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

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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, 197). He was introduced to her and she gave him a 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 Episcopal 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. Krebs 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 *Sulamith* (Krebs, 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 Drible 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,” *Hulda* 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. I, 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 sultriness, 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 Ecclesiastes. 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 \textit{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 Stiehle 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 \textit{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" (Kretzschmar).

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 Tron (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, Bethlehemite 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 houseth with waiting, 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 evil doers; as the grass shall they soon be cut down and die, as the green herb shall they be withered. Yea, the 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 howling where the dead are laid, when the shimmering moon beams tremble o’er the lake, when the lute 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, and 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 shrill 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 preseth in upon me, and I know not what it will bring to me!
(From Part II, No. 6):

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, "Mizreh 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 Amerikaner*. 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 ("tzif tzif") 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. cix, 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, 21-103).

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 momentary 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).