from Isaiah in 1945, a few years before writing *Ruth*.

Mellers wrote the following in a letter (29 January 2003):

I don’t know why I chose to ‘do’ the book of Ruth, except that it’s a good story in lovely language. I am not a Christian, and the story has no particularly ‘religious’ slant for me.

**Lennox Berkeley (1903-1989)**

Berkeley’s biography fills four pages of New Grove. Dickinson (who also wrote a full-length study of Berkeley’s music, *The Music of Lennox Berkeley*) remarks on Berkeley’s “natural feeling for melody, coupled with a flair for orchestral texture and a discriminating harmonic
sense," all of which enabled him to develop his own personal style (Dickinson in New Grove, vol. 3, 359). He studied at Oxford, though not music; yet it was at that time of his life that he decided to make music his career. Maurice Ravel looked at some of Berkeley’s early scores and encouraged him to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, which he did from 1927-1932. In 1928 he became a Roman Catholic, which “profoundly affected his life and work.” During those years he met and befriended major composers such as Stravinsky and Poulenc. He later also met Benjamin Britten, and the two became both friends and musical collaborators (Dickinson, 360).

Dickinson believes that:

Religious subjects in particular gave rise to vocal music of unusual spiritual intensity...Ruth showed Berkeley to be more at home with something less ambitious than grand opera, something more in keeping with his personal reserve (Dickinson, 359-361).

Berkeley first began writing vocal music in the 1940’s and Ruth was one of three chamber operas he wrote between 1952 and 1956 (the others were the grand opera Nelson and the one-act comedy A Dinner Engagement; Dickinson, 359). The instrumentation and sound of the score are similar to Britten in places, possibly because it was written for the English Opera Group and for the same small-scale forces as several of Britten’s operas (for example, Rape of Lucretia, Turn of the Screw). This was considered a revolutionary concept at the time (Peter Reynolds, personal communication, 21103).

Ruth was not very favorably received at its premiere. One reviewer criticized Crozier’s libretto, saying that “the opportunities for several of the best musical sections are unconvincingly contrived” (C. Mason, “The Progress of Lennox Berkeley,” in The Listener, Sept. 27, 1956, 485). Mason did feel, however, that musically this work “clearly belongs amongst his finest and most important works” (Mason, 486). A critic who saw the premiere performance found Ruth ...a distinguished work...composer and librettist were surprisingly successful in making a stage piece out of somewhat improbable, though undeniably very beautiful, material (D. Mitchell, “London Concerts and Opera,” in The Musical Times, November, 1956, 597).

As part of the Berkeley centenary celebrations, Ruth was performed at the Cheltenham Festival on July 20, 2003. The reviews were more favorable for this performance. In a review for The Guardian (22 July, 2003), Rian Evans states:

The instrumentation...for all the inevitable echoes of Britten in the piano’s punctuation of sections, was mellow and sometimes surprisingly rich...emotional tension was carefully built up, the harvest celebrations were vibrant and rhythmically pungent and the impassioned, unaccompanied passage from Boaz...created a high point in the structure. The dignity of Ruth...then matched that enlightened heroism to bring a real nobility to the ending...Ruth, with its often strikingly beautiful music and only momentarily schmaltz, could have been even better had Berkeley been more ruthless in cutting Eric Crozier’s libretto.

Aminadav Aloni (1928-1999)

Aloni first began to compose Jewish music as organist music director at Valley Beth Shalom, in Encino, California. In the over 30 years he worked there, he produced a prodigious library of important Jewish works. Ultimately Aloni produced hundreds of Jewish compositions, including many complete services, songs and prayers commissioned by synagogues, cantors and individuals around the world, and nine complete musicals, several on biblical themes.
The power of his music is attributable to an unusual blending of talents. He was a superb classical pianist, teacher, musicologist, a prolific musical comedy composer, a remarkably creative jazz artist and a highly skilled arranger. The complex beauty of his Jewish compositions was guided by his familiarity with the sacred texts and his devotion to Hebrew literature: classic and modern, prose and poetry (Aloni Foundation Website).
APPENDIX II: BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MUSICAL SETTINGS OF THE SCROLL
Listed in reverse chronological order (based on earliest publication date).
Sources. OCLC and WorldCat online catalogs and card catalogs at Library of Congress,
Washington, D.C.; and British Library Catalog

1. Works Discussed


[LC Call No. M1503.B4997R9 1956]

Beecham, Adrian. *Ruth, a cantata*. London: Joseph Williams Ltd., 1956:


[LC Call No. M1503.R94R8 1949]


and (see Foreword)


II. Other works at the Library of Congress


III. Works in other library collections (locations given where possible)


Reynolds, I.E. *Ruth: a sacred music drama*. 194--; [OCLC: 18708263; at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Texas]


Ippolitov-Ivanov, Mikaill, *Ruth, lyric opera*. Moscow, P. Urgenson, 1888. [OCLC: 21825696; at University of California, Berkeley and UCLA]


Broad, John Astor (1845-1883) *Ruth, the moabitess*. Boston: White, Smith, 1875, 1877, 1905, 1917. [OCLC: 4050746; at Universities of Delaware and Virginia]


LeBeau came to my attention late in my research; her name was included in a list of *Ruth* works included in Smith. It would be an interesting study to see what alterations a woman composer made to the Scroll.

Luise Adolphia LeBeau (1850-1927) was a German composer, pianist, singer, and critic who wrote her first composition at the age of 15. She performed for Hans von Bülow, one of the most famous musicians of that time, and gained his lifelong encouragement. She also briefly studied with Clara Schumann, another of the most noted musicians of the day. LeBeau moved to Munich in 1874, where she won prizes and favorable reviews, as well as meeting Brahms and Liszt. Her style was characterized by “small, well-shaped themes and strict sonata structure.” Her first opera was well received. In 1899 she wrote *Miriams Lied*. Her memoirs were published in Baden-Baden in 1910, and a concert of her works was given in that city in 1925 in honor of her 75th birthday (Judith Olson, *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, 270). She was considered one of the most talented women composers of her time, and several of her compositions were selected for performance at the Chicago Worlds Fair (Aaron Cohen, *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers*, 148). LeBeau is discussed in two books written about women in music in the 1980’s: J. Bowers and Tick, *Women Making Music*, Chicago, 1986; and J.F. Olson, *Women in Music*, New York, 1982.
APPENDIX III  BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SONGS AND ARIAS BASED ON THE SCROLL.
Listed in reverse chronological order


Ellis, Merrill. “Entreat me not.” 1947. [OCLC: 42755062; manuscript at University of North Texas]


APPENDIX IV: BIBLIOGRAPHY OF LITERATURE BASED ON THE SCROLL

Organized by date of publication. Source: WorldCat Library of Congress online catalog. I have not distinguished between novels, plays, and poems. In most cases the genre is obvious.

21st century


20th century


Or, Tirzah. Rut: Mahazeh Tanakhi be-arba'ah ma'arakhot u-tenumah ahat. Tel Aviv: Alef, 1977


Murphy, Edward F. (b. 1892). *The song of the cave: a tale of Ruth and Noemi*. Milwaukee, 1950


Spivak, Jennie Charsky. *Boaz the agrarian: drama in poetic form*. Denver, Co.: C. Mapes, 1944


Lindley, Laura. *Ruth a pageant.* 1934 (no publisher details)


Maxfield, Mina R. *Ruth of Moab.* Graw, Allison (b. 1877); Graw, Ethelcan (Tyson); Mrs., joint author: Barbee, Miss Lindsey. *Making of a king. Pharaoh's daughter,* and other Biblical plays of the contest. Drama league-Longmans Green play-writing contest, 1927. New York: Longmans, Green and co., 1928. (These plays were submitted in the Drama league-Longmans Green play-writing contests, 1927 and Pharaoh's daughter was the prize-winner of the Non-sectarian Biblical group. Included was Ruth of Moab, by Mina R. Maxfield).


Hamilton, James A. *Ruth's daring adventure.* 1926-1929


Levinger, Elma Ehrlich (b. 1887). *Ruth of Moab, a springtime play in one act.* Cincinnati: Department of Synagogue and School Extension of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1923


Leiser, Joseph. *The girl from Moab, a harvest play in three acts.* Cincinnati: Department of synagogue and school extension of the Union of American Hebrew congregations, 1922


Young, Andrew. *Boaz and Ruth* (dramatic poem). 1920

19th century

Rosenzweig, Salomon, *Rut*. Krakau: 1893


Disselhoff, Julius (1827-1896), *Ruth, die ährenleserin aus Moab, oder, Wunderanfang, herrlichen Ende*. Kaiserswerth am Rhein: Verlag der Diakonissen-Anstalt. 1885


Adomeit, Ruth E. (owner), *Hebrew lyrics; select poems on Old Testament subjects*. London: The Religious Tract Society. 1837. [Note: The poems include works by Wesley, H. Rogers, Doddridge, Ragg, Ednorton, Tappan, Miss Jewsbury, and many others, including some anonymous. From the library of Ruth E. Adomeit, with her bookplate.]


Cohn, Isaac Jogade, *Bo'az ye-Rut; be-sha'ash mahlakot* (Hebrew). Breslau, Germany: Gedruckt bey L. Zulstbakh und zohn. 1834

Pichler, Karoline von Greiner (1769-1843), *Biblische idyllen*. Vienna, Austria: A. Pichler. 1812 (includes poetry about Rebekkah, Hagar, and Ruth)

Clere, Mrs., *Bethlehem's three mothers; and the soil they trod*. London: Hatchard. 1800-1899? (treats Naomi, Ruth, and Mary)

NOTE: These results show, for the 20th century, four works in the 1980's, six in the 1970's, three in the '60's, eight each in the '50's and in the '40's, six in the '30's, 10 in the '20's, and two from 1900 1920. For the 19th century, there are five in the 1890's, four between 1850 and 1890, and five in the first half of the century. Since this is not a complete account, this survey can only indicate certain trends. I can cautiously hope that the required further research will be done.
LIST OF TABLES AND GRAPHS

TABLE A: SCENE DIVISION

TABLE B: FREQUENCY OF APPEARANCE IN SCENES:
- 19th Century
- 20th Century

GRAPH B1: Based on figures in Table B

GRAPH B2: Narrator

TABLE C1: NUMBER OF RUTH SOLOS
  - C2 NAOMI SOLOS
  - C3 BOAZ SOLOS

TABLE D: ENSEMBLES

TABLE E: OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

TABLE F: MENTION OF GOD'S NAME

TABLE F1: TOTAL MENTIONS OF GOD BY MAIN CHARACTERS

TABLE C: SOLO PAGES

TABLE C#: RUTH SOLOS
  - NAOMI SOLOS
  - BOAZ SOLOS
**LIST OF MUSICAL FIGURES**

(Some titles are my English translations of the original; both versions appear in chapter 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fig.</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Goldschmidt</td>
<td>Turn again (Ruth Naomi)</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Whither thou goest (Ruth)</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>I will lay me down (Boaz)</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Damrosch</td>
<td>My dear daughters (Naomi Ruth Orpah)</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Surely we will return (Ruth Orpah)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not (Ruth)</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hearest not my daughter (Boaz)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gaul</td>
<td>Farewell (Naomi Ruth Orpah)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not (Ruth)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Glory be to thee (Boaz)</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cowen</td>
<td>Like as a Father (Naomi)</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not (Ruth)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>Happy am I (Ruth Boaz)</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Franck</td>
<td>Bitter grief (Naomi Ruth Orpah)</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>I want the same land (Ruth)</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ah, henceforth (Naomi)</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Fino</td>
<td>No longer say Naomi (Naomi)</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>Woman, your soul was pure (Ruth Boaz)</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Schumann</td>
<td>1st page of orchestra score</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Naomi's lament (Naomi)</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not (Ruth)</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>Whither thou goest (Ruth)</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Rumshinsky</td>
<td>I am like the sycamore (Naomi)</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not (Ruth)</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>Call me not (Naomi)</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Mellers</td>
<td>Entreat me not (Ruth)</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>Call me not (Naomi)</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Beecham</td>
<td>Turn again (Naomi)</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entreat me not (Ruth)</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>Call me not (Naomi)</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Whither thou goest (Ruth)</td>
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<td>Call me not (Naomi)</td>
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<td>Lo my beloved (Ruth Boaz)</td>
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<td>Aloni</td>
<td>Go back (Naomi)</td>
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<td>Don't ask me to leave you (Ruth)</td>
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Additional musical selections discussed but not illustrated are listed on pp. 105-6.
## BIBLICAL CITATIONS

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<td>172</td>
<td>22:22</td>
<td>25:7, 9</td>
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283
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Proverbs
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<td>6.14-29, 14.1-12</td>
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<td>Romans</td>
<td>5.8, 15, 25n, 174</td>
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289


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