The scroll of Ruth re-told through librettos and music: biblical interpretation in a new key
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CHAPTER FIVE  MUSICAL ANALYSIS: CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

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, which 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 in 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).

MUSIC 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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*Quoted in Baty, 306*

*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, 760). 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 (Kitv 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, interrelations 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).

* 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

[1] 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 (Kaay, 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).

Voice types

Ensembles

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 (Clement, 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 Ruth 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 (Jennifer Robinson, 19). Chromaticism, whole-tone scales, and augmented or diminished triads, all involve intervallic 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 (Dahlhaus, 1982, 95). There was a steadily rising “dissonance threshold” throughout the 19th century as well, especially in Germany, and in the disciples of Franz (Longyear, 291). In the
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. Moubite, 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

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 recitativo 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 Kivy 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.
PREFACE TO CHAPTER SIX  THE ORATORIOS AND OPERAS

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.

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 LIBRETTO

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. Orphah 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 Moabite 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 is acceptable, only Moabite 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 F. 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 F, 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, Orpah, 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. Orpah 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 non-existent. 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, 208). 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)

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

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

Fino
Naomi and Ruth: “O Nuora” (“Oh daughter-in-law”)
Naomi: “I per it bene” (“I direct your 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 ayafii” (“I didn’t tire”) (based on 2.18)
Boaz: “Be-lev kavarti” (“I buried in my heart”)
Ruth: “Ve’etirastani 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...”