

Who Is Solomon? Intertextual Readings of King Solomon in Reception History

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For centuries, biblical texts have inspired artists to create and shape their own works. Biblical stories and characters have been retold, depicted, and staged countless times in Christian, Jewish, and also Islamic traditions. This creative process modifies the biblical images, for example, by changing the features of the figures or adding new episodes to the narratives. Hence, the tradition develops and broadens the motives and facets attached to biblical stories and characters. Such transformations are well-known from legends, but the arts also continue this process. That is why the understanding of biblical stories and in particular the characteristics of biblical figures change over the centuries. This special literary environment also affects the question of an intertextual relecture as it is not limited to two, nor even to any limited number of specified texts. The possible pretexts are countless and often not even identifiable. In the same way, dependencies become gradually blurred as it is no longer possible to ascertain the source of information for a specific reading. Nonetheless, an intertextual reading of literary adaptations of biblical texts is still able to produce important insights and to point to mutual influences between reading biblical and literary texts.

In the following I present observations on how we may construct such an intertextual reading process and what impact it might have on the understanding and interpretation of the texts using the example of King Solomon. The reception history of Solomon shows a rich and diverse

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picture, making this biblical figure a suitable object of study. The diversity of the images of King Solomon already starts in the biblical texts and grows rapidly in the tradition. As a consequence, it is barely possible to depict a distinctive portrait of Solomon. This figure is in constant danger to merge into the great imaginative space of images of kings and rulers. Hence, Solomon might appear as just another legendary king, whose mentioning generates some interest but does not determine the character of the literary figure. In order to analyze and describe the intertextual reading process and its impact on the interpretations of the various images of Solomon in biblical and literary texts, I will first focus on interfigural as a special aspect of intertextual relations. Then I will turn to the history of the reception of biblical texts and outline this specific intertext. In a next step, I will suggest to (re)construct an intertextual reading with the aid of “blending theory” as developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. Finally, an exemplary analysis of three poems on Solomon will show how such an intertextual reading may be applied.

Intertextuality and Interfigural

Interrelations between figures are a special but quite important way to establish relations between different texts.¹ There are numerous ways and a wide range of elements that may establish relations between literary figures, whereby proper names are among the most obvious ones. Quite similar to a quotation, a name uses and repeats a segment taken from a pretext within a subsequent text.² Once a name triggers the memory of another text, the readers start looking for similarities between the figures. The more unique the proper name is, the stronger the reference will be and the more intensely the readers will be searching for similarities. Vice versa, a common name will only add a fleeting awareness of other literary figures bearing the same name. Furthermore, if a figure reappears in another text, it is not necessarily certain that it really is the same figure, nor is it always possible to reidentify the same figure in a different text.³ Searching for criteria to establish the identity of reoccurring literary figures, Uri

1. Wolfgang Müller, “Interfigural: A Study on the Interdependence of Literary Figures,” in *Intertextuality*, ed. Heinrich F. Plett, RTT 15 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 101.

2. Müller, “Interfigural,” 103.

3. See Uri Margolin, “Introducing and Sustaining Characters in Literary Narrative: A Set of Conditions,” *Sty* 21 (1987): 116.

Margolin lists five minimal constitutive conditions under which literary characters can be introduced and sustained: (1) the figure has to exist in a work of literature; (2) it needs some unique traits to form a recognizable identity; (3) it must be unique in the text-world; (4) the figure has to form a paradigmatic unity—thus, its different traits must be coherent; and (5) it must be presented as a syntagmatic continuity. As such, its depiction needs continuity throughout diverse episodes, sequels, different books, and so forth.⁴ If (at least some of) these core features remain constant, a figure can be identified by the readers.

Nevertheless, the figures and their characteristics may still vary significantly if they appear in different works. Wolfgang Müller points out that if “an author takes over a figure from a work by another author into his own work, he absorbs it into the formal and ideological structure of his own product, putting it to his own uses, which may range from parody and satire to a fundamental revaluation or re-exploration of the figure concerned.”⁵ Figures thus might take on a quite vivid “afterlife,” especially figures from well-known literature like the Bible (the same holds true, for example, for figures from Greek mythology or classical literature). Although they are recognizable throughout many transformations, these figures are not identical with their first appearances.

If we apply these criteria to the biblical figure of King Solomon, the existence of the literary figure and its uniqueness is well established in 1 Kings and the books of Chronicles. His characterization is elaborate, although not unambiguous. In 1 Kings, Solomon is introduced as son of David, king of Israel, and builder of the temple. He is further portrayed as wisdom’s apprentice, a wise king and judge; he fears God but also is disloyal, building sanctuaries for foreign deities. As a king, he is portrayed as a benevolent ruler but also demands forced labor for his building projects. The appearance of this royal figure in other biblical books shows some variations. In the books of Chronicles, the figure of King Solomon is easily recognizable. Its portrait is very similar to 1 Kings, although this Solomon is less complex, as he lacks all the negative traits. Three other biblical books mention Solomon only briefly. The Song of Songs introduces Solomon as a figure of the text. The short references mention him as king; however, his role is reduced to a suitor in a love song. The book of Ecclesiastes also points to Solomon and suggests that he is the lyrical

4. Margolin, “Introducing and Sustaining Characters in Literary Narrative,” 111–21.

5. Müller, “Interfiguralität,” 107.

speaker (Eccl 1:12–2:26). However, the identification of Qoheleth with Solomon is not beyond doubt. The so-called royal fiction rather implies that Qoheleth identifies himself with Solomon as a thought experiment. The book of Proverbs refers to Solomon three times. He is mentioned in the headings of collections of proverbs (Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1), indicating that Solomon is the author (or editor) of these sayings. Thus, Solomon appears as an authority behind the narrating voice, the parent's voice, or the voice of wisdom. However, the recognizability of Solomon as a literary figure is rather low, and it takes considerable efforts from the readers to find "Solomonic" traits or a Solomonic voice in these texts.⁶

The issue of the figure as a paradigmatic unity can be answered for 1 Kings and the books of Chronicles, while the other books provide only partial images of Solomon, adding or emphasizing some traits to the overall picture. The syntagmatic unity of the figure of King Solomon is also clearly recognizable in 1 Kings and the books of Chronicles. Despite some differences, Solomon's most important achievements are presented in a similar way. While these books depict Solomon's whole reign, the other references point to specific episodes (Song of Songs) or allude to Solomon's kingship (Ecclesiastes) or his wisdom (Proverbs) in general.

To summarize, it can be noted that King Solomon is developed as a unique literary figure in 1 Kings and the books of Chronicles. Most probably, the portrayal in Chronicles already is an adaptation of 1 Kings, reshaping the image of the king according to its purpose. The other occurrences refer to these portraits as one, without differentiation.⁷ This points to a dynamic of a growing and expanding character. The figure of Solomon is not recognized in a specific realization of one book. King Solomon, rather, is a character that changes continuously as new traits and aspects are added or modified. The different images are not passed on separately but rather combined. In this way, a complex figure with, in some instances, contradictive characteristics arises from the various portraits of Solomon. For the vast majority of artistic works, Solomon thus is a unique figure which includes an accumulation of character traits and skills. He is a great king and a wise judge (1 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles), a wisdom teacher (Prov-

6. See Mathias Winkler, *Das Salomonische des Sprichwörterbuchs: Intertextuelle Verbindungen zwischen 1Kön 1–11 und dem Sprichwörterbuch*, HBS 87 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2017), 117–67.

7. The only exception is Sir 47:19–20 (LXX). Solomon's devotion to his wives that brought him disgrace is only mentioned in 1 Kgs 11.

erbs), a philosopher and skeptic (Ecclesiastes), and allegedly wiser than all men but also a fool (Sirach). Solomon fears God but also builds sanctuaries for foreign deities; he is a benevolent king and an oppressor; furthermore, he is a lover (Song of Songs) and is drawn to women and also captivated by them (1 Kings, Sirach). In this way, Solomon's biblical portrait as a whole becomes the pretext for later relectures, and not the different images of the single books.⁸

When the biblical texts are completed, the development of Solomon's image does not stop. This becomes already obvious in the widespread legends in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic tradition.⁹ These texts added many stories not known in the Bible and thus enhanced the image of the great king. Subsequently, these stories and images became an integral part of Solomon's image, just like the biblical stories. It is out of these traditions that artists attain the biblical knowledge they use, shape, and modify for their own works. The wide range of characteristics for the figure of Solomon the artists may draw from results in widely divergent images of the biblical king. So, it happens that Solomon is a romantic lover in one novel and a womanizer or even a misogynist in others. He can be portrayed as the exemplary good king, a brutal dictator, or just another incompetent sovereign. In the same way, Solomon sometimes is extremely wise, sometimes unworldly and naive.

The Reception of the Texts

In the long history of interpretation and artistic adaptations, the biblical images of Solomon are constantly expanded and transformed.¹⁰ Due to this ongoing change, defining a pretext in this process is a challenge. As all texts and all figures of Solomon leave their marks on the picture of

8. Later traditions explicitly try to combine the various aspects of Solomon into the image of one character by taking into account various changes in his life. So, for example, the differences in the books attributed to Solomon are explained by assigning them to different stages of Solomon's life. See August Wünsche, *Der Midrasch Schir Ha-Schirim*, BibRab 6 (Leipzig: Schulze, 1880), 1, 9.

9. See Joseph Verheyden, ed., *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition*, TBN 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

10. Brennan W. Breed further distinguishes between processes that expand and adapt the text in a creative way (he calls transmutations) and readings that express the capacities proper to the text. See his *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 133–34.

Solomon within cultural memory, every new image and every reuse of the figure of Solomon draws on a wide variety of characteristics as it constructs its own version of this figure. The intertextual relations are not restricted to a text and specific pretext(s), but rather a given text relates to a cloud of pretexts. Furthermore, musical adaptations or paintings may also contribute to Solomon's image and thus function as a pretext. A new image of the figure of Solomon hence may be rooted in the biblical texts or a particular interpretation of these texts, but it may also emerge from a mere passing familiarity with the biblical figure and its manifold traditions.

Nonetheless, as Brennan W. Breed points out, every new image of Solomon is based on this tradition and starts with an—at least—partial perception of it. In doing so, selections take place, as the process of reading and perceiving always narrows the potentials of texts and also other works of art. Hence, every reading, seeing, or hearing reorganizes a text or an artwork and, as a consequence, each element of this pretext will embrace only a (very) limited range of its potentials.¹¹ With regard to the totality of the interpretations and artworks dedicated to Solomon, the reception history appears as the story of the text's capacities.¹²

Although the receptions of King Solomon only form a very small section of the intertext, as Julia Kristeva envisioned it, the large network of texts, artworks, and their relations mirror its complexity on a small scale.¹³ Focusing on such an overview, Breed further points out that “by tracing readings from many diverse contexts, a reception historian can locate various semantic nodes through which clusters of readings converge.”¹⁴ This suggestion offers a very helpful schema to organize the multitude of images and interpretations arising from biblical texts throughout the centuries.¹⁵

11. Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 138.

12. Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 140–41.

13. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Language and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 64–91; Kristeva applied Mikhail M. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to a discourse between all texts. She defines intertextuality as a characteristic feature of every text as every text is a mosaic of other texts. Intertextuality, therefore, defines an open text; it is a through road and a semantic crossing of many texts. Consequently, numerous combinations, relations, overlappings, and multiple meanings characterize every text.

14. Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 140.

15. Caroline Vander Stichele suggests speaking of the impact of texts instead of their history, thus focusing on the “cultural impact of scriptures rather than on their

For Solomon, several such nodes can be established.¹⁶ The most obvious node is Solomon the king. At all times, people were interested in the image of a ruler, and they used Solomon as a role model in their reflections. Depending on the perspective and interests of the interpreters, Solomon is portrayed as a benevolent and just ruler, a king of peace and thus a role model for other rulers, or as an inept sovereign and sometimes even a brutal dictator exploiting his people. A crucial part of Solomon's kingship includes his building projects, especially the construction of the temple. In retelling this event, Solomon's attitude toward his reign, his people, and, of course, God is reflected. Frequently, Solomon's religious conviction and performance are closely connected to the image of the king. Solomon might be depicted as a God-fearing, pious ruler but also as a skeptic; other stories tell of his apostasy and repentance. Another very active node is Solomon's wisdom. Starting with the summary in 1 Kgs 5:9–14, where Solomon's wisdom surpasses that of all other people, this image is vastly expanded in the tradition. Subsequently, Solomon is not only able to talk about every possible topic, to rule justly in difficult court cases, and to solve any riddle, but he is also able to talk to everyone, humans and animals alike. Furthermore, his knowledge might even exceed earthly wisdom and encompass magic, which in turn gives him power over the world of the demons. In addition, Solomon's relationship to women is of wide interest and forms another such node. He is commonly depicted as a passionate lover, a womanizer, but also a misogynist.

It is evident that the well-established nodes for the reception of Solomon comply with the most prominent activities of his biblical portrait: the image of the king who builds the temple, loves many women, and is wise beyond all measure forms the backbone of many artistic adaptations. Solomon's character traits, however, are not clearly defined. In continuation of the biblical diversity, later portraits freely modify his personality.

history." This proposal adds the aspect of interaction to Breed's nodes, as all (cultural) texts interact within the intertext. See Caroline Vander Stichele, "The Head of John and Its Reception, or How to Conceptualize 'Reception History,'" in *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*, ed. Emma England and William J. Lyons, LHBOTS 615 (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 80.

16. For a more elaborate presentation, see Elisabeth Birnbaum, "Salomo in Barock und Moderne: Ein interdisziplinäres Kaleidoskop," *BArts* 1 (2017): 1–25, especially 1–7.

Nonetheless, the constancy of some core elements guarantees the recognizability of the biblical figure.

Reading between the Texts

When literary works recreate a biblical figure for the eyes of their contemporary readers, they offer them a new approach to traditional and biblical images. The intertextual reading that may be stimulated by such works bridges the chronological distance between their own time and earlier or biblical times, thus enabling the readers to see the biblical stories becoming transparent for their contemporary questions, and, vice versa, to interpret the artwork's time in the light of a biblical figure and its (long) history. In this way, the worlds of the biblical stories and the literary or artistic work interact. They blend in the reading process as the readers construct meaning between different texts. New reading possibilities arise from the interplay of the texts, exceeding the given text and the pretexts alluded to. Renate Lachmann calls the crossing point of the texts an *implicit text*. This implicit text is a space where the given text and the absent texts intersect; it is a place of interference of texts which have coded and conveyed cultural experiences as communicative experiences. This implicit text can only be defined approximately, as the space where a dynamic constitution of meaning occurs.¹⁷

If we want to take a closer look at how this dynamic space between the texts is constructed and how meaning is created, insights from cognitive science are helpful. Fauconnier and Turner, for example, describe the process of how meaning is created in their well-received book, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*.¹⁸ In biblical studies, their insights have been used for metaphorical studies in particular, but their approach is of course not restricted to figurative language. According to Fauconnier and Turner, "conceptual blending" is a "basic mental operation, highly imaginative but crucial to even the simplest kinds of thought."¹⁹ Explaining the concept of blending, Fau-

17. Renate Lachmann, "Ebenen des Intertextualitätsbegriffs," in *Das Gespräch*, ed. Karlheinz Stierle and Rainer Warnig, PH 11 (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1984), 133–38.

18. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

19. Fauconnier and Turner, *Way We Think*, 18.

connier and Turner show how it is possible to parse complex figures of thought into single, less complex concepts and to describe their different interactions in order to explain the new meaning such figures of thought offer. This approach works with a concept of different “spaces”: the starting point is the so-called mental spaces, “small conceptual packets that are constructed as we think and talk.” These mental spaces, in turn, “are connected to long-term schematic knowledge called frames.”²⁰ There are different kinds of mental spaces: the “generic space” contains the elements the input spaces have in common, and the “blended space” combines the input spaces and their frames and thus creates something new. Blended spaces may, in turn, serve as input spaces in another blending process which results in a network of blends referred to as “megablend.”²¹

If blending theory is applied to intertextual reading processes, it may provide new insights into how the implicit text in an intertextual reading emerges. I want to demonstrate this approach using the example of the description of Solomon’s wisdom in 1 Kgs 5:12–14 and Prov 1:1–5.

(1) The input space created in 1 Kgs 5:12–14 shows Solomon as a very wise man, a universal scholar, who is admired by all the kings of the earth. The corresponding frame is both the content and structure of knowledge and its display and reception. The second input space displayed in Prov 1:1–5 presents King Solomon as a teacher of wisdom, who passes his knowledge on in his proverbs to all those who want to listen and learn. The corresponding frame is the content and structure of knowledge and the relation between teacher and pupil.

(2) When Prov 1 names King Solomon as writer of the proverbs, it takes up the image of the wise king in 1 Kgs 5 and expands it. Nonetheless, both texts are quite similar as they share the concept of a wise man who has great knowledge, presents his knowledge, and is heard by others. These elements, common to both mental spaces, form the generic space.

There is yet another element the mental spaces of this example share, namely the figure of King Solomon. In this example from the biblical text, the figure of King Solomon is explicitly reintroduced in Prov 1:1 as Solomon, son of David, king of Israel. Without this introduction, the points of reference would be too few to decide with certainty whether Solomon is the outlined author. Like Margolin, Fauconnier and Turner reflect on

20. Fauconnier and Turner, *Way We Think*, 40.

21. Fauconnier and Turner, *Way We Think*, 151.

the recognizability of figures across different contexts and works. In principle, they come to a quite similar conclusion: namely, that characters remain recognizable across different contexts and works because of some unchanging traits. According to the schema of blending theory, these elements are part of the generic space for that person, forming a personal character.²² Thus, “characters, like frames, are basic cognitive cultural instruments. We may dispute every aspect of their accuracy or legitimacy or invariance, or even their very existence, but cognitively we cannot do without them.”²³

(3) Combining the mental spaces does not reduce them to their common elements, but this process also creates something new, namely the blended space (the blend). The example of Prov 1:1–5 shows a compression of time, space, and identity as the writer of the proverbs is identified with King Solomon. Furthermore, the different concepts of presenting and sharing wisdom are blended as the emphasis shifts from having and presenting wisdom to teaching and learning wisdom. Also, the exclusive knowledge of 1 Kgs 5:13 makes way for proverbs and commonly shared wisdom. The blend thus modifies the image of Solomon: On the one hand, the authority of the wisdom teacher is strengthened by King Solomon’s fame. On the other hand, Solomon’s wisdom is also put into perspective; he is not only an instructor, but—as a typical wise man—he is also someone who is instructed.

Solomon the King throughout the Centuries

Throughout the centuries, King Solomon has been used as a model for contemporary rulers. In doing so, Solomon’s exemplary reign, wisdom, and power are praised but also criticized. In the following, I will present three selected examples in order to show how Solomon’s intertextual portrait develops in reception history. The biblical texts portray Solomon as a successful king who stabilizes the kingdom, inwardly and outwardly, so that peace is secured (1 Kgs 5:4, 18; 1 Chr 22:9). An important element in the description of his reign is his descent from David. Solomon is the thriving successor. Nonetheless, the depictions within 1 Kings and the books of Chronicles show two different political interests. In 1 Kings, Solomon

22. Fauconnier and Turner, *Way We Think*, 249–50.

23. Fauconnier and Turner, *Way We Think*, 250.

has to prove himself as king, and although he achieves great things, he does not measure up to the image of his father. Unlike this portrayal, the books of Chronicles present a more static picture showing David and Solomon together as the idealized beginning of the Davidic dynasty.²⁴ As far as domestic policy is concerned, the organization of the land (1 Kgs 4) and the building of the temple, palaces, and cities (1 Kgs 9:17–19) have to be mentioned. Solomon is presented as a powerful king who is able to enforce his will and to implement his ideas. Regarding foreign policy, Solomon is portrayed as a well-known, respected, and admired king. In this way, the biblical portraits of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles correspond to the image of a great king. However, despite all his glory, Solomon's image in 1 Kings also includes a darker side. Not only does Solomon consolidate his power by destroying his (potential) enemies (1 Kgs 2), he also has to deal with political adversaries (1 Kgs 11). His treaty with King Hiram of Tyre, the use of forced labor, and the construction of sanctuaries for foreign deities further add to an ambivalent portrayal. The self-critical references to Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes and the open criticism in the book of Sirach continue this critical trend, thus laying an ambiguous basis for later receptions.

Solomon the Model King

From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, the so-called mirrors for princes instructed kings in the important virtues of a ruler.²⁵ Therein, Solomon appears as a paragon for wisdom, the first of all royal virtues. Frequently, Solomon is also mentioned in homages to a king, which compare a contemporary king with the biblical King Solomon and praise him as a new Solomon. In these examples, the character of Solomon remains mostly unchanged. The input spaces share the frame of kingship, thus creating a “mirror network,” a blend of spaces that have the same “organizing frame.”²⁶ Time, space, and identity are compressed. The blend adds to the image of the contemporary king the aspects of excellence and distinctiveness. This,

24. See Mark A. Throntveit, “The Idealization of Solomon as the Glorification of God in the Chronicler's Royal Speeches and Royal Prayers,” in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Lowell K. Handy, SHCANE 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 411–27.

25. Such texts were often composed at the accession of a new king, when a young and inexperienced ruler was about to come to power.

26. Fauconnier and Turner, *Way We Think*, 122–23.

first of all, helps to justify the king's reign. Implicitly, it also might raise the readers' hopes or expectations that the king will prove to be a Solomonic king, providing peace and well-being for his people. For the king addressed in the text, it adds the request to satisfy this high requirement.

Not all works portraying Solomon as an exemplary king are related to one specific ruler. Many rather refer to a common or ideal image of rulership of their time. A good example is the poem, "King Solomon and the Ants," by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892).²⁷ In this poem, he describes different ways to exercise a king's power. He combines biblical and legendary elements to present Solomon as a role model for sovereigns. The poem starts with a description of the king riding out of Jerusalem with his entourage and the queen of Sheba. When their path approaches an anthill, Solomon overhears the ants' worries, and he translates their words for the queen of Sheba (seventh stanza):

"Here comes the king men greet
As wise and good and just,
To crush us in the dust
Under his heedless feet."

The queen is quite surprised by these words, and this starts a dialogue with Solomon on the ideal behavior of a wise king (ninth to eleventh stanzas):

"O king!" she whispered sweet,
"Too happy fate have they
Who perish in thy way
Beneath thy gracious feet!"

"Thou of the God-lent crown,
Shall these vile creatures dare
Murmur against thee where
The knees of kings kneel down!"

"Nay," Solomon replied,
"The wise and strong should seek
The welfare of the weak,"
And turned his horse aside.

27. John Greenleaf Whittier, *The Vision of Echard and Other Poems* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1878), 99.

Two totally different images of the relation between a king and his subjects are set side by side. While the queen of Sheba sets out an absolutist rule which is totally centered on the king, Solomon replies with the image of a king who cares for all creatures in his kingdom. Without further argument, the queen admits that Solomon's attitude characterizes a truly wise king (thirteenth and fourteenth stanzas):

The jeweled head bent low;
 "O king!" she said, "henceforth
 The secret of thy worth
 And wisdom well I know."

"Happy must be the State
 Whose ruler heedeth more
 The murmurs of the poor
 Than flatteries for the great."

This reaction of the queen of Sheba emphasizes Solomon's portrait as a benevolent sovereign. She even declares this trait as the core of Solomon's wisdom. The last stanza draws a general conclusion from the depicted events that once more highlights the central theme of a considerate ruler and, in this way, links a distant past and present times.

An intertextual reading of this poem has to consider two earlier pretexts. The most obvious reference is the biblical story of King Solomon as it is depicted in 1 Kings. The figures of King Solomon and the queen of Sheba and also the examination and approval of Solomon's wisdom by the queen are common elements and form a generic space. The biblical portrait of Solomon is complemented by legendary images of Solomon, which add more mental spaces to the intertextual reading of this poem. These legends expanded the image of King Solomon's wisdom. One widely known additional trait is his ability to understand the language of animals. This ability is a key feature of Solomon's portrait in the poem; it is, however, not explained, indicating that this information is a widely known skill attributed to Solomon. Another legend tells about Solomon's encounter with an ant queen. In this episode, Solomon, who is shown as a ruthless king, wants to demonstrate his superiority, but the ant teaches him a lesson in humility.²⁸

28. Louis Ginzberg, *Bible Times and Characters from Joshua to Esther*, vol. 4 of *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913), 163.

In the blended space, the different portraits from these mental spaces come together and initiate a dynamic portrait of Solomon. The poem's criticism of a ruthless king alludes to the critical voices on Solomon's reign in 1 Kings, and the legend even strengthens the critical perspective. The legend uses the biblical frame of the king's dispute with the queen of Sheba, blending the wise Solomon of 1 Kgs 10 with the traits of a despotic king. The image of the queen, Solomon's dialogue partner, remains the same. Like the queen of Sheba, the queen of ants is very wise. However, the schema of the dialogue—namely, the seemingly inferior queen of ants beating the arrogant king with her arguments—is a new development in the legend.

Whittier's poem, in turn, picks up the characters and the frames from the biblical story and the legend and presents Solomon in a very positive light. This twist could be read as a sequel or a response to the legend. The king of the poem is shown as a modest ruler, while the queen of Sheba, at first, is arrogant and heartless. She combines the image of the biblical queen and the legendary Solomon. What these two figures have in common is that they are powerful monarchs. The biblical queen of Sheba and the legendary Solomon are, however, input spaces governed by two different frames, one of which prevails in the blend.²⁹ Thus, in the critical encounter between Solomon and the queen of Sheba, the roles shift, and Solomon now speaks against an arrogant and ruthless royal stance. The poem also modifies the dispute; instead of a heated argument, the dialogue unfolds very politely in the form of thesis, antithesis, and approval. While the legend only tells that King Solomon left abashed, the queen of Sheba is not humiliated but explicitly evaluates Solomon's considerations for the weak and gives credit to his attitude. The relation between a benevolent and a ruthless ruler would be termed as "Disanalogy" by Fauconnier and Turner, a relation which "is often compressed into Change."³⁰ By changing her mind, the queen of Sheba proves to be a wise monarch who recognizes wisdom in others. In this way, her biblical portrait is confirmed, whereas Solomon's image is restored. The focus on his considerate behavior alludes to the biblical image of security and welfare all people could enjoy during Solomon's reign. Hence, King Solomon is again approved as a paragon for all rulers.

29. The queen's image in the poem is thus the type of blend referred to as a "single-scope network" (Fauconnier and Turner, *Way We Think*, 126).

30. Fauconnier and Turner, *Way We Think*, 99.

Solomon the Despot

During the last two hundred years of Solomon's literary reception, however, emphasizing only the positive aspects of his reign is the exception rather than the norm. Instead of a flawless sovereign, Solomon can be shown as a despot oppressing his people; as a failing king, a guilt-ridden ruler; or, especially in modern times, as a self-critical sovereign who knows about his strengths and weaknesses. From the tradition of Solomon the despot, I will briefly discuss two poems by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) and Matthias Hermann (born 1958). Both highlight the discrepancy between the king's reputation and his rather cruel reign. These texts pick up the biblical image of Solomon as it is presented in 1 Kings and emphasize the cruel aspects of the king already implied there.

Heine's critical poem, "König David," focuses on the royal succession.³¹ The first two stanzas introduce the theme of the poem, namely, the unchanging relationship between a ruler and his people:

Lächelnd scheidet der Despot, Denn er weiß, nach seinem Tod Wechselt Willkür nur die Hände, Und die Knechtschaft hat kein Ende.	Smiling still a despot dies, For he knows, on his demise, New hands wield the tyrant's power— It is not yet freedom's hour. ³²
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From the third stanza onwards, this common reflection is replaced by a biblical example, restaging the scene at the deathbed of King David. From the pieces of advice David gave his son Solomon, the one concerning Joab (1 Kgs 2:5–6) is chosen for this poem:

Sterbend spricht zu Salomo König David: Apropos, Daß ich Joab dir empfehle, Einen meiner Generäle.	On his deathbed, David told His son Solomon: "Behold, You must rid me, in all candor, Of this Joab, my commander.
Dieser tapfre General Ist seit Jahren mir fatal,	Captain Joab's brave and tough But he's irked me long enough;

31. Heinrich Heine, *Romanzero*, vol. 3.1 of *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, ed. Manfred Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1992), 40–41. The *Romanzero* was first published in 1851.

32. Hal Draper, *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: A Modern English Version* (Boston: Suhrkamp, 1982), 586.

Doch ich wage den verhaßten
Niemals ernstlich anzutasten.

Yet, however I detest him,
I have never dared arrest him.

Du, mein Sohn, bist fromm und klug,
Gottesfürchtig, stark genug,
Und es wird dir leicht gelingen,
Jenen Joab umzubringen.

You, my son, are wise, devout,
Pious—and your arm is stout;
You should have no trouble sending
Joab to a sticky ending.”³³

The biblical story presents David as a king who, at the end of his life, fears that some people might become a danger for the reign of his son. He thus explains to Solomon what causes his deep mistrust and asks him to watch these people closely, respectively, to eliminate them. David is characterized as a proactive and suspicious king, recognizing potential risks and removing them as a precautionary measure. He is further described as a ruler who tries to dictate his succession and to prevent struggles for the throne.

Heine’s poem presents King David as a king who, despite his power, feels quite uneasy about Joab and thus asks Solomon to eliminate him. At first sight, the texts show a broad consensus in their characterization of the figures of David and Solomon. The generic space includes David, a powerful monarch, who urges his son to follow his example. However, an intertextual reading of the two texts also reveals the differences. The poem uses a different frame which prevails in the blend, thus creating a single-scope network. The biblical image of the king is modified in two ways: on the one hand, it enhances David’s image as a ruthless despot, and on the other hand, it highlights the aspect that David is afraid of Joab. While the biblical frame points out a political necessity for the king’s instruction, Heine’s David does not recount Joab’s actions and thus justify his mistrust. Rather, he only points out that he detests his captain but does not dare to confront him. In this way, the seemingly justified anxiety of David in the biblical text is exposed as a merciless struggle for power. Thus, Heine’s criticism of rulers modifies the image of the biblical king by emphasizing hints already present in the biblical texts. In turn, presenting David with the attitude of a contemporary ruler suggests that such a behavior is nothing new but typical for monarchs, past and present. The blending of the biblical David with Heine’s David thus reveals the true image of a despot. In this way, the generalization offers a disguise of Heine’s criticism of contemporary rulers.

33. Draper, *The Complete Poems*, 586–87.

Besides David, both texts also introduce Solomon as David's successor on the throne. In 1 Kgs 2:1–9, David urges Solomon to prove himself a capable ruler by being strong and keeping God's commandments (vv. 2–3). Regarding special cases, he also asks him to act according to his wisdom—to find a just solution to the problems (vv. 6, 9). While the abilities David attributes to Solomon in the biblical text express David's hope that Solomon will live up to this image and fulfill the tasks, the poem lists almost the same attributes and skills as a description. David calls Solomon pious, God-fearing, clever, and strong, and he reckons this combination as a good condition for one specific task. In this way, the poem modifies the task Solomon is given. The focus is not on being a strong and wise ruler who knows how to remain in power but on the elimination of Joab. This depiction blurs the boundaries between actions that may be justifiable from a political perspective and an assassination. Again, Heine's poem exploits the critical hints of the biblical text from a contemporary perspective and presents a quite unfavorable image of Solomon. In the blend, Solomon, like King David, turns into the image of a typical despot.

Another example in this tradition is the poem "Salomo" by Hermann. Like Heine, Hermann's poem uses the biblical portrait of Solomon in 1 Kgs 1–3 as a disguise for his critique on a contemporary political situation, in this case on the political system of the former German Democratic Republic. In his poem, Hermann uses the stream of consciousness technique to present the readers an insight into Solomon's thoughts:

Um sattelfest zu
Sitzen auf dem Dawidberg,
Fällte ich 3 Todesurteile.
Die fabelhaften Richtersprüche
Werden von meinem
Schmeichlervölkchen gepriesen,
Um mich einzulullen,
Auf daß ich nicht
Weiter fälle
Salomonische Urteile.³⁴

In order to sit firmly
on David's mountain,
I passed three death sentences.
The fabulous judgements
are being praised
by my flattering people,
in order to lull me,
so that I will not
render any more
Solomonic verdicts.³⁵

34. Matthias Hermann, *72 Buchstaben: Gedichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989).

35. Translated by Antonia Krainer.

Like Heine, Hermann uses the critical hints in Solomon's biblical portrait as a starting point for his image. However, he does not focus on one death sentence but more generally on Solomon's jurisdiction. The narration in 1 Kgs 2–3 presents quite different verdicts. Nonetheless, they are all presented as examples of Solomon's wisdom. He is the wise king who is able to maintain political and social stability by his just ruling. Although there are some nuances, Solomon's positive image dominates within the biblical context. The poem, however, presents Solomon's thoughts from the perspective of the late-twentieth century and thus from a time which condemns the radical elimination of political opponents. Furthermore, it combines the politically motivated death sentences (1 Kgs 2) with the people's reaction to Solomon's decision in the dispute between the two mothers over the living and the dead infant (1 Kgs 3:16–28). The death sentences are presented as "Solomonic verdicts," which the people fearfully praise. By skipping the narration of the two women, the poem represses positive allusions and instead strengthens Solomon's negative image. This tendency is further enhanced by the stream of consciousness technique. In this way, the poem creates the impression of a cynical and scheming ruler who has little regard for his people.

The generic space of these two texts includes a ruler who has absolute control of jurisdiction and who is praised and feared by his people. Furthermore, the outline of the royal behavior is similar, but there are great differences in the evaluation of these actions due to the different cultural contexts. Within the frame of the biblical text of 1 Kings, the absolute jurisdiction is not only an integral part of Solomon's reign but a main cause for his praise. In contrast, the frame presented by the poem emphasizes that absolute jurisdiction only leads to an abuse of power.

In the blended space, the poem's frame prevails. Its claim to reveal Solomon's thoughts modifies the perception of the biblical text. Thus, Solomon's positive biblical image is deconstructed, and, again, he appears as an example of a ruthless dictator. The compression of time gives the impression that the present is a mirror image of the past.

The tradition of such critical images of Solomon deprives this biblical figure of its positive exemplary function.³⁶ Such images emphasize the contrast between the official image of a glamorous and peaceful king as

36. The most well-known example of a biblically embellished critique on the political situation in the former German Democratic Republic is probably Stefan Heym's novel, *The King David Report* (London: Quartet Book, 1977).

presented in the biblical texts and the people's experience of oppression and abuse of power, suggesting that a critical look reveals the dark side of a totalitarian rule. In contrast to earlier critical images of Solomon, these poems do not deliver a warning or urge the king to avoid such behavior. They rather deconstruct any absolutistic power. In this way, Solomon's reign appears as unavoidable evil, but the only way to revolt is to gain insight, to recognize the true nature of the political power, and therewith to deny the rule its justification.

Summary

The reception history of King Solomon includes a wide variety of royal images. Focusing on the aspect of Solomon the king, the biblical figure usually is clearly recognizable by its proper name and its role as a monarch. All other characteristics, however, may vary. This also applies to all other biblical figures related to Solomon. The literary texts develop these common elements freely and adapt the biblical figures and their actions to relevant political challenges of their own time. Although the figures are recognizable, their storyline unfolds in different frames.

An intertextual reading reveals not only the differences between the biblical pretext and a later literary text but pays close attention to the new images, developing from the combination of both texts. As a model to describe such an intertextual reading, the model of blending with its different stages as developed by Fauconnier and Turner proves to be helpful since it allows (re)constructing the reading process. In addition, it also recognizes the mutual modification of the reading of the biblical and the literary texts in this process. Furthermore, an intertextual reading considers not only the biblical pretext but also other texts in the reception history. It attaches great importance to these traditions and takes the memory of texts in their intertextual allusions seriously.