

Brennan W. Breed. *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014. 206 pages. \$51.97.

Rarely have I encountered a book with the power to reconstitute the governing assumptions of homiletics. Brennan W. Breed's *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History* is that book. It is superbly crafted and patiently argued—a showcase of scholarship. Melding technical precision, crisp logic, and compelling prose, Breed showcases his scholarly prowess with equal measure to his pedagogical poignancy. Every homiletician and every biblical scholar—and I measure my words when I say *every*—needs to read this book. It will revolutionize how you think about the biblical text and how you preach it.

The singular beauty of *Nomadic Text* is found in its ability to deconstruct entire sub-fields of study while simultaneously paving the way for greater precision within those fields. His primary targets are biblical scholars who approach the text from a historical-critical perspective, drawing their conclusions off of the assumption of an “original text.” In addition, Breed deconstructs the context-driven assumptions of form, source, and redaction critics, as well as reception historians, who seek to stabilize the textual foundations of the Bible by attending to genre, culture, or history.

Breed's volume takes shape in two moves. To begin, Breed assumes a posture of reading his guild very much akin to the “readings” of Jacques Derrida. Pointing to the pluriformity and polysemy of biblical texts, Breed deconstructs the foundational assumptions of biblical scholars with regard to the concept of an original text (chapter one). In chapter two, Breed extends his critique to include scholars who recognize the pluriformity of texts but who still attempt to stabilize the text through a form of essentialism (realists/nominalists). Instead, Breed advocates a “nonessentialist ontology of biblical texts” (65) that leads to a reframing of textual criticism as “mapping the process of textual development” and a “charting of the trajectories and changes that the form of the text has always undergone” (68).

Chapters three and four attend to the problems of anchoring texts to their historical, cultural, or generic contexts. Attempts to tether texts through appeals to authorial intention or the original audience are misguided. Rather than seeking to anchor texts through these means, Breed suggests the metaphor of the spandrel for biblical scholarship. Spandrels, like texts, change over time. They are reworked for new contexts and purposes. They traverse semantic boundaries and contextual borders. Anchoring texts through appeals to the original text and the original meaning produces “specters” that thereafter “haunt” scholarship, leading to a lack of methodological precision. He writes, “The skill of escaping contexts is not an anomaly or problem but in fact a central feature of texts” (93), and “all texts continue to find new contexts regardless of writerly, readerly, and scholarly attempts to pin them down. This is how texts function” (104). Breed concludes the deconstructive section of his book by observing that if all of biblical history is constituted by “people taking a text and doing something with it,” then all biblical scholarship is reception history (115).

Chapters five through seven constitute Breed's constructive proposal for a way to analyze biblical texts as historical receptions in light of his foregoing critiques. He also showcases this new theory in action through a tight analysis of Job 19:25-27. Breed adapts Gilles Deleuze's concepts of the virtual and the actual, the problematic field, and topological identity to formulate this new, cartographic and vectorized theory of biblical reception history. Texts are not objects; they are “objectiles,” which is to say that because they are characterized by movement and variation they always harbor more capacities than they manifest at any given point in history.

Scholars should map the trajectories of texts. They ought to “dramatize” the action of texts in various contexts because texts are inherently nomadic rather than sedentary: “Here is the mandate: demonstrate the diversity of capacities, organize them according to the immanent potentialities actualized by various individuals and communities over time, and rewrite our understanding of the biblical text” (141).

Breed concludes by reshaping the governing metaphor for biblical studies. Texts are neither *exiles* yearning to return home, nor are they *migrants* who decide to leave their homeland for pragmatic reasons. No. Texts are *nomads*. They have no home because they are never sedentary, nor were they. Inasmuch as homiletics is dependent upon the work of biblical scholars, we ought to take Breed’s theory seriously. Imagine the homiletical potential of looking to a text’s myriad ways of meaning in various times and cultures. Breed opens a path beyond homiletical essentialism by helping us to see texts as *events* rather than *objects*.

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